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EDITORS: Tatjana Vukadinović, Ana Abramović  
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# **CLUBTURE NETWORK**

**20 years of  
exchange and  
cooperation**



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# Introduction

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**T**his publication was created on the twentieth anniversary of the Clubture network as an overview of the comprehensive and extensive activities of the network within the Croatian cultural system (and towards the Croatian cultural system). The exciting energy of work over the last twenty years has been particularly recorded from the perspective of collaborators intensively involved in various program activities of the network. What is obvious from all the texts is the vast experience, effort, and time devoted to “intensive coexistence” with the Clubture network in recent years. The publication records the moments in the development, but also the limitations faced by actors working in the field of independent culture. At the same time, interviews with collaborators gathered around the Clubture network highlight the need for a more systematic review of the network’s achievements and cultural policy topics that have been touched on in the last twenty years. Such an overview would potentially allow the network to position itself more clearly in the cultural field and improve communication about its role. We hope that this publication presents a step towards a more comprehensive history of the network, although we have been aware that we may not be able to meet all expectations in being comprehensive. Therefore, the most important goal of this publication would be to provide valuable insight into the value and vision of joint action in the (independent) cultural system as a common space of freedom, but also the many limitations that we persistently strive to overcome.

Ana Abramović

# Independent, unstable, solidary

Author: Luka Ostojić

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“**A**lmost every text on independent cultural scene starts by an attempt of defining what the scene would mean,”

was written ten years ago by<sup>01</sup> Davor Mišković, a long-lasting activist and the president of Clubture Network in the period of 2009–2016; and this quote can be used as a starting phrase of every text with a similar topic. The inevitable introductory attempt, which over time is more reminiscent of invocation than definition, is a clear sign that this aspect of the cultural field is still not widely recognized or self-understood. It is no wonder that Platform Clubture, a network with over 20 years of experience in strengthening the position of the independent cultural scene, is not considered a part of “general knowledge”. However, the history of Clubture should be taken into account, not to pay tribute to the institution or to finally determine what the independent cultural scene is (spoiler alert: we will not succeed), but because Clubture’s work consistently opens important cultural and social issues to which the politics for decades hasn’t been able to offer articulate and imaginative answers.



From the beginning, however, we have to be aware that the concepts and cultural actors we deal with are difficult to fit into a simple story. Concepts related to independent culture refer to complex history rather than fixed interpretations. Clubture itself can be defined as a formal “body” that interconnects certain organizations from the scene, yet in fact, those

boundaries are quite porous. Clubture is not an external body because the independent cultural scene itself makes and runs Clubture, it forms its framework by a bottom-up approach<sup>02</sup>, and it is not possible to completely separate organizations from the network itself. On the other hand, the work of Clubture contributes significantly to making the scene truly a set of connected and coordinated actors, rather than a collection of isolated organizations. Furthermore, behind Clubture itself, its procedures and projects are still people; in this case people from the scene, at the same time in and around Clubture, whose role is still not worn out in the formal functions they carry. Talking to them does not only give a clearer idea of history and context but also points to a human element that easily remains hidden in facts, reports, and formal descriptions.

To sum it up, the concepts do not lead to a clear definition but raise questions, travel through time, lead us further from Clubture towards the themes of shared culture, public resources, and community engagement to

01 Davor Mišković (2011) “Prebivanje u kulturnoj politici”, in: Milica Pekić and Katarina Pavić (ed), *Exit Europe – Nove geografije kulture*, Zagreb and Belgrade: Clubture: p. 54–70.

02 see: Matija Mrakovčić (2012) “Programska i politička platforma nezavisne scene”, *Kulturpunkt*, <<https://www.kulturpunkt.hr/content/programska-i-politicka-platforma-nezavisne-scene>> (visited July 5, 2021)

eventually return to Clubture itself and the same initial issues. Therefore, in this text, we will start from the concepts themselves, not to define them, but to unpack their historical baggage and try to find out why Clubture, scene, and independent culture were and have remained relevant.

## Independent culture

The concept of “independent culture” theoretically does not seem particularly appreciative as it does not provide a positive description, but defines the scene through what it is *not* – it is not dependent on political demands and market logic, thus retaining aesthetic openness and freedom in critical reexamination. This broad term gives us a blurry suggestion of all the concepts of culture, and it can also misassociate that such a scene should be completely independent of public or market profit. Of course, the cultural scene cannot exist in the free media

space but necessarily depends on the material conditions of the world in which it functions. The key point is in aesthetic and ethical independence, i.e. that the use of public funding or market profit does not come at the cost of compromising their principles. In this sense, “independence” refers to the value behind the action, not the working conditions. Yet, on a particular level, the term “independent culture” has managed to become a symbol of affirmation of certain local productions for over 20 years, i.e. an indicator of the context that shaped the activities of the independent cultural scene. Roughly speaking, independent culture refers to a culture created by individuals and organizations outside public (local and state) institutions, which is non-profit because its goal is not to make a market profit, (this does not exclude market activity, but in that case, all the profits are returned in programs and core business).

Although independent culture existed in socialism<sup>03</sup>, the establishment of the democratic system in the 1990s had put the cultural scene in a novel and unique position, which was elaborated by Dea Vidović<sup>04</sup>. **Independent culture should have benefited from a democratic framework because civil non-profit associations are “imprinted in the very foundations of democracy, so it is not surprising that the right to assembly is the standard of developed democratic societies.”** (Vidović, p.18) However, it was not until the late 1990s that a legal framework was created that

03 see: Bojan Krištofić (2020) “Na istom prostoru, ispred vremena”, *Kulturpunkt*, <<https://www.kulturpunkt.hr/content/na-istom-prostoru-ispred-vremena>> (visited July 5, 2021)

04 see: Dea Vidović (2007) “Razvoj hrvatske nezavisne kulturne scene (1990–2002) ili što sve prethodi mreži Clubture”, in: Dea Vidović (ed.), *Clubture: Kultura kao proces razmjene 2002–2007*, Zagreb: Clubture: p. 13–31

nominally enabled the assembly of citizens (which was multiple problematic and amended in 2001). Independent culture found itself in a blind spot because it could not secure its existence either on the market or with the support of the official policy. The cultural policy continued to be reduced primarily to the financing of public institutions, as well as to openly favoring conservative and nationalist culture, which is why **“the 1990s proved to be years that were very disastrous for types of cultural and artistic thinking that were not dominant conveyors of ideological and political concepts and ideas.”** (ibid. p. 19) Independent culture, therefore, had neither public recognition nor financial support, but it was the only space of freedom for all those cultures that did not fit into the dominant patterns – modern, socially engaged, unconventional, non-commercial, and aimed at young people.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, independent cultural organizations were strengthened and expanded, largely thanks to the support of international foundations and new public funding opportunities. Nevertheless, the situation became precarious, especially with the withdrawal of international funding from Croatia by the mid-2000s. Independent culture was, therefore, left vulnerable on many levels – without systematic public support, without wider social support, without infrastructure, and largely without significant experience – and yet it was a major source of an alive and innovative culture. Consequently, independent cultural organizations, unlike public institutions with more stable financing model for their production, chose to connect, collaborate, learn from each other, and engage in the struggle for recognition and public support.

Such a position determined the activities of independent cultural organizations and had certainly influenced the formation and direction of the national Clubture Network. The network was founded in 2002 by the Zagreb clubs Mama, Močvara, KSET, and ATTACK! (which is why the word “club” is implemented in the name), but the network soon expanded to all independent organizations dealing with culture and youth. Over the years, the membership base, scope, and the number of projects have expanded, the organization and context have become more complex, but at the core of all activities is the intention for this network to “create an own framework for the independent cultural scene with common actions and fights to improve the system which would favor a more stable and sustainable development.” (ibid. p. 28) From this primary intention sprang the various programs into which Clubture flowed.

## Decentralization

The major and the oldest program of the network is “Clubture–HR: Program exchange and cooperation” which has been ongoing since its implementation. Through it, programs are exchanged, collaborations are made in the creation of new cultural and artistic content, and the distribution of financial resources for program implementation is decided by network members and all organizations that propose content for implementation in each cycle. Therefore, Clubture’s contribution to decentralization is, quite understandably, often mentioned, regarding that the network has, with this program, successfully managed to connect and support organizations outside the bigger cities. As we can see from the archive map on the Clubture website, in almost 20 years over 1500 events have been held, of which over 80% were not in Zagreb. About 300 participants worked on them, and many of them were new and young organizations that received the first

support for their program through Clubture and which were automatically included in the network. Miljenka Buljević, the president of Clubture since 2016, sees this as one of the major virtues of the network: **“For example, if a team in a smaller town organizes concerts, usually no one in the local government acknowledges their work – they are not necessarily against them, they just do not perceive it as a culture. These people feel lonely, they have no infrastructure, they have no one to connect with, and in that sense, Clubture is very important because it empowers such organizations and connects them with similar ones in other cities. Through Clubture, new associations can easily get funding that they cannot get at the national level because usually larger or more experienced organizations have the advantage.”** Associations and artistic organizations, as well as informal groups, can apply for support, which makes the procedure extremely accessible, and a special call was subsequently opened exclusively for organizations that were not previously holders of collaborative projects (i.e. non-members of the network). Buljević states that a large number of new members came through this invitation, and the network managed to reach smaller cities such as Sinj, Imotski, and Vinkovci. This gives people from smaller places the opportunity to organize and to attend programs that would otherwise be difficult to come across (e.g. queer festival in Donji Lapac).

However, Katarina Pavić, the coordinator of Clubture from 2009 to 2016, warns us that decentralization should be considered in layers. **“Decentralization is often thought of in form, as a mere event outside Zagreb, and there are parts of Zagreb that are on the periphery, as well as scenes in Zagreb that are on the sidelines. The point of Clubture is not just to geographically decentralize cultural production, but to fulfill the responsibility of stronger actors to motivate others to action. I do not mean instructing the smaller ones how something is done, but vice versa, helping and encouraging others to try to do something in their environment.”**

In this respect, we can notice decentralization at every level of this program. The award of grants is not decided by some council or the central management of Clubture, but by the proposers themselves and the network’s entire membership. Namely, the representatives of the organizations meet at the annual assembly and, after a two-day deliberation, make a democratic decision on which programs will be supported. “Some are thrilled because they are involved in decision-making, while some are not happy because they struggle for two days in the whole process, and in the end, they may not even be given that symbolic support of a few thousand kuna,” Pavić explains, and says: **“We were suggested to create a program selection committee because the deliberation**

**process is exhausting, but it is very important to us that program proposers also choose programs. It is also great training for members because they have to read, think about and evaluate all program proposals.”**

Learning through work also continues once the support has been granted. “Grant recipients do not receive the amount directly on their account, but Clubture becomes the producer of the program and pays the costs directly,” says Kate Pavić, and explains: “It is very useful for young people who have just started running their organization because they are learning how to produce a program, make travel orders, reservations for accommodation, and how to rationally approach bureaucratic requirements... People often admire our horizontal decision-making model, but will not necessarily notice the importance of time that the network spends on mentoring the people on how to do practical things, which is important in the long run because young organizations will later know how to manage their projects well.”

