



SOUTH-WEST
UNIVERSITY
·NEOFIT RILSKY·
BLAGOEVGRAD, BULGARIA

VOLUME 2
2004



SCIENTIFIC
Research

ELECTRONIC
ISSUE

Tatiana Stoitchkova

Aspects of Cultural Policy of Bulgaria

Abstract

Over the past century it would seem that cultural policy and the arts have become significant to the Bulgarian state. This article investigates the various stages of periodization of the cultural policy and the difficulties that the development of the cultural policy in Bulgaria is now facing. It argues that it is useful to think about cultural policy across many different fields – legislation, institutional core structure of culture and various areas of cultural production and reception.

- Cultural and Educational Activity
- Institutionalization of Cultural Processes
- Cultural Policy of the State
- Creative Energy Concentration

The different stages in the development of the Bulgarian society, cultural processes and interactions are not identical in every respect. However, we may at least attempt to point out one or another group of tendencies and how they go. At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century culture in Bulgaria was an accelerator of the feeling of national identity, the cultural unity being a prerequisite for unification of the young nation and state. Since the National revival the call for preservation of the Bulgarian traditions and developing culture along with the Modern time achievements has been alive. The restoration of the Bulgarian state triggered the processes of institutionalization of the cultural processes, aiming mainly at establishment of the necessary conditions for promotion of cultural education activity. The governments, constantly changing at that time, used to commence campaigns to teach the population to read and write. The task of the newly established institutions was the national political and cultural renovation of the state.

This was a time that perceived the increasing ability of the state to participate in the cultural field, and in education firstly. From a historical point of view in Bulgaria the state has always played an important role. At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century the Bulgarian state was considered the most radical and undisputed agent of modernity. Its primary purposes were to establish infrastructure and legislation. Alongside, in the process of consideration of the stages of the streamlined state cultural policy, of importance is, as Lachezar Elenkov pointed out, not only the initiatives of the altering parties in the government but the place of the state in the general cultural processes (Elenkov, 1995:39).

There is sufficient evidence, developed in the enormous amount of literature in this field, of the paramount role of the intelligentsia for the establishment of our cultural identity, as well as for the establishment and recognition of the various

cultural and public organizations. Its beneficial role in the processes of emergence and analysis of the artistic life was widely noticeable. Its most prominent educationalists of pre-liberation Bulgaria such as Petko Rachov Slaveykov, Nayden Gerov, Sava Dobroplodni, Ilia Blaskov, Raycho Karolev, Tzani Ginchev set themselves the task to contribute for the restoration and further development of education and culture. An it was the very intelligentsia – prominent poets, writers, artists, teachers, historians, folklorists – that materialized with its actions the widespread aspirations that were consecutively and gradually being integrated in the symbols of Bulgarian identity. The intelligentsia managed clearly enough to lay the foundations of our national cultural identity.

A learned audience, knowledgeable community gradually emerged as a reply to this processes.

The governmental institutions were the performers, regulators and defenders of the governmental power. It was with their assistance that the state managed and directed the state cultural life, cultural relationships with the other states and nations and adhered to its policy. The manner that the state presented cultural self-understanding and nation essence outside was also significant. The Ministry of Education was transformed into an administrative centre of education and culture. At the same time the library centres, as real civil institutions, began to perform important socio-cultural functions countrywide. They hosted the first museum collections, libraries, staged the first amateur theatrical performances. They promoted arts, organized amateur performances: choirs, orchestras, theatrical companies and significantly contributed for the overall cultural uplift in the society.

Cultural policy throughout this period was directed towards grants of scholarships and means to everybody who was capable and diligent, studious, but unable to continue education due to financial reasons. In 1881 “Rules for Scholarships Abroad” was adopted and in 1883 it became an act on provision of scholarships and aids of students in Bulgaria and abroad. This act stipulated that there should be an annual amount for scholarships and aids in the budget of the Ministry of education. The state schools for art and industry and music held competitions for admission of those who wanted to study there and for needy students aids were stipulated and granted.

1880 saw the elaboration of the Act on research and literary centres, which created the requisite legislative base for subsidy granting in the search for ancient ruins, archeological monuments, archive documents, as well as for documentation of our rich cultural historical and folklore heritage (Cultural Policy of the Republic of Bulgaria, 1996:5).

The Children Literature Act was passed in 1920. The Ministry of Public Education was assigned the task to issue in exquisite coverage selected works of the major Bulgarian authors to be given as presents each year to the excellent students from all schools.