The program has its flaws which will be pointed out in the interview. The deliberation process requires a lot of energy from both members and the network, application procedures are regularly reviewed, changed, and upgraded to encourage the widest possible involvement of organizations. Also, one fact that the network cannot directly influence is the overall amount for programs because Clubture is also an association funded through public tenders. “The overall amount of funding is unfortunately limited since it depends on our donors and is always lower than our ambitions. It used to happen that 50 programs applied for it, and we did not have more money than for 10–15 grants, and those were modest grants up to 20,000 kuna. Therefore, a major problem can be unwanted competitiveness, which can be frustrating, especially in the voting process,” says Pavić. An additional consequence is the inability to provide some long-term or stronger support, but this is not so much the focus of the network. Clubture has neither the capacity nor the goal to help the growth of established organizations, yet the main goal is to provide new organizations and young people



with support, trust, knowledge, and entrance into the field of independent culture. The impact of Clubture therefore cannot be shown by the number of realized programs and members. **“The network works in the background and thus gives dynamics to the scene, which is why the effect of Clubture would be visible only if Clubture disappeared,”** says Pavić, and concludes: “People get basic infrastructure, gain collaborations, learn to lead projects, and can be autonomous because they work without the need for approval from some central body. With such a decentralized structure, Clubture is a unique network on the European level. Still, we do not intentionally want to be innovative, just that for us there is no other way.”

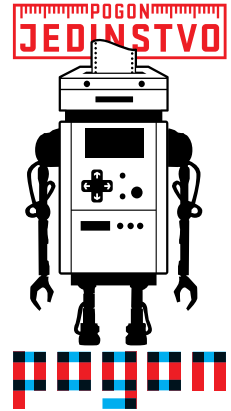
## Involvement

Given the undesirable state of independent culture since the beginnings of Clubture, it is not surprising that the network quickly decided not to limit itself to work within the given framework, but to try and influence changing these frameworks, which meant stepping out of cultural production into social involvement. The forms of this involvement depended on strategic decisions, but also on the capacities of the people in Clubture. In the early years, not only artists and activists were active in the network, but also individuals with experience in cultural policies,



such as Davor Mišković, who had, after working in the Ministry of Culture, founded the Drugo More Association, became active in Clubture and with time the president of the network. Mišković remembers the first struggles: “In 2003, the former government proposed a new Law on Councils of Culture, intending to cancel the Council of New Media Culture, which financed the activities carried out by almost the entire independent culture. We easily agreed upon opposing the adoption of such a law, it was just a question of how. We concluded that two interconnected ways are possible: activism, with the organization of protests, and advocacy, that is, an attempt to negotiate with political decision-makers to give up their intention. We succeeded in that, the Ministry of Culture withdrew the proposal and the Council continued to act. It then became clear that this type of action could work.”

The next key year was 2005 when the event *Operation: City* took place and about 30 Zagreb associations took over the premises of the former Badel factory and performed a free cultural program for ten days. “It was then that independent culture made its first joint ideological and programmatic outburst. Many people from the scene gathered in the same place, realized that they have common ideas and desires and that together they can be a key component,” recalls Kate Pavić, and continues: **“It was the culmination of the first generation of Zagreb’s independent culture, but also the point of the first great conflict with the city. Mayor Bandić was nominally very open to the scene, he visited the opening of *Operation: City*, and immediately**



after the event, he abruptly started partializing and commercializing Badel. It quickly became clear that the city's policy was led by clientelism and partnership interests, and that some common interests could only be reached through struggle. At that time, the activities began branching out – on the one hand, they started dealing with spaces for living culture, and on the other hand, with the political problematization of this issue.”

The organizations moved from the issue of space for culture and youth to the problem of how the city government in Zagreb treats public space in general, which was most strongly manifested through the initiative “Right to the City” against the construction of a shopping center on Cvjetni Square and a garage in Varšavska Street. The initiative resulted in a five-year activist campaign against the construction organized by civil society organizations. Although Clubture was not a key participant in the campaign, the campaign influenced the status and functioning of the entire independent culture, including Clubture. Pavić believes that this was “the first articulation of the independent scene towards the public interest,” and Mišković finds that at that time activism moved beyond the frame of a gallery or theater onto the road.

The protest activities established the actors of the independent cultural scene as public actors, which had a positive impact on the future advocacy activities of Clubture and other civil society organizations. In 2005, Clubture was one of the founders of the Association of Operation City, which aims to encourage the development of independent culture and self-organized youth. The

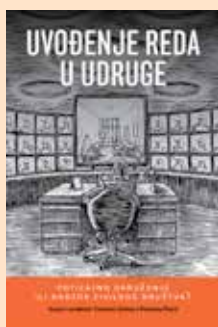


Association had with the City of Zagreb in 2008 founded Pogon, Zagreb Center for Independent Culture and Youth, on the model of public-civil partnership (more on that in the next paragraph). Through many years of advocacy, independent cultural actors have convinced the Ministry of Culture to redirect lottery funds to the newly established public foundation *Kultura Nova*, whose goal was and remains to contribute to the stabilization and development of cultural organizations. But in parallel with greater public engagement and the influence of independent culture, there was a distrust of political authorities towards civil society. The 2012 reform of the Civil Society Law thus placed a greater burden of unnecessary administration on associations and increased public oversight of civil society. Even though associations are initially responsible for reporting to their donors, the new reform imposes additional, strict, and demanding financial management rules originally designed for public bodies financed directly from the budget. The association was placed under greater political control, and the complexity of the administration made it difficult to unite, which is a constitutional right of citizens<sup>05</sup>. Thus, the reform invoked the poor legal framework for associations from 1997, which had as many as 16 unconstitutional items and hindered the work of the civil society.

In a context where independent culture is involved in wider protests against the privatization of public spaces and common goods, in 2014, *Clubture* became one of the initiators of the “We are not giving away our motorways”

initiative, along with two road unions, five union centers and six civil society organizations. The involvement of an independent culture network in a referendum initiative against giving motorways to concessionaires is not a self-understandable move. Pavić explains how the decision was made: “We had long and wide conversations with the members of our network, not everyone was happy to participate in this initiative because it were our first steps outside the field of culture and outside the youth population as our primary group.” However, it was decided that *Clubture* should step outside its zone: “It was extremely important for us to protect the public interest in terms of infrastructure that is concrete and clear to everyone. If we are not able to fight and explain to people the importance of visible public resources, how will we explain to anyone that invisible public resources such as culture are important?,” says Pavić.

In practical terms, Mišković explains, *Clubture* had a clear and important role in the initiative. “As a national network, *Clubture* was the



<sup>05</sup> see: Tomislav Domes and Katarina Pavić (2016) *Uvođenje reda u udruge – Poticajno okruženje ili nadzor civilnog društva*, Zagreb: *Clubture*.

**only one on the scene to cover a wider territory and mobilize various organizations to collect signatures. The trade unions and Clubture played a key role through their membership, and it turned out that Clubture had a structure that no other cultural organization in the country had.”**

Eventually, more than 520,000 signatures were collected and the government was forced to withdraw the decision to give the motorways in concession. It then became unquestionable that the independent cultural scene was willing to go beyond the narrowly understood *spiritual* culture and had enough strength to be able to achieve a political effect. It is therefore not surprising that in early 2016, the then-new government immediately set out to combat the power of civil society by abolishing or cutting public funds to finance non-profit media, civil society, and independent culture. A broad “Kulturnjaci 2016” initiative was formed against this policy (in which Clubture also participated), but despite the relatively rapid fall of the

government, a significant part of the abolished public funding was never retrieved, not only because of the financial crisis but because the tensions between the government and civil organizations have not disappeared.

Clubture continued to be active in advocating for the legal regulation of independent culture and youth, but as the current president Buljević explains, “We do not find enough understanding and open doors. We have been on The Council for Civil Society Development for several terms, we have participated in the drafting of the ‘National Strategy for the Creation of an Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development’, which was not adopted in the end, we participate in all public consultations. Clubture has maintained its mission and advocacy activities in this regard, but the circumstances have changed.” The situation became particularly bad in the pandemic, during which the Ministry of Culture did not adopt timely or adequate measures to protect cultural associations, and there was a lack of dialogue between the Ministry and the independent cultural scene. “In 2020, the Ministry of Culture invited cultural actors to consult on measures to protect culture from the effects of the pandemic,” says Buljević. **“Clubture carried out a research on its member organizations and sent the Ministry an analysis of the current state of independent culture and a proposal for new measures. The Ministry of Culture has not even answered us.”**

Clubture’s commitment testifies to the wider development of independent culture (and civil society) as

a factor in a democratic political system, and thus to a social shift in the perception of the opposition between culture and politics. Organizations that advocate culture as a common good and directly deal with the context in which they operate, will inevitably sooner or later break out of the conventional boundaries of culture and enter into other political struggles revolving around these values. Simply put, Clubture will recognize that the economic accessibility of motorways is a prerequisite for a quality cultural exchange program. Therefore, it seems that Clubture is politically engaged when it comes to connecting cultural associations, as well as dealing with culture even while participating in political advocacy.



## Participatory management in culture

Given that Clubture was primarily concerned with the independent culture and youth, it is obvious why it constantly returns to the topic of spaces that are necessary and often inaccessible to such organizations.

Clubture originated from clubs, in the early years it entered the fight against the commercialization of public spaces, and in collaboration with Kulturtreger and Kurziv it researched the history of independent cultural spaces: the exhibition *Nezavisni prostori – Prostori nezavisnih*<sup>06</sup> (*Independent Spaces – Spaces of Independent*) mostly indicates neglected buildings (barracks, mines, factories...) that the squatters squatted or took over by agreement

in order to turn them into gathering places for youth. Given that independent cultural organizations usually do not have the funds for commercial rent, and that local authorities are looking after bigger empty spaces, it is not surprising that Clubture and related organizations have largely focused on advocating the so-called *participatory management* of cultural spaces through *public-civil partnership*. Clubture is promoting the idea that such space management should be a partnership and not a relationship between a distrustful landlord and a poor tenant. This means that civil society would be given full access to public infrastructure, but not all the responsibility for preserving and improving that resource would be transferred to it. In such a space, associations could run socio-cultural centers, spaces dedicated to contemporary culture, but also to social activism, sustainable development, non-formal education, and other related areas, i.e. content that meets public needs in culture and youth. The public authority would ensure spatial stability and managerial independence

06 The exhibition by Dunja Kučinac and Dejan Dragosavac shows the history of independent spaces from 1988 to 2015. The exhibition was set up in 2015 and presented in nine cities in Croatia.

in exchange for essential program dynamics. In the late 2000s and during the 2010s, the model was successfully implemented in practice and socio-cultural centers were opened in Zagreb (Pogon), Pula (Community Center Rojc), Split (Youth Center), Karlovac (Hrvatski dom), Dubrovnik (Lazareti), Rijeka (Palach) and other cities (ibid.)<sup>07</sup>.

We asked Domagoj Šavor, Clubture coordinator, and Ana Abramović, program coordinator, how the advocacy process works in practice. Šavor also started cooperating with Clubture, while with his colleagues in the early 2010s fought for Karlovac associations to get a closed space from the city for their activities: “There were a lot of youth organizations in Karlovac at that time. Two youth centers were opened, but these were mostly exhibition spaces, and we wanted to do concerts and more demanding productions. Therefore, in 2012, on behalf of three organizations, we began to send inquiries on our own initiative, but we received nothing but rejections. That is when the Kultura Nova Foundation was founded, and with the support of Clubture, we applied and received support for the advocacy platform. We have

established a formal alliance of five close organizations to manage the space for an independent cultural scene and have begun negotiations to allocate us the space of Mala Scena Hrvatskog doma. In collaboration with Clubture, based on the example of Pogon and similar models, we developed our public-civil partnership proposal that suited us and that we could push into the local context, and we argued that we would manage the space much better than the city company that had done so far. Our organizations had already strengthened, we had employed people, it was obvious that we have the capacity and energy, and we were persistent enough, so in 2016 we got a space that is still used today.”

By joining the European Union, the possibility of financing through the European Social Fund (ESF) was opened, and Clubture and other civil society organizations, by their model development and advocacy, influenced the Ministry of Culture to publish a Public call for ESF financing projects “Culture in the center – support for the development of public-civil partnership in culture”, totaling HRK 50 million. **“It was a European incentive to develop socio-cultural centers, and the call was designed in such a way to show that public-civil partnership was very important,”** explains Abramović, **“but such a large fund attracted many other actors who positioned themselves through projects as socio-cultural centers, and in practice, they are not public-civil partnerships based on equal positions and distribution of power.”** Namely, the concept of public-civil partnership should strengthen

<sup>07</sup> On socio-cultural centers see: Matija Mrakovčić and Ivana Pejić (ed.) (2019) *Sitni vez društvene promjene*, Zagreb: Kurziv.

and stabilize the link between civil society organizations and local/regional administrations in spatial management, but it seems that the ESF tender in many cases served as a one-time source of funding for public administration and partners, but without opportunities for long-term public-civil partnerships.

Another problem with ESF funding is its timeframe. “On the one hand, the project gained a certain development continuity, and on the other hand, the continuity was interrupted by the gap between the completion of one and the announcement of another tender. There was a period when a large number of people were paid to implement the project, and then suddenly that source of funding disappeared, people were left without engagement and the planned projects could not be further developed,” says Abramović.

In this instance, again, Clulture took on the advocacy and mediating role. As part of the “Culture in the Center” project, Clulture connected socio-cultural centers at the national level and established a new network of socio-cultural centers Mreža društveno-kulturnih centara (DKC-HR) to make it a separate actor to deal with this topic. As part of the second ESF call, Clulture started the project “New Public Culture and Social Spaces”. Abramović explains that this is a collaboration with socio-cultural centers and the academic community. “We are conducting three scientific pieces of research: on public cultural centers, on public-civil partnership and new cultural practices and models of networking. We will make scientific and professional articles, guidelines for improving the framework of socio-cultural centers, assessment of the social impact of the proposed guidelines, structured dialogues... in short, a full advocacy cycle.”

Abramović points out that large and demanding ESF grants initially exclude smaller organizations and raise the issue of the work continuum. “Funds from European programs are not intended to ensure the sustainability of organizations. However, the problem is that the funds of local and national governments do not enable sustainability,” concludes Abramović. The crux of the problem is that advocating for public-civil partnerships counts on the establishment of a solid relationship between organizations and their local government, which in the long run should not depend on European funds. Thus, the struggle for space for small associations has been successfully transferred from the local and national to the European level, but there is still no harmony at the local level that would enable the centers to stay sustainable in the long run.



## Independent culture on “independent culture”



A reader with a gift for noticing minor details could perceive that most of the cited texts were published by Clubture. The reason for this is that Clubture itself was primarily engaged in researching independent culture and developing vocabulary about it. As we have seen in several examples so far, the network conducted expert research and analysis of its members and proposed packages of potential public measures. These contents are primarily intended for decision-makers and the professional public, but they are published and available to the general public free of charge<sup>08</sup>. In addition, the Clubture website contains a detailed archive map listing all the programs held under the “Clubture-Hr: Program exchange and cooperation” program from 2002 to the present. Tatjana Vukadinović, Clubture’s program assistant, worked on filling in the archive: **“Since 2015, there has been a digital map containing basic information,**

**a description of the content and materials of individual programs from 2002 until today.**

If we look at the map from a broader perspective, we can follow the change in the type of program and how the independent cultural scene itself has developed and changed over time.” Due to a large number of projects, cultural organizations are mainly focused on current and future projects, and less on archiving completed programs, so a detailed approach to the archive means a lot for the collective memory of contemporary culture (without which this text would not be possible).

Since the discourse of independent culture is mostly aimed at institutions, the language produced by Clubture can sound strict, dry and goal-oriented, without the charming slips and aesthetic outbursts one might expect from a culturist. As we learn from Kate Pavić, this language originated as a combination of critical theory and managerial language that organizations adopted at the time through important strategic management workshops. But it is worth bearing in mind that the language of Clubture originated *ab ovo*, at a time when the independent cultural scene was just beginning to exist both socially and conceptually. “Clubture has contributed to the creation of a field of independent culture, not only in terms of activities and connections but also in terms of articulating what that action is and what it is like compared to other social activities. The research work helped to define the boundaries of



<sup>08</sup> In addition to the mentioned publications, it is important to mention a research by Edgar Buršić *Mreža Clubture: mapiranje organizacija izvaninstitucionalne kulture* (Clubture, 2014) and a two-part online analysis of the impact of Covid-19 virus spread on independent cultural organizations (several authors, Clubture, 2021).

independent culture, to determine for ourselves what we do, and that was extremely important,” notes Davor Mišković, and continues: **“Clubture started self-reflection very early to codify knowledge and language on independent culture. That culture is a relatively small area, but by articulation itself, it has become essential. Clubture has made the notion of independent culture unquestionable. Now everyone in this field has the awareness of belonging to an independent culture, which is a great thing.”**

From November 2004 to March 2006, Clubture published a monthly magazine *04 – magazine for reality hacking*, a printed critical magazine for younger audiences, and in 2005 launched Kulturpunkt.hr, a portal which is following contemporary independent culture, and is still one of the few media that gives both: visibility and critical reception to independent cultural production. Since 2009, Kulturpunkt.hr has been under the auspices of the Kurziv association, founded by Clubture and the portal’s editorial team. Kurziv, in addition to running the portal, is important in creating knowledge about the independent cultural scene through its publications and maintenance of the “Center for Documenting Independent Culture” (in collaboration with Kulturtreger).

Apart from Kulturpunkt, other projects originally started within Clubture and then stood out as independent organizations, such as the regional network for independent culture Kooperativa and the aforementioned DKC-HR network. This does not expand the scope and capacity only of Clubture, but of the entire scene. Individual organizations can focus on specific topics, and these associations are connected through common goals, projects, and people. In that sense, it is quite difficult, sometimes impossible, to talk about Clubture as a separate entity that is separated from its “sister” organizations on the scene. This is paradigmatic for Clubture and the entire independent scene where organizations and people always work together, and not as isolated actors. Since these collaborations transcend organizational frameworks, there is no sense in personalizing the organization without paying attention to the people who have made and are making the network.

Kulturpunkt.hr



## People

All the participants of the interview have joined Clubture through their engagement in the independent cultural scene, whether it was running a literature association, working part-time at the net.culture club Mama, or attending Kulturpunkt's journalism school. Attempts to clearly distinguish between roles in individual organizations have failed – it seems that in their case, belonging to Clubture has been an organic outcome of being on the scene.

On the other hand, joining Clubture usually does not happen without direct human contact. Apart from the mentioned assemblies, the Clubture Forum, an annual conference that has been taking place in various cities since 2008 (Rijeka, Zagreb, Split, Dubrovnik, Pula, Zadar, Čakovec, Vukovar...) is also important in this respect. The Forum hosts workshops, lectures, talks, and gatherings, and an important part of each Forum is a public forum that seeks to bring together decision-makers, representatives of organizations, media, activists, artists, and other citizens. At the forum itself, members introduce themselves to each other, and organizations that are not members are also invited. This introduces local organizations and Clubture members directly to each other, and then it is easier for new organizations to join the network.

In addition, despite the serious tone of Clubture publications, we learn from Katarina Pavić and Tatjana Vukadinović that the interaction between network coordination and members is informal and direct, which is again important in strengthening links and maintaining dynamics within the network. Without human relationships, the structure does not exist.

Given this situation, it is not surprising that the functions within the Clubture itself are not strictly formalized. The function of the president or the board of directors does not mean running the network with an iron fist, and most of the responsibility falls on the coordinators, which is logical considering that they are also employees of the organization. However, in discussions about programs, decisions, and ideas, the names of various activists and cultural figures often appear, whose influence cannot be reflected only through a formal function in the network. It is clear that various people from the scene have formed the structure of Clubture over the years, but this structure then also formed the participants of the scene. The way of working to encourage solidarity and cooperation has finally



attracted and formed new generations who also share the same values, as witnessed by the generational transition within the network – people engaged in current programs and projects were still going to school when the network was being formed. Unfortunately, some negative things on the wider level have not changed significantly after twenty years. Clubture’s public funding is progressively declining, while the number of organizations seeking support is growing. Current President Buljević warns: **“The great merit of Clubture is that it has set up an independent culture as an actor, but even after the founding of the Kultura Nova Foundation, independent culture has not been considered an equal to the institutional culture at the local and national levels, although in many aspects its production, quality, and impact are much more important. It is a political decision, but also the outcome of the sluggishness of an institutional system that sees itself as default and unquestionable.”** Independent culture, civil society, management of common resources, socio-cultural centers – all these are political issues to which the current economic and political regime is not able or willing to articulate ideologically concise answers, which makes the position of independent culture still unstable.



Current circumstances suggest a level of concern, but also remind us of how valuable the Clubture is. “Now that I’m not in Croatia, I understand the importance of Clubture because this type of organization does not exist elsewhere, although many countries have many more resources and organizations,” concludes former coordinator Katarina Pavić. Current coordinator Domagoj Šavor announces further work and development: “Although Clubture has been a stable actor on the scene for many years, we still intend to think progressively, improve programs and network activities, so that nothing stands still.” Clubture has been constantly adapting and evolving over 20 years, with cooperation being and remaining a core value. In this way, it successfully opened important issues of culture and society in a democracy, connected and encouraged many artists and organizations that create the current culture of this area, and passed on the same principles to the next generation of actors on the independent cultural scene. The history of Clubture, therefore, reveals the history of contemporary culture, and at the same time shows us what that culture should be and what we optimistically believe it will be in the future.

# Katarina Pavić


Clubture



**F**or many years you worked as the coordinator of the Clubture Network. Before we move on to that period, can you describe your first experiences with the network? How did you start participating in Clubture?

My first contact with the network came in the early 2000s, when as a student I started spending time in Mama, a space run by the Multimedia Institute, one of the founders of Clubture. At that time, Mama was a cyber club<sup>01</sup>, and also a place that offered many interesting programs and a space of culture that included various activities: film screenings, literary evenings, lectures and discussions. It was actually a real alternative university curriculum of interest to any student of social sciences. It was a space that brought together interesting people, in which an exceptionally high-quality program was realized almost every day, which also did not require any financial efforts, and that was an important item in my student budget. I became interested in what they were doing, primarily in the field of cultural infrastructure. I understand infrastructure in two senses: as physical infrastructure, but also as infrastructural connection between the actors within the sector. In short, I recognized the space for myself, recognizing myself among the people who came there, either as organizers of the program or as an active audience. The first “official” contact took place when I started working on Mama’s desk in 2005. The role of the “desk workers” was to monitor the payment of the Internet (and we are talking about a time when high-speed Internet was an experimental category), but it also included other activities, such as selling tickets for club programs (primarily Močvara’s, but sometimes other Mama’s partner organizations, like Attack). A period spent on the Internet was at the time charged at a fairly friendly rate, the lowest of all cyber clubs in the city. The desk was led by Emina Višnić, Clubture’s coordinator at the time, and as I was active on the Desk and then on other Mama’s activities, she soon asked me to help translate one Clubture report into English. That served me as a good entry into Clubture’s story. It was a fairly extensive report for a multi-year project, and on this task, I had the opportunity to get acquainted with the wider activities and various programs of the network. Among them

<sup>01</sup> Cyber-clubs were places where computers connected to the Internet could be used freely, free of charge or for a small fee, before the spread of broadband Internet networks, and of course, before the spread of smartphones. In addition to the use of communication technologies, users and promoters of new technologies gathered in the premises of cyber clubs, and in Mama’s case, they were enthusiasts gathered around open source technologies and free software. At the time, a critical view of social development related to the development of technology was one of the focuses of the Multimedia Institute.




was CTHR, but also some projects that are not active today and which are not mentioned so much, although from this perspective they are extremely interesting and still relevant. After that, I worked more and more often with Clubture, and in 2008 I got a job in the organization, where after several years of implementing and leading individual programs and projects, I finally took over the coordination of the organization. Thus began my intense coexistence with the network that lasted until the end of 2017.