Side by side with the implemented cultural policy, the public initiative throughout this period had a significant contribution to the cultural development, the manifestation of the initiative being voluntary work and donations, the virtues of the Bulgarian people, formed during the Revival and continuing as traditional. The primary education enjoyed nation-wide support; under municipal instructions the whole population took part in the construction of the schools and their equipment.

Until mid-90s of the nineteenth century the population supported the teachers, providing one third of their remuneration until 1905. The brothers Hristo Georgiev and Evlogi Georgiev donated a special fund of 6.5 mln. Leva for the construction of a higher school later named University of Sofia.

The presence of public and governmental rule as a managerial ideological and organizing principle had a crucial and decisive importance for the formation of the social mechanisms in the cultural development throughout the period of socialism. Other aesthetic and ideological requirements were prevailing in the cultural and political thought. Culture was organized, controlled and managed by the state. Several more general features may be outlined in the cultural policy of the state, reduced to centralized administration of cultural processes, ideological monopoly over cultural content, stress on the extensive cultural development, construction of wide infrastructure (Cultural policy of the Republic of Bulgaria, 1996).

“Art – to the people”, “Nationwide aesthetic upbringing”, etc. were some of the most popular slogans that directed the program for culture democratization. The reviewed period saw the establishment of a widely accessible educational system, emergence of new forms of mass culture conditioning new aspects of cultural policy although within the framework of the centralized ideological system. The establishment of a wide infrastructure, as well as budget financing and support predetermined the inappropriate utilization of public resources.

The occurrence of structural changes in the society has various reasons – major demographic changes, market extension, new public and international interactions, replacement of one social system with another or principle technological amendments. Throughout the past decade of transition our country, like the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, underwent a deep structural change concerning all aspects of social life, which change in its turn predetermines the strong shifts in culture. If during the period of socialist transition the access to art was widely popularized and overt, now art is changed in such a way that the majority of the people are unable to participate in the cultural life of the country due to financial reasons.

The organizational and administrative structures in the cultural management and financing have also undergone significant changes. There infrastructures have been largely cut off and many employees in the field of culture remained outside this field. This change restricts or reduces the state subsidy for culture and as a result thereof part of the cultural organizations were dissolved and other experience financial strains. In fact many cultural organizations such as libraries, museums, library centres, have been deprived of the opportunity to renew their funds, exhibits, activities. The insufficiency of financial resources for culture is much greater than in the developed countries of the Western Europe. Therefore, the major part of the cultural organizations may not rely on the financial support of the state only and that is why they are forced to resize budgets and time, precisely calculate their resources and means in the seek for additional financing sources mainly from private entities sponsors and business. Strangely, most of the problems that the cultural sector is facing, remain outside its abilities. The changes in the way of life, social norms and cultural organizations are a long and continuous process. Should the dominating culture be unable to reasonably interpret these changes, to process and transform them, then the crisis will deepen.

The shift in the paradigm of the cultural and political thought and action, requiring new reevaluation, is:

- Elimination of the ideological dependence and censorship of creation and cultural organizations;
- Decentralization;
- New subjects of cultural policy – foundations, private cultural formations, new professional associations (Cultural Policies. 2001).

There are, however, sufficiently strong reasons to admit that part of the defined cultural and political orientations, being in the form of democratization and participation of the population in the cultural life, are rhetoric rather than actions of the cultural and political engagement. As a result of the famous lack of interest in culture of the last decade, in respect of the general cultural development, cultural policy does not happen to be a task and priority of national importance, nor central, sociopolitical category.

According to another aspect for the democratization processes, however, the present democratic concept of cultural policy involves reduction of the role of the state in fact. However, it should be mentioned that even in the conditions of reduced central financing and administration, the state should not be wholly relieved of responsibility in the field of culture, the ideas of denationalization, decentralization and privatization frequently serve as an excuse for failure in implementation or non-assuming of public responsibility. The most striking example of this falling off of the responsibilities was the hasty and rash approach to the privatization, without paying attention to preserving the activity of bookstores, cinemas, library centres, etc. In 1998 the Ministry of Culture put the bookstores for privatization and transferred responsibility and authority to the Ministry of Industry. Thus, the whole functioning network of bookstores was destroyed, sine these were a valuable real property.

The state support and participation should be multidirectional. By application and support of mixed forms of financing, culture, as a public welfare, should remain to a very high degree responsibility of the state, as well as significant institutes of national importance, creative activities, which are unable to sell themselves on their own on the market, support of libraries, archives, etc. This support is particularly necessary for the present day artistic processes, experimental creation, innovative designs and activities, thus assisting the culture development as a whole. The state support is necessary with the purpose to prevent against negative impact of the commercialization process.