**Your work at Clubture began at a stage when, we could say, it had already been formed and established. Yet, during the time you spent in the network, its orientations changed along with the scene it brings together. Can you tell us something more about the programs that are no longer active?**

Along with CTHR, which is certainly the network's most visible program (and rightly so), there have been several other efforts to sustain the scene at various levels. I will take the example of the *Kultura Aktiva* program, which focused on the selection of cultural councils and the impact on cultural policy at the local level. Throughout Croatia, we worked on empowering and educating members of the independent scene to actively participate in the adoption of cultural policy in their communities. We encouraged them to run for these councils, to follow their work so that in the end local platforms dealing with the cultural policy could emerge from that embryo. The broader focus of the program has meant that the energy that existed in Zagreb - and was anchored around the establishment of the Pogon and local cultural policy - spills over into other areas and encourages actors to develop their own, more solid, foundations. Clubture has had the role of a questioner, a creator of an atmosphere that encourages engagement in local communities, without lecturing and imposing the "correct" ways of acting. Another program that dealt with the organizers in the residency, *Organizers in Residence*, arose from the idea of CTHR to exchange programs between organizations, but also to create an atmosphere of peer-to-peer knowledge exchange. It was open to event organizers from different backgrounds who would go to another city or place for a few days or weeks to participate in the co-production of the event.

Since 2008, we have been organizing the Clubture Forum – a multi-day gathering of members of the platform and a wider range of organizations that gravitate to it, every year in a different city or town. The idea began with a tendency to organize an alternative assembly, a gathering of a less formal type where new ideas and existing challenges could be discussed. The Forum has always had a clear public profile, through the organization of public discursive formats such as discussions, round tables, and public debates on current issues relevant to local circumstances, but also a cultural and artistic program intended for the general public. We organized the first Forum in Rijeka with Molekula. I think that the most legendary edition of the Forum is the one from Medika in 2009.

Somewhat later, I think in 2013, the *experimental-interventionist* program *Clubture cultural action lab: CT lab* was launched, which operated so that the organization could come up with an advocacy idea that needed to be implemented swiftly, outside established project cycles, and was related to some urgent need for an independent cultural scene (e.g. forcible closure of space, or adoption of a cultural strategy) so that, for example, people from Karlovac could come to Pula and help people from Rojc or gather several actors in meetings and plan activities which otherwise could not be able to organize because there were no resources available. This is extremely important when taking into account the circumstances in which the actors of independent culture operate – the project cycle is designed so at least 6 months (in the best cases) pass from planning and applying for a project to the implementation of activities. In addition, campaign activities often cannot be precisely planned or described, as campaign circumstances are often unpredictable and it is not possible to say with certainty in advance whether it will be better to organize meetings and workshops with different actors or a media campaign. This is the best thing that networks can do – ensure that actors have someone behind them who has their back so that they can work harder for better cultural conditions at the local level. I must not omit many educational and information-educational programs and shorter activities that were organized



by Clubture over the years. From the early years in which cycles of education on strategic management in culture were organized to symposia on cultural and creative industries. And besides, the programs of visibility and promotion of the independent cultural scene such as *04 – megazine for reality hacking*, which was once on newsstands, and its content was comparable to legendary editions such as ArkZine or Nomad.

On the other hand, some projects have been affirmed for many years and eventually moved beyond the logic of Clubture, which is good. I feel it is a success for the organization. Clubture has directly or indirectly encouraged many projects on the scene, and some of them are no longer an organic part of the network today, although they work closely together, often as roommates. These are projects such as Kulturpunkt, which was our segment before it split into the program of the independent organization Kurziv, which we co-founded, or the program of exchange and cooperation in the region, which became a separate network of Kooperativa. Such projects are incubated and then consciously separated from the program structure of the network so they would not compete with each other under the same roof and to allow them to act as independent parts of the same ecosystem.

**CTHR has been the central program of the network, as evidenced by the fact that it will soon mark two decades. It is a constant in Clubture's work and has been based on the principles of exchange and cooperation from the very beginning. How much has CTHR changed during your mandate at Clubture?**

I would say that it has changed a lot and that it is always changing organically, following the needs of organizations that implement programs in the field. It is changing, of course, in terms of the criteria of the call and the way of deciding on the allocation of funds. When I joined Clubture, the program had been running for many years, but in the period I am familiar with, I have also witnessed major changes in the program lines that organizations have implemented through CTHR. In my beginning, there were three modes of CTHR. The first was *program exchange*, a very simple physical exchange of existing content in cities and towns, that is, different spaces

of independent culture. The second mode was *project cooperation*, in which organizations jointly designed new content. There was also a third line called the *festival segment* because back then, in the early and mid-2000s, festivalization was in full swing. Although we stood in a critical stance towards the process, we wanted to develop a lever that could help the scene. It enabled some segments of the festival, and most often it was guest appearances by foreign performers, to perform in other places as well. Over time, the 2-3-3 model has evolved from the dynamics of the scene and communication with organizations that have sought to simplify the process. According to it, at least two organizations that partner to produce three different events in three different cities or places can apply for support. Then, in the early 2010s, we added a *tour* to that scheme, a category in which the emphasis was on distribution instead of production. The tours allowed the same content to be distributed in several cities or towns.

There have also been major changes in deciding on the final list of projects to be implemented in a particular cycle, ranging from a simple mathematical formula to a complex set of rules that were prone to change. They are still changing, following the evolution of the program and our desire to eliminate potential power imbalances in the decision-making process. CTHR has always been a living mechanism that accompanies the growth and development of the network.

**As the network coordinator, you have witnessed a period that brought significant administrative and logistical burdens to the activities of associations. Can you tell us what that process looked like from Clubture's perspective?**

The situation in independent culture has always been far from idyllic but has become particularly acute since 2008/09, following the beginning of the crisis, that is, when our structural crises met with the financial crisis of global proportions, causing major cuts, and administrative burdens. I think that the worst thing happened to organizations that were not in the category of the smallest, because the smallest had already lacked resources and were not hit by such a shock, but to the actors that we can



call medium. I am thinking of those organizations whose ambitions in that period were moving in the direction of more serious engagements and budgets. On the one hand, they were hit by cuts in funds, and on the other hand, the administrative burden that requires a strong push from organizations. In general, I think the scene is very tired of the fact that we are stuck between the hammer and anvil of the administration and the lack of conditions to deal with the content and production of the program. From Clubture's and my perception of reality, I would also highlight important changes in the network's human resources. Namely, Emina Višnić (in Pogon) and Dea Vidović (in the Kultura Nova Foundation) left the network, which meant that as a new and unrecognized person on the scene, I took on the operational role of network coordinator. It is important to add that we, as a relatively small organization, a "featherweight category" organization, in the context of financing many other national networks have always shown great ambition and resilience to crises. I think we rode on the drive and persistent *madness* of the protagonists in the various processes in which we were actors. In addition, we were persistent enough to push some interesting concepts such as the foundation for independent culture or the affirmation of socio-cultural centers to the level of materialization through promotion and involvement, convincing various social actors for the general benefit of these concepts. It takes energy that brings change, but requires dedicated work and consumes people physically and emotionally.

And yes, even though we were aware of the category we belonged to, we were entering a ring with far bigger heavyweights. There is a phrase for this in the English language: to punch above one's weight. I think that this principle can easily be attributed to the entire independent cultural scene in our region.

Just to get back to the topic of your question, we have also dealt specifically with the administrative burden on organizations. In 2015, my colleague Tomislav Domes and I jointly prepared a mini-study related to the system of supervision and (self) control over civil society organizations and organizations of independent culture: *Uvođenje reda*




*u udruge (Introducing order in associations).* We wanted to point out how the system treats these organizations unfairly, requiring an incredible amount of fiscal-administrative responsibility, which itself does not satisfy, and in complete opposition to the proclaimed discourse on the enabling environment for civil society and to the Constitution and laws guaranteed freedom of association and freedom of speech. I think that the text of the publication is still relevant to our circumstances, and now the situation seems much worse than five or six years ago.

### How have these changes affected CTHR as the core program of the network?

Sudden cuts in funding for culture at the local level have brought a significant increase in the number of applications for CTHR programs. Subsequently, this put a lot of pressure on us because CTHR is not intended as a fundamental support for the production of independent culture, but as a supporting pillar to that part of it that relates to exchange and cooperation. In other words, it was assumed that the local scene would get some support from the Ministry of Culture, as well as from their cities, counties, and municipalities. When these sources dried up, internal competition in our tenders intensified, so that at certain periods we were not perceived as a collaborative network, but as a competitive instrument. Ways had to be found not to provide further development of such perception. There was a discrepancy between our mission on the one hand, while on the other there was a growing threat to be perceived as a boring donor. This discrepancy stems from circumstances we cannot influence (because we too are dependent on public funds and tenders).

During my tenure, such a perception has been a big burden and it is something we have often struggled with, constantly looking for ways to keep the atmosphere from becoming competitive. We have always strived to be a dynamic background, while the lack of resources on the independent scene has created energy and a type of mistrust that has required a great deal of willpower to make Clubture understood as a support mechanism. In general, it seems to me that an understanding of the full extent of the network's contributions would only come



about if Clubture disappeared. For organizations that are far from the center in physical, but also economic and cultural terms, it not only helps them to survive but also to have the perspective of development and collective thinking. From Clubture and its CTHR development model emerges the fact that a collaborative program does not need the “blessing” of a headquarters, but that organizations from smaller communities can also negotiate collaborations. And the effects of such (physical, geographical, and cultural) decentralization would only be seen if the network that works on them for so long, so actively, and with such a commitment, ceased to exist.

**In addition to the decentralization action underlying CTHR, what else would you single out as the network’s most significant contributions?**

The contributions are very large in terms of creating scene dynamics. By contributions, I mean lively cooperation in the creation of program content between organizations that are mutually oriented to each other, while there is an active transfer of knowledge in which they learn and work together. I also think that Clubture’s orientation towards creating a cultural system that is propulsive is extremely important. Monolithism, i.e. impermeability, is one of the great problems of our cultural system. It is difficult for new organizations to enter the funding system because it is not at all propulsive, it does not recognize new actors and organizations. Clubture allows new and young organizations to establish themselves, to connect, and start learning from the more experienced – unlike the financial framework of public funding. Another problem related to the impermeability of the cultural system, I would define as clogging, by which I mean a situation in which there are small or medium-sized organizations that are already in the public funding system, but reach a border and can not exceed the limits of a particular financial class, that is, they cannot be established despite expanding the scope of their work. Clubture, through its capillary action, is a counterbalance to a system that inhibits the new and prevents growth. This is also clear from the figures which show that more than 250 different organizations have gone through Clubture in different ways.

You have witnessed many CTHR programs. Which of them would you single out as the most impressive from your time at Clubture?

I would not single out specific programs because I think this is not appropriate given my coordinating role, even though I am no longer part of the network. Instead, I would highlight the most striking feature of many CTHR programs: defiance. Defiance in the sense of “pushing” something that is missing, yet the audience for it exists. With various programs, I liked that they have a level of defiance, opposition to the current situation. And there were great events, amazing, unexpected results of our exchanges. Clubture is here to provide a haven for organizations, to create networks of actors who are not hierarchically superior to each other. This transfer of knowledge about quality work on organizing events, working with audiences has had remarkable results, especially for content that is considered marginal, and should not be. We are the starting point of a cultural system that has an impulse for *the new*, and that creates space for cultivating and generating that *new*.


# Marino Jurcan

Metamedia Association, Pula



**M**etamedij was founded in 2001 as an informal initiative, yet you started working a few years earlier, and you were implementing the first programs through CTHR in 2003, immediately after the establishment of the network. What did your first contacts with Clubture look like and what did CTHR, as the central program of the network, bring you in the beginning?

Our history in the context of Clubture is specific, and to explain it, we have to describe prehistory. Like most associations that deal with independent culture in Pula, Metamedij originates from the field of music, and we are more specifically related to the field that is today called *rave* culture. But I must mention that in our beginnings when we started organizing parties and other events, we did not feel that the word *rave* applied to us. At the time, for us, it meant a ready-made form of electronic music, while Metamedia's work included genres from *psy / goa trance music*, through more experimental electro forms to *drum'n'bass*, *dub*, and *chill out*, which occasionally included collaborations with bands. In the 1990s, I was one of the first goa trance DJs in Croatia, and at such events, I met the Zagreb team that was part of the anti-war movement. Among them was Benjamin Perasović, who collaborated with Arkzine, whose editor-in-chief Vesna Janković informed me that there are interesting guys in Labin who run the Lamparna club. I soon visited Lamparna where I met Teodor Celakoski and Nenad Romić, or Marcello Mars, later the founders of the Multimedia Institute (an organization that is one of the founders of Clubture). I believe that they came to Lamparna to open a cyber cafe, and perhaps they were there to gather knowledge from Dean Zahtila from LAE on writing and leading more demanding European projects because he was among the first in our region to have such experience. After that meeting, we started collaborating on our *Media Mediterranea* festival in 1999, where Metamedij was involved in music content, while the guys from the Multimedia Institute organized educational content. Through them, we also met the Ljubana organization Ljudmila, which implemented programs similar to the Multimedia Institute, combining DJing and VJing skills with theoretical knowledge, spreading awareness about copyleft, free software, etc.



A few years later, in 2002 or 2003, a newly formed Clubture team invited us to join the opening tour in Pula, when they toured Croatia and tried to interest organizations to join the work of the network.

**What were your experiences of exchange and cooperation with other associations before the founding of Clubture, and what changes did the membership in the network bring? What did your first programs look like and what would you single out from your networking experience in the early 2000s?**

Before Clubture, alongside the Multimedia Institute, we had experienced cooperation with associations from Pula and Istria. Previous programs were held in an abandoned military zone and outdoors, and the know-how needed to organize festivals and outdoor events was not so widespread at the time, therefore we exchanged knowledge with other associations that were involved in organizing music events. At that time, Pula was dominated by alternative rock bands, and from those circles, we knew the team from Monteparadiso and Distorzija. We cooperated with all of them on the organization of open-air activities, and wider cooperation with associations from the rest of Croatia started only when we joined Clubture.


Since Metamedij started working in the field of new media through the party scene, i.e. rave culture, our previous activities within CTHR were focused on DJing, VJing, and programming websites that were created in Flash. Back then, VJs did their animations in Flash, and that segment of our early work is perhaps closest to what is considered new media art today. We did audio and video production, and later organized exhibitions. After we started organizing programs in Rojč in 2002, associations that were interested in such content contacted us through Clubture and we started cooperating with them. Part of the program was realized through the CTHR line *segment of a festival* where part of the festival could be offered to other associations. We found that, in addition to the projects we implemented and exchanged, partner projects are also extremely important. Apart from exchanging programs, Clubture was a place for us to inform and gather contacts and insights into the scene in Croatia. I would say that it meant even more to

us than the programs themselves. The programs were, of course, of good quality, but I would single out access to information and contacts as the most important part of our CTHR experience. This can be seen in the development of our festival and the wide list of associations that hosted it in the early 2000s. We collaborated with the Močvara Gallery led by Marijana Stanić, the Amateur Film Review (Postpessimists Association), the NAN Association from Zaprešić, Ekscena, and various other initiatives that we would not have known existed, let alone invited to the festival if there were not for Clubture. In short, we had the opportunity to host various programs and exchange knowledge and skills with them, which meant a lot for our organization.

**Apart from program exchange and collaboration, Metamedij has participated in several other Clubture programs aimed at knowledge exchange. What did those activities look like?**

Through Clubture, we participated in an ambitious cycle of drafting strategic documents. In the mid-2000s, the National Foundation for Civil Society Development began funding the financing of associations, and the condition for applying for these funds was that the associations have strategic plans. And beyond that, of course, it is desirable that associations have longer-term plans and that they know how to place themselves within cultural policies, and at that time such knowledge did not exist in associations. We came to Zagreb intensively every month for training in strategic planning. I remember that my colleagues from Kontejner were in the group with me, and in other groups, some interesting actors remain active on the cultural scene to this day. It was a peer-to-peer education which, in addition to communication with mentors and program leaders, included learning from close colleagues, which proved to be extremely useful.

The exchange of knowledge on advocacy, advocacy processes, and cultural policies was as important to us as program exchange, if not more important than it. Therefore, I would like to single out Clubture's program *Kultura aktiva*, which gave us an insight into the ways of functioning of the cultural system and our position in that system and enabled us to formulate the need to deal with it and create



working conditions. In 2004, the Law on Councils of Culture was passed, which stipulated that cities with more than 30,000 inhabitants have to have cultural councils. Until then, there were no councils for new media cultures, as we called them then, and this being an area that includes new media arts, interdisciplinary projects, youth culture, alternative scene - so a fairly wide range of activities that did not have a category of public funding. Today, this category is called Innovative Artistic and Cultural practices. *Kultura aktiva* included education on the basics of advocacy and cultural policymaking, and their first activities included organizing discussions and discussing the state of independent culture in individual cities, as well as a joint initiative to establish councils for new media cultures at the city and county levels. As part of this program, Metamedij, together with the associations Distorzija, Monteparadiso and Studio kaPula from Pula and the association I from Poreč, in October 2004 initiated the establishment of the Cultural Council for New Media Cultures. The proposal was accepted, we have had a Council since 2005 and since then independent cultural associations have been recognized as an area that forms a dynamic part of the cultural scene, which is worth being co-financed from public sources.

**Metamedia's participation in the founding of the Rojc Alliance overlaps with the reduction of your activities within CTHR. Are these circumstances related? And how important was the experience of knowledge transfer within the building for you?**


This is the period when Močvara and Attack entered Jedinstvo in Zagreb, Kocka association entered Youth Center in Split, and several associations entered Rojc in Pula. Even then, it was clear that Rojc is a specific form of networking, important at the Croatian level as a building that brings together associations and cultural figures in the form we now call the socio-cultural center. In the beginning, the city of Pula in Rojc housed associations with which it did not know what to do: from cultural associations, through Josip Broz Tito or Vukovar Mothers, all the way to fan groups and sports associations, to associations of national minorities. The first association that came in Rojc was the noisy brass orchestra and it was



located here so as not to disturb the city. It seems to me that the attitude of the city administration was that Rojc is almost a landfill, and it seemed to us that the building had potential, so we launched several actions in the mid-2000s. Through Clubture, we started talks on networking of associations in the building during *the Days of Open Doors of Rojc*, an event that was, as a part of CTHR, transformed into the program *Karlo Rojc – meet your neighbor*. Later on, we even set a date for the founding assembly for the new alliance of Rojc associations with our colleagues from Green Istria, Suncokret Association, and several other associations, but then one association changed its mind and convinced us that it was better to stay in informal cooperation. At that moment, we had trouble running our organizations, let alone coordinating associations. In short, the idea of collaboration was smoldering but not formalized, and the alliance was eventually founded in 2012. Of course, I would say that our small capacities have shifted from the organization of tours and exchanges in Croatia to engagement at the local level, and not only around the area of Rojc. Namely, in 2006 we established the Youth Center in Pula together with the association ZUM, the County of Istria, and the Ministry of the Family, Veterans' Affairs, and Intergenerational Solidarity. As a youth center based on the model of civil-public partnership, it was a pilot project at the Croatian level, but existing youth policies later did not recognize such a model and it stopped receiving funding after a few years. Today, it is the Youth Info-Center because this type of model is recognized within the youth policy and continues to be run by the ZUM association.

**Your long-lasting term in the CTHR working group also went on in the mid-2000s. What did the engagement of the members of that body look like at that time? What have your experiences with the procedures for evaluating and deciding on CTHR programs been like?**

The evaluation takes place in the Assembly and is designed so that the community creates the criteria, and I would say that the cross-section of the evaluation in the end, despite possible disagreements, really represents an appropriate evaluation for projects. Of course, the model of horizontal decision-making is not perfect, but I think



that the principle of voting, in addition to being democratic, in principle results in an assessment that reflects the quality of the proposed program. My term in the Working group lasted from 2003 to 2007, and our role was to help associations in administrative terms and with budgeting, i.e. to explain to them which application rules should be followed to formally meet the conditions. It was interesting because we traveled a lot. We toured Croatia and had meetings with various organizations, and various trips (to Split, Rijeka, Zagreb) allowed us to understand other local contexts. Then I realized that Slavonia and Dalmatia are places of great and unrealized potential. Today, of course, the situation is much different, but then Split was a big city where not much was happening outside the activities of KUM and associations in the Youth Center. It seemed to us that Split had much greater possibilities that the city authorities did not take seriously. Moreover, in Osijek, also a student city with a lot of young people, there was a lot of unrealized potential for interesting programs. In Pula, on the other hand, there were many associations, located in one building, which found it difficult to find a common goal or interest. The associations were young at the time and I would say that there was a certain amount of need for proof, greater visibility, and individual profiling on the independent scene, which often led to minor conflicts on scene that we, of course, tried to smooth out. In 2005, the discussion expanded to another range of topics, when Clubture launched *04 – megazine for reality hacking*. The megazine opened a discussion about non-profit media policies, which was an unexplored field at the time. I gladly participated in such discussions.

### Can you tell us something more about Megazine?

Megazine was a printed publication that responded to the lack of content on independent cultural production, both in the print media and on Internet portals. Copies of Megazine were distributed on the programs of the independent scene and this magazine gave us space for informing about the work of associations, but it also included theoretical texts on the context in which we operate. At the time, the National Foundation had funded nonprofit media projects, and later the Ministry began to recognize

the nonprofit media scene. Today it is much more active, there are media such as radio Rojc, KLFM, Roža, or internet portal, but the idea that non-profit media should be discussed and that this field needs to be regulated somehow is something that has started with Megazine.

**Given the fact that you have been following the work of Clubture and participating in it from the very beginning, what would you single out as the most important segment or segments of the network's activity?**

There are several levels that I would single out as important: program cooperation, the possibility of knowledge transfer between organizations and actors on the scene, and the transfer of knowledge about advocacy and cultural policies. I have to admit that at first, I was skeptical. I presumed that CTHR would be another excuse for Zagreb programs to travel around and that associations from smaller communities will not have the opportunity to participate in full. Our cultural system is centered in Zagreb, there are many associations, funds, programs, and I was afraid that CTHR would reflect such centralization. I talk about the type of centralization we have the opportunity to see today in the dynamics of the EU and international projects, in which associations from our region are most often partners, and rarely contribute to the design and coordination of programs, in innovative and intellectual terms, and mostly work on smaller activities. Programs in CTHR have proven to be truly mobile. Looking back two decades ago, I would say that for Metamedia, but also for the wider scene, were equally important programs of education and capacity building of associations, through which we became aware of our position, role, and ways of functioning of the cultural system in Croatia. Over time, we became actively involved in the process of changing that system and creating working conditions. Finally, I would like to emphasize the advocacy of Clubture, because today it seems to me that Clubture is the only instance at the national level with which associations can talk and communicate the need for change. Perhaps this is the most important role of the network today.

# Miranda Veljačić

Platform 9,81, Split




**P**latform 9.81 is among the few organizations in the Clubture membership that operate in the field of architecture, but it is one of many that advocate for spatial justice and bring public space issues into question. What inspired you to join the network and what did your beginnings on the independent cultural scene look like?

We started working in 1998 as a student association. We soon began to organize programs in collaboration with organizations from other disciplines, such as the Multimedia Institute or the Center for Dramatic Arts, which were growing at the same time, and profiled themselves in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Our programs *Arhitektura uživo (Architecture Live)* and *Nevidljivi Zagreb (Invisible Zagreb)* soon spilled over from the domain of architecture into other areas. In the beginning, they included a conversation between architecture students and professionals who do not teach at the faculty, but after the first lecture, we moved to a public space, and the talks about architecture became a trigger to discuss other topics. The activity of Platform 9,81 soon grew into a collaborative practice that included other organizations on the scene. Working together, incorporating everything we did through Clubture, seemed natural to us. I cannot separate the work of my organization from working together because I have always felt strongly that we are all part of a larger system. As an organization, we have rarely worked only for ourselves nor because of ourselves. From the very beginning, we have achieved everything together with other organizations.

**The first project you were implementing through CTHR was *Invisible Zagreb*. What did the program include?**

*Invisible Zagreb* emerged from *Architecture Live*, a program in which we mapped spaces that were not used solely by us, and the project became a service for other civil society organizations as a response to the lack of working space. *Architecture Live* was a series of 25 lectures in public spaces, each of which gathered an average of 300 people in the audience. The lectures were held in various locations, from the Ribnjak Park to the Slaughterhouse, which we were the first to use as a space, and we brought to a state that allowed the program to take place. In these programs, we somehow connected the needs



of organizations with the spaces that were (or were not) available, and we would try to arrange these spaces in the way that was needed for a particular type of program. These were not only public spaces but also private ones, like factories. Through *Architecture Live*, we developed a procedure for contacting the owner, the police, reporting a public event, and similar steps that were needed to make an event happen, and we helped other organizations on the scene in all this. *Invisible Zagreb* was launched in 2003 and is a continuation of the practice we conducted through CTHR. At that time, the *Cultural Capital 300* program was launched, a large project supported by Erste Bank, and Platform 9,81 implemented it together with WHW, CDU, Multimedia Institute, and BLOK.


**This was followed by *Urbanistička početnica (Urban Design Primer)*, a program that was implemented in various iterations through CTHR from 2008 to 2012 and included several different implementation locations.**

We started *Urban Design Primer* as one of the few organizations that moved or changed its headquarters – in our case from Zagreb to Split. When you move, other perspectives open up to you. We realized that there are several people across the Adriatic doing valuable programs which prompted us to establish some type of “Adriatic cooperation”. The main motivation was provided by Slaven Tolj – without him, there would be no *Urban Design Primer*, as well as some other joint projects. In the field of architecture, our collaboration later spilled over into a project for the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rijeka. Such collaborations have no beginning or end, they appear in various iterations, they have breaks after which they continue and they do not always take place in the same sector. Ever since we started working with other organizations on the scene in the late ‘90s, we have forever been determined by the collaborative model, looking at everything from a lot of angles. Such an approach to cooperation, since we are quite related to civil society, has spilled over into our professional practice, which greatly distinguishes us from other architects.

Along with Srdjana Cvijetić, Slaven Tolj encouraged us to start opening spatial themes in

Dubrovnik, which was the center of activities during the first years of the program. The program began as a self-education of team members. We would pay architects from big cities the cost of travel and accommodation to move out of the office comfort zone. Not only did they come to the Dubrovnik area to give lectures, but we also organized visits to construction sites (project tours) and guided tours for high school students. The collaboration was primarily related to history professor Đuro Capor, who for years motivated his students to get involved in the program. For such a form, which was simple and a bit naive – in the sense that it demystified the story of space, architecture, and the work of an architect – I would say it was quite successful. Young people have responded quite well to our need to talk about space in a simple, understandable way. I remember that after one season, out of eight students, as many as four enrolled in architecture, which surprised us because our intention was not to directly encourage students to become architects. I remember a workshop led by Damir Gamulin where one student, who did not intend to enroll in architecture at all, did the task so perfectly that it shocked us all. At the end of that session, he came to thank us and finally changed his mind about his future career.

The core of *Urban Design Primer* has always been in the transfer of knowledge. The expertise of designers, architects, and people in the field of social practices was passed on in simple discourse to people who are not architects. The usual format is for architects to give lectures to each other in a professional environment. As students, we had trouble understanding the complicated way in which established architects spoke. The subtitle of *Architecture Live* was *One Architect, One Project* because the intention was for the author to explain only one project and to make it detailed and understandable. *Urban Design Primer* is a continuation of the same idea based on the simplicity of addressing a non-professional audience and stepping out of the comfort zone in spatial terms: instead of showing pictures and drafting their projects, the format included a tour of buildings that may not be theirs. Talking, for example, about hotel architecture, they would share their views on



architecture without talking about their projects. This format was extremely dear and important to us, so when founding the Kultura Nova Foundation, we registered *Urban Design Primer* as a programming platform in which initially 7 organizations participated, and later 12. Later, the project grew into the *Urban Platform* in which *Urban Design Primer* remained one of the segments. Without CTHR, none of this would be possible. We would not have the opportunity to meet associations from all over Croatia, just as we would not have the opportunity to implement such a complex project.

**It is, therefore, an example of a project that, after incubation within the CTHR, became ready for larger and more demanding frameworks.**


I think that projects implemented through CTHR should not be conducted for a longer period. The format of CTHR is small and I think it is a great opportunity to start, develop, and get introduced, especially for organizations that do not belong to our small pool of organizations but feel the need for exchange and cooperation. Still, I think that after a few years the implementation of the same program is becoming counterproductive and the program can be expected to stabilize enough to be ready for other, more generous sources of funding. It is simply not realistic to expect Clubture to follow this growth as a network, to start financing HRK 100,000, a program that was once financed with HRK 30,000. Sharing money within the network donors rarely see benevolently, in the sense that they recognize that added value is being created. On the other hand, donors generally perceive Clubture as an instance that assumes the role of donor and are therefore not overly inclined to increase network funding. Clubture, of course, has other roles, although program sharing is the most important. It not only creates opportunities to test, check, initiate collaborations and programs but also tests the readiness to function in a collaborative process and allows everyone to honestly express their opinion on the program of any other member of the network, without an external jury. There are, of course, many circumstances that affect whether a project will be supported or not. For example, organizations are sometimes more inclined to support concerts



or experimental programs, and the goodwill of organizations is something that cannot and does not want to be influenced. The question is whether or not someone wants to participate in this type of collaborative process because in such processes you test yourself, your willingness to cooperate, and co-decide. This is a good test because if you can't tolerate the co-decision making within Clubture, it means that you are not ready to work in the system of socio-cultural centers or at other levels where this type of model is applied.

**Your tenure on the Board of Directors of Clubture has been ongoing since 2011, which means you have gained considerable experience. What does this work look like and how come you have been a member for so long?**

I think that such a long tenure on the Board of Directors of Clubture was made possible by the fact that this organization is so well structured and has sustainability in its focus. The Board of Directors is the supporting component, i.e. the body that supports the work of Clubture employees. The Board of Directors has meetings at the invitation of CT employees whenever there is an important topic or situation for the scene – from public speaking, formulating a common position, questions from other networks; so we meet and very quickly distribute work and reach a common conclusion. Clubture as a Center of Knowledge, program exchange, and recently the initiator of the Network of socio-cultural centers – all these are aspects which the Board of Directors is familiar with, but does not deal with current situations daily. Just for comparison, some other boards of directors which I participate in have a reverse logic: the board of directors leads the organization, gives directions, and delegates tasks to employees. In contrast, in Clubture there is a synergy of the Board of Directors and the people who work in the network, so at the meetings of the Board we deal with already formulated topics, and after the meetings, the obligations are clearly allocated and promptly done. The system is streamlined, no matter who the network coordinator is, and the division of labor has never been an issue. Synergy, regardless of the individual, has always worked well and I must point out that I have not encountered such a good



situation anywhere else. The people who work in CT are diligent and effective, they understand the importance of the network and they do a great job, which I see as a great advantage of the network. It is because of CT employees that the network works so well, and other bodies such as the Board of Directors and the Working Groups support them.

**I would like to dwell on the functionality of the work model you have just mentioned. Because of the length and horizontality of decision-making, network assemblies are often referred to as a test or exercise of patience. What does the Assembly of CT look like from your perspective and how do you evaluate the model of horizontal decision-making?**

I was never bothered by lengthy meetings. I do not consider one meeting a year to be a great effort and I think it is worthwhile that it is not a formal situation, but a joint work. Some results are from time to time difficult for some members and are certainly one of the reasons for dissatisfaction – you do your best to present and the program does not pass. However, the Assembly seems important to me because, apart from the program exchange, the members have the opportunity to discuss other topics. It is my experience that at each Member Assembly they open at least one important issue that concerns everyone, such as scene funding, poor position of organizations, etc. Such topics cannot be communicated through other channels and it is great that there is a format that allows this type of conversation. For me, it's one of the best formats I've had the opportunity to participate in. As far as I am concerned, the Assemblies could last a day longer because there are many topics.

**How do you see the role of the Forum as another event that the network regularly organizes?**

The Forum is an annual form of meeting that focuses on presenting organizations, an “expo” that allows organizations from some area to show what they do. The Forum is important precisely because of the moment of gathering, because it is one thing when someone's content is read on social networks or listened to at the Assembly, and another when organizations have the opportunity to shortly demonstrate how they implement programs. I

would like the Forum to have more resources so it could become a serious demonstration exercise or a serious expo. With more funding, the Forum could become a real Clubture festival where organizations could showcase and perhaps share programs. It primarily serves for introducing the members to an environment that is different from one of the Assembly, and where the informal socializing grows into moderated meetings and reflections on the potential of the network.

**Given that you have many years of experience with the network, how do you see its contributions and how do you rate its importance?**

I think the most important thing is that the network has found a way to continue its growth. For me, Clubture is an incubator that allows people to try to collaborate, to learn about each other and themselves. Members are connected by an assembly, which means that they meet regularly, and when people meet regularly, failure is easier to bear because it is okay that some things fail and do not go beyond the original framework. The value of a space that values experimenting is great for anyone involved in culture and arts. The space of freedom that CT provides, in any sense – programmatic, administrative; is important, especially today when the cultural and civil field is extremely standardized and complicated. Clubture is a haven that provides support to organizations that cannot administer and is available to them daily. The network, in short, allows organizations to start a program from scratch. Finally, I would like to emphasize the importance of Clubture's steps in forming the Network of Socio-Cultural Centers. I think it represents a big leap in the work of the network and I am looking forward to its future.

# Luiza Bouharaoua

Scribonauts, Zagreb



**T**he Scribonauts have joined the CTHR program at the very beginning of their activity. Since 2011, you have been working on providing access to culture to the prison population, and in 2012, you implemented the *Pisce u zatvor! (Writers to Prison!)* project as part of CTHR. Can you describe the beginnings of your work and your first experiences with Clubture?

In the first activities, we tried to bring culture and art closer to people who do not have access to it, but in a way, that culture comes to them. In other words, we were interested in bringing cultural and artistic programs to places where they do not exist. Through early programs in 2010, we researched where we want to work. After a series of public discussions in Split, we quickly developed cooperation with the Kaštela Orphanage “Miljenko and Dobrila”. The orphanage is closely connected with the Center for Children with Behavioral Problems – it often happens that such institutions are interconnected, so homeless children become protégés of the Center. Then our colleague Tomislav Uvodić suggested working in the prison system, that is, in prisons and penitentiaries. We didn’t know where to start or who to contact for approval. In 2011, we managed to get in touch with the Ministry of Justice and obtained permits to organize a first panel discussion in the Split prison, which hosted travel writers Hrvoje Ivančić and Zvezdana Jembrih. In that first encounter, we mapped out the problems that continue to follow us because they represent permanent ailments within the system, such as lack of space. We held the event in the prison chapel, we were addressing the audience sitting in the pews from the altar – because the prison in Split has no space where such a program could be held, as most prisons in Croatia do not have. We also learned that the latest author represented in the prison library was Josip Kozarac, while the only organizations that hold activities there are religious organizations. But the most important information was certainly the one about the structure of everyday life in prison. Namely, prisoners spend a full 22 hours a day in a cell, while the remaining 2 hours are allowed to walk in the yard. The experience of that meeting prompted us to apply for the CTHR project *Writers to Prison!*. The project consisted of a series of discussion panels in 6 prisons with the participation of 18 writers.

In the beginning, we faced several prejudices that accompanied the idea of holding cultural programs



in prisons and we were not considered eligible for existing forms of funding. On the one hand, our programs were not considered culture in the narrow sense and therefore the Ministry of Culture did not recognize them. On the other hand, they are not recognized as social programs in the narrow sense in the support system of the Ministry of Labor, Pension System, Family, and Social Policy. At the time, trends such as audience development or direct work with a specific population were still not in sight. We found ourselves, in short, in a gap from which we were drawn just by the fact that we had successfully applied for CTHR. Clubture members at the Assembly realized that our programs belong to a culture and are socially important, which allowed us to start *Writers to Prison!*, but also to start developing the capacity of the organization that lives to this day. The project included a series of forums through which we were able to find out about the functioning of the prison system, the needs, and interests of prisoners and staff. We learned, in short, that interest existed, while the main objection was the one-time realization of the content. Therefore, over the next few cycles of CTHR, we funded longer-term, continuous programs through which prisoners were able to master the basics of an art medium and express themselves in it.

**A program *Izvana/iznutra (Outside/Inside)* through which you collaborated with many associations followed the *Writers to Prison!*. Can you describe your networking experience within that project?**

From the very beginning, we collaborated with Attack, which was an expected and meaningful choice of partner. Namely, in the old days, they had a Book for Prisoners program in which they collected titles for prison libraries, which they continued to do through projects that we implemented together within the CTHR. We have collaborated with a whole range of people and organizations, and we have found all our partners at CT Assemblies. CT brings together a large number of organizations that work in culture and different media and approach art in different ways, which is very helpful. Outside of Clubture, we have also developed a large network of individuals active in organizations and freelance artists who have led workshops and various programs within the *Outside/Inside* project.

### How did *Outside/Inside* differ from *Writers to Prison!*?

In this project, we organized programs that included more systematic, months-long work with prisoners. Unlike one-off events, continuous programs have a long-term positive effect on the lives of people in the penitentiary. The process of artistic work of an individual prisoner includes a significant amount of collaborative work with other prisoners, through which group dynamics are created and a sense of belonging and responsibility that continues after our meetings. A good example of this is the prison radio workshop run by Ljubica Letinić in the Lipovica penitentiary. Participants met outside of our dates to work and record content for the radio program. However, given that we need to cover prisons and penitentiaries equally in our work, and there are different degrees of openness and space in them, it proved necessary to do both types of programs – one-time and long-term. Thus, *Outside/Inside* included workshop activity that is longer and includes fewer people, but also cultural programs that are open to all who want to participate in them. One such program is Kino Sloboda (Cinema Freedom), an interactive prison cinema that uses the largest prison facilities, and there was also a radio program, a literary club, and several months of workshops covering various media (comics, film, theater).

### In addition to the experience of the radio workshop in Lipovica, what other situation from your programs at CTHR would you single out as particularly important?

The most legendary situation, which pointed us to a long list of problems, challenges, and nonsense, came from the documentary film workshop led by Igor Bezinović in the penitentiary in Lipovica. On it, the prisoners recorded a short omnibus *Slobodni vikend* (*Free Weekend*), which was later included in the official program of the Days of Croatian Film. It took three years and two edits to realize that two-month program. For the first year and a half, we could not get approval to undergo the workshop, despite our many years of experience in the prison system and the relationships of trust and cooperation we have developed in it. The reason: at the time Ivo Sanader became a prisoner, the law on serving a sentence was changed in vain and included an article banning the recording and media exposure of prisoners without



explicit prior written consent. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but at the end of the article, there is a section stating that prisoners are not allowed to appear in the media while serving their sentences. The Ministry of Justice interprets the term “media” very broadly and saw participation in our workshop as media exposure. Although we had the full support of the prison administration, the Ministry persistently rejected us. In the end, Bezinović and I had an extremely bizarre conversation with the Ministry, the conclusion of which was that we could get consent for the realization of a documentary film workshop only if no one would be seen or heard in the film. I remember after the meeting I asked Igor how he had intended to make a film without image and tone, to which he replied that he had no idea how, but we agreed that we would come up with something. And we did, and the fact that the film was included in the official program of the DCF eventually changed the perception of the Ministry. We realized, in short, how deeply dysfunctional some of the security measures in the prison system are. We are currently part of a platform called Motor (Engine), and it is made up of very different organizations working in the prison system. The main and common problem is precisely this law because it is contradictory written and is meaningless and it disables the work in a space with extremely important opportunities for the public perception of the prison and the prison system.

**The next program you were doing under CTHR was *Revija na putu (The Travel Exhibition)*, a project in which you participated as a partner.**

The program included a traveling exhibition of prisoners’ works and was intended for communication with the public. Due to regulations restricting the public appearance of prisoners, we encountered great complications in every attempt to take the artifacts of our work out of prison spaces. On the other hand, our content must communicate with a wider audience because it opens up a discussion about who the prisoners are and what their living conditions look like. And they open this discussion in a much more constructive context than, for example, mainstream media discourse. As an example of the sensationalist horrors that dominate media representations, I will single out a recent special that writes about women prisoners as “women child killers”. Our society is



generally schizophrenic in the treatment of prisoners: we consider many war criminals and profiteers to be heroes, regardless of whether they have served a prison sentence, while the most ordinary people who have been in prison carry a huge stigma. That is why in Scribonauts we are constantly looking for a model that would allow us to shape what we do in a way that allows communication to the public. Through the project of a traveling exhibition in different local environments, we have shown the works of prisoners who mostly thematize a wide range of human preoccupations.

**I would like to return to the beginning of the interview and to your observation about the non-recognition that the Scribonauts have faced as an association that operates *between* different systems – criminal, judicial, cultural. What are your experiences with cultural institutions and the system? During your experience in the labor sector, have there been any positive changes in the perception of cultural programs in prisons?**

As an organization, we were saved by the founding of the Kultura Nova Foundation, i.e. the fact that they understood why our work is cultural and artistic and why it is important, and they gave us their support. The support of Kultura Nova has enabled us to develop our programs, to hire a person who can even write projects and apply for grants. That allowed us to survive. At one point, the Ministry of Justice received funds that could be allocated to projects implemented within the prison system, which helped us because we were the only ones dealing with the field of culture, but it was a short-term solution. Initially, the money was allocated to three-year projects, but the next iteration of the tender brought a reduction to a one-year framework. Since the beginning of the pandemic, they have had only one tender that prohibited direct work with prisoners, allowing only work with staff or beautification of prison facilities. The last part is a direct paraphrase of a project that the HDLU carried out in the prison system by painting murals in prisons. We concluded that there is no point in inventing programs that eliminate direct work with people, which is the core of our work. However, as a result of the support of Kultura Nova and the three-year support of the Ministry of Justice, we currently have two employees, which is sufficient given the scope of Scribonaut's activities, at least in the pandemic years, concerning the numerous restrictions on our

work. However, I have to mention that in different circumstances, such a capacity would not be sufficient for the implementation of long-term programs, as well as for the implementation of major European projects.

**You are active in Clubture as a member of the CTHR Working group. What does the Working group do and what is your experience with that body?**

The members of the Working group read the received projects, assess whether they meet the conditions of the competition, and check whether they are projects with content that belongs to independent culture. Over the years, we have encountered many programs that did not belong to the area as defined by Clubture. A sheep shearing project that was once in the selection can best serve as an illustration. In addition to checking the content, we determine if the project is working on networking, review budgets, and check financial constructions. The Working group is a fully advisory body and we reject a very small number of projects immediately, while we give suggestions to others on how to improve their applications. For example, if an organization proposes a program that includes only one partner who is neither an initiative nor an independent culture organization, we suggest that they replace it with someone who fits that profile. Also, in cases where the activities are not clearly described, we refer to their elaboration or indicate ineligible costs. After that process, we, at the Assembly meeting, have the role of asking questions about problematic aspects of individual projects. For example, an important topic is the acceptability of projects that are not free of charge for users, i.e. that are financed by registration fees. This is an issue that is important to us, and therefore we asked everyone who applies for programs with registration fees to argue in detail why this is justified. Finally, the Working group summarizes the results of the vote and agrees on two budget proposals. In the first, a smaller number of projects with higher coefficients are approved, with higher-ranked projects receiving one hundred percent of the requested budget, while lower ones receive a lower percentage. In the second proposal, everyone gets a smaller percentage of the amount they asked for, but this finances a larger number of projects. In all the years of my participation in the Working group, I do not remember the first



proposal ever being voted on. As a rule, the members opt for the version in which a number of projects are awarded grants.

### How do you see the importance of Clulture and its central CTHR program from the perspective of your engagement through Scribonauts, but also participation in the Working group?

Clulture is designed as a stepping-stone for youth, new initiatives, and cultural organizations. Clulture serves to enable you to realize some of your ideas, your need for organization and work. It served the Scribonauts just like that in the beginning, and as a member of the Working group, I always looked at it in that way. I haven't mentioned a very important and useful aspect of Clulture's work: the fact that they administer costs. This means that young organizations have the opportunity to fully dedicate themselves to the implementation of the program and cooperation while someone else is involved in administration. This is a great relief for organizations or initiatives that are in the process of being created. I would also like to emphasize Clulture's openness to various forms of work, as well as the goodwill. Unlike other donors, Clulture will not automatically disqualify applications in which there is an error and gives the applicants a possibility to adjust programs and participate, that is to (unfortunately) compete for money that is (never) enough. I would single out this goodwill as an important feature of Clulture, especially because we talk about programs that belong to the domain of independent culture and it is questionable where, if anywhere, in their beginnings they would be able to find other types of support. I will return to the beginning of the interview and our first project *Writers to Prison!*, for which we could not get any funding because the system at the time viewed it as an excess. It is for such projects, which have potential, but in a pool where many organizations that have been operating for years would never swim to the top, that CTHR is extremely important. I would also like to point out as a very useful part of Clulture's work is the possibility of meetings at least once a year, at the Assembly and the Forum, where information about other actors in the field spontaneously exchanges, where ideas and interests overlap and networking occurs.

# Deborah Hustić

Radiona – Zagreb Makerspace  
– Association for Development  
of 'do-it-yourself' Culture




**T**he full name of your organization says “association for the development of ‘do-it-yourself’ culture”, and it is interesting that in the descriptions of your work you emphasize the category ‘do-it-with-others’ culture. In general, it seems to me that your focuses on collaborative learning, on sharing knowledge and skills are quite in line with CTHR’s principles of exchange and collaboration. What do you think of that overlap? And how do you feel about the position of Radiona in Clubture?

Radiona started as a Media Lab within the Culture of Change of the Student Center in Zagreb, more than a decade ago. After two years we decided to register as an organization, more precisely as a makerspace. It is a hybrid organization that has elements of makerspace / hackerspace, media art laboratory, repair café, and residential space. We have a very diverse community of 30 to 35 people of very different backgrounds, each of whom brings some of their statements to the work of the organization. From the beginning, we have been a DIY / DIWO / DITO - ‘do-it-yourself’, ‘do-it-with-others’ and ‘do-it-together’ because until then there were no practices in Croatia regarding open-source hardware, biohacking, interactive design, sound art, reverse engineering approaches, etc. Our work is based on bottom-up approaches and democratization of artistic processes when, for example, we do the production of our exhibitions, while the educational program is based on interdisciplinarity and critical thinking.

In a broader context, the do-it-yourself approach on the cultural scene was of course present many years before the emergence of Radiona, and other organizations, such as Monteparadiso, Mama, Kontejner, Attack, and Mochvara, (I must have forgotten to mention some, sorry) worked on such skills exchange. Do-it-yourself and do-it-with-others approaches have been linked to subcultural practices in the past, but have long belonged to the mainstream.

Of course, these perspectives certainly shape our work and our approach to networking because these are the methodologies and principles that are crucial to us. We like to emphasize science to citizens, encourage people to use technology to



improve the quality of their lives and the quality of life of their environment. Contrary to the STEM trend that is dominant in Croatia, Radiona is oriented towards STEAM, which, along with science and technology, equally includes art and creative expression or thinking. Without creativity, there is no innovation and our mission is a symbiosis of creativity and innovation. Quite often people from the art field in Croatia are annoyed by the use of the term creativity, but when we put it out of use in the general public, our cultural sector is the first to be left behind, so let's leave that word alone because it is still part of our universe and we need it.

Another important priority in our work, both through CTHR and beyond, is certainly bringing culture and technology closer to small communities in Croatia. In our beginnings, we were more oriented towards cooperation abroad, i.e. we networked, and then established ourselves, through various international channels and cooperation. In Croatia, networking was much harder for us. The proverb says that nobody is a prophet in their own land and for us it was true. Clulture was important for us to "situate" in Croatia. Before Radiona joined the network, I didn't feel like we were perceived in the local context as part of the scene and it wasn't easy for us to get into an area where there are a lot of organizations that are bigger than us and have been around a lot longer. Clulture helped us a lot in that. In addition, Clulture has a democratic assembly story, which is sometimes reminiscent of ancient Greece, but in Doc Martens or Converse shoes, and creates a likable moment very specific to the network. The network also brings different principles of financing, it is entered more with the heart, and fees are, for example, second priority. This is not a compliment or a monument to Clulture, but a testimony to what and how much the network has helped us.

**Can you tell us something about your experience working in smaller communities? How do you find partners for your projects, how do you choose locations?**

As for Radiona's work in Clulture, I will now reveal the trade secret behind the success of our projects at CTHR – and it is not a problem, because I would like others to apply it: it is very important to work

with places that have not participated in programs. It's important to put new cities on the Cluture map and make it meaningful, but some things, of course, have to be done bit by bit. Of course, this can be very challenging and often tedious, and you frequently feel that you do not have a counterpart on the other side. But you have to be persistent. We have always oriented our networking towards the environments in which we have friends – not because we included those friends in the projects, on the contrary – but because they would bring us their ecosystems, which allowed us a wider reach within the projects. Each of our projects implemented within CTHR is very specific and each of them has brought us something new, mostly positive: from the *Hackathon Suptilne tehnologije: bio-elektroničke dimenzije* (*Hackathon of Subtle Technologies: Bio-electric Dimensions*) as part of which we visited Osijek and Deringaj, through *Digitalni svjetionici* (*Digital Lighthouses*) in Zagreb, Rijeka, and Osijek, to the *Hacktory – putujući lab hibridnih kurioziteta* (*Hacktory – traveling lab of hybrid curiosities*) that included Đakovo and Karlovac. Working in smaller communities opens up opportunities that are crucial for our work: an opportunity to meet citizens and an opportunity to demystify technology and urban culture. Although “urban” is not the happiest term, I mean in general cultural content that is in symbiosis with something outside the narrow field of culture, as technology would be in our case. I will never be so fascinated by big cultural events as I am fascinated by smaller events that are aimed at citizens. This, for me extremely touching moment of working with citizens in our work, is reflected through *the science of citizens* and is generally very important to us. Citizens in smaller communities are more often accustomed to cultural content that they can watch, but cannot actively participate in, and people are often surprised that we bring them in front of artifacts that they can touch and play with. For me, it's touching to see, for example, a retiree's first encounter with a gaming console. Through CTHR, we try to demystify culture and try to make the public more sensitive about it.

Can you tell us more about the sensibilization you have mentioned? What are your experiences in different parts of Croatia?



There are very different realities in different parts of Croatia, therefore our experiences with them are very different. There are environments in which contents from the spectrum of activities of organizations that are members of the network, and which concern progressive social ideas, are more difficult to pass – and for the most part, I speak of more traditionally oriented environments. Our range of activities is wide, but not all programs are possible to be implemented in all environments, whilst working with the public and citizens for us includes investing effort in their empowerment. We like to explore different concepts and try to bring something “new”, or look for new forms of “hacking” that deconstruct the existing ones. With such “hackings” we try to intervene into the atmosphere which makes those who feel like they don’t fit in want to leave the smaller community, as well as to disseminate the progressive attitudes we represent. We try to use projects in smaller communities as a medium, as a language in which we bring our contents closer to the citizens, but we also deal with fears that people from smaller communities often hide. This allows us to cooperate with local organizations, but I think that there is great potential in involving local institutions. Through our experience in smaller communities, it has been shown that they have a great potential to attract audiences. Residents of smaller places often attend all events in formal spaces because it is the only cultural offer available to them. In that sense, formal institutions enable stronger dissemination and reach to the audience. I am generally interested in mainstreaming progressive ideas, and I think it is important to have very diverse partners, including a local museum, library, theater, or family farm, to expand the scope. This kind of cooperation should be kept in mind in future steps in the development of CTHR.

In addition to working with smaller communities, I would like to mention the intergenerational aspect of our work. We strive to make our content intergenerational, accessible to children and young people as well as their grandparents. Transmission is very important to us, both in terms of communication and programming. The great motivation behind our work with the younger generations stems from the desire to keep




them here and it seems to me that Clubture generally has a big role to play in enabling organizations to work in smaller communities and creating opportunities for young people living in them. Among the most beautiful parts of Radiona's CTHR experience for me are projects that brought young people in smaller communities content that does not exist there, such as the Karlovac and Đakovo hosting of *Hacktory – traveling lab of hybrid curiosities*.

**What else, besides the Hacktory you have just mentioned, would you single out as beautiful segments of Radiona's experience at CTHR?**

As beautiful segments of our CTHR experience, I would like to single out those programs in which we managed to achieve good programs and a successful partnership, that is, to organize something that makes sense and also to have fun. Here I include every collaboration with Drugo more (The Other Sea) from Rijeka, the Free Dance and Ka-Matrix from Karlovac, and Udruga za promicanje urbane kulture A.R.L.A. (Association for the Promotion of Urban Culture A.R.L.A.) from Đakovo. I mention this as important because the organizers of the program very often become part of the machinery and forget about themselves, and the goal of the program should also be to give us the organizers pleasure and we should feel good at the implementation of the program.

**The projects you have participated in as partners within CTHR appeal to very different communities. From the project *Odbačeni (Rejected)*, which included the Roma community, to *Svjetlo i voda (Light and Water)*, in which you collaborated with the contemporary dance community, your work has spread to very different participants and audiences. Can you tell us a bit more about the audience development aspect in your partnership projects?**

The project *Rejected*, in which we were a partner of the Art Community RoUm, was interesting, but we participated in it on a small scale by co-organizing an event in Zagreb. It was our first experience of working with an organization that deals with social entrepreneurship, and their work on upcycling and involving members of the Roma community in production is certainly commendable



and I am glad that we had the opportunity to participate in such a project. The collaboration with the Free Dance association within the framework of *Light and Water* is part of a more complex collaborative story, because we have been working with them for many years through different, but always distinctive projects. Since its beginnings, Radiona has been collaborating with performing artists, as well as with all other arts, because in addition to the technological aspect of our work, the social-humanistic one is equally important to us. We easily find common languages with artists and collaborate in different forms. For example, since some of us are involved in music, we sometimes create music for shows or technological solutions for shows, performances, and concerts. The Free Dance is working hard to develop an audience for contemporary dance in its environment and their work is interesting to us from the perspective of audience development. In general, the audience for content that belongs to the more experimental artistic spectrum in smaller environments should be fought for in some way. Programs such as concerts or street art have a good chance of responding, but as soon as we move into areas such as contemporary dance or hybrid media, we need to look for tactics to attract audiences, such as using streets and public spaces. In Karlovac, we worked a lot on the streets, in parks, and the open air in general, following the methods by which the Free Dance reaches a wider audience. Our joint work created within the framework of *Light and Water* was later accepted at the Almada Dance Festival, a great international event, and we managed to move from a small budget project within CTHR to other frameworks and achieve foreign success. In addition, this collaboration created some really good friendships between the participants.

**Apart from the decentralization of culture, which we talked about a lot, what would you single out as Clulture's contributions in the context of the domestic cultural scene?**

An important opportunity that Clulture allows to organizations on the scene is the possibility of trial and error. Not everything has to be perfect in the implementation of projects through CTHR, you

have the opportunity to learn how to work, and learning about budgeting and writing projects for younger organizations is extremely important. The variations of encouragement, knowledge transfer, criticism, and honesty that Clubture nurtures are very valuable in an environment where the system and donors demand from associations to know how to do everything perfectly while learning it practically only through work. On the other hand, like it or not, within the independent scene, associations sometimes compete with each other. The civil sector in Croatia is very large and on the one hand, it is a huge asset of our society, but also an aggravating circumstance for individual segments of the system, especially for cultural associations that are a vulnerable part of civil society.

In general, it seems to me that the division according to the sectors in our country is very strict and full of prejudices that do not make the situation any easier for anyone. The business sector usually dislikes the civil sector because it considers us as parasites, the nonprofit sector considers the entrepreneurial sector to be purely neoliberal propaganda, the art sector fears them all and fears being exploited by organizations and entrepreneurs, and the public sector often thinks all of them do not pay taxes or they certainly cheat. Maybe my vision is pink, but I think coexistence and influence between different sectors are important. And coexistence within the scope of the Clubture network – between cultural organizations, initiatives, cooperatives, different micro-communities – is of great value and I would even say that the network should emphasize it more strongly.

Also, considering the always somewhat uncertain operation of organizations in culture, the great value of Clubture is that it keeps us together in some sense. And we find ourselves in a situation of exhaustion of the scene, at a time when I find it necessary to reset how we will work on the social shift, create creative disorder and encourage paradoxes. The best we can do is make f... good projects. And advocate for them.