In 1999 the Protection and Development of Culture Act was adopted. This act is necessary with regard to the strengthening of the state legal actions in the process of financing culture and its consistent programming. This act is useful to the government and in relation to the activity of the subjects of cultural policy, specifying the basic directions of regulation of the Bulgarian cultural development. At the same time, it should be remembered that the act is an instrument for implementation of the directions and purposes of cultural policy. Without being a recommending but a regulating instrument, the act is not the policy itself. In order for the legislation to be effective it should conform with, in terms of content and values, and support the purposes and priorities, set forth in the national cultural policy . Effectively stable and well-regulated financial system is absent. In this line of thought, the issue researchers

expressly stress on the necessity of a parallel development of the third sector, civil initiative and civil culture.

The Protection and Development of Culture Act stipulates that institutes of culture have their own economic and creative independence; unfortunately this is only desirable, because part of the theatres may not receive off-budget means. At the end of 199 and the beginning of 2000 part of the clauses concerning the financing of the institutes of culture, of the law were revoked. The opportunity to raise means from companies means to grant preferences to these companies. Paragraph 6 of the Transitional and Final Provisions of this Act links to new sections of the Corporate Income Tax, namely, section 14 of Article 23, which stipulates that “the financial outcome prior taxation shall be reduced by the size of the gratuitous funds granted for securing of the activity of the cultural organizations within a calendar year” (Protection and Development of Culture Act, 1999).

The majority of the people in Bulgaria consider that the Protection and Development of Culture Act is strongly restricted from authority, and therefore ineffective, and not allowing tax relief for culture. Such people state that 1% of the GDP for Bulgarian culture (instead of 0.6% at present) as tax relief, sponsorship should be fixed and require that part of the hazard should be directed to “Culture development” Fund. It is considered that the conditions for private capital investment should be improved.

Throughout the last decade Bulgaria has been seeing the imposition of mixed state and municipal financing. The Budget Act and the Protection and Development of Culture Act contain definitions concerning the transfer of part of the financing to the municipalities. By signing certain agreements the Ministry of Culture provides 70% and the municipalities – 30% of the funds for remuneration. The municipal governors shall be obliged to enter into contracts with the Ministry of Culture with regard to the optimal responsibility in the process of financing. The current situation of application of mixed financing in Bulgaria, however, displays what the attitude of part of the municipalities to culture is in fact and the degree of public awareness of the need of it. Unfortunately, some of them display negligence and improvidence towards the existing problems and directions of development of local culture. The situation in Bulgaria is quite diverse, because there are some municipalities that do not enter into contracts and do not provide funds, there are municipalities that enter into contracts and do not provide funds, and municipalities that do not enter into contracts, but provide funds (Angelov, 2001). When cultural organizations do not own the buildings, library centres, for example, the mayoralties lease these, but the income from that lease is not used for improvement of the cultural infrastructure, enlargement of library funds, encouragement of cultural participation.

In other words, municipal budgets, considered as the basic alternative source of financing, from the point of view of our official cultural policy, are still within the terms of reference of the state budget but very often may not meet their liability to culture. The municipalities themselves have limited budgets and each reduction in the budgets shall have impact on the subsidized cultural organizations and activities. Furthermore, most often financing is used for maintenance of infrastructure, buildings, expense for remuneration, thus completely leaving cultural creation behind.

As a conclusion, what is necessary in Bulgaria is to fully utilize the indirect and direct forms of cultural financing by development and application of sponsorship as an activity beneficial to arts and business.

Alongside this and the accentuated difficulties and challenges in literature, fine and scenic arts, there is an interesting and various cultural dynamics, new styles and trends emerge and win recognition. The opportunities for free manifestation and pluralism become greater. There is concentration of creative power. As Chavdar Popov mentioned, processes of de-hierarchization, de-sacralization, secondary (after the Renaissance) autonomization of cultural creation and consumption are happening. The centralized, vertical structure of culture is being restructured in a horizontal way and this leads to the emergence of new forms and phenomena – private galleries, private film-making, private publishing of books, new theatrical forms – ‘free stages’, civil associations and independent organizations. The conditions of competition and financial insufficiency are compensated by the gaining of new managerial skills and knowledge, “in a processes that provide more chances for success of those who are initiative and talented” (Popov, 1992).

Freedom of creative expression changed the status of the author towards realization of its autonomous mission. Increase occurred in his responsibility, personal commitment to himself and the audience.

For our country the elaboration of cultural policy, as well as the held conferences and debates on the issues of democratization in this relation, is rather an attempt for legitimization to Europe, instead of setting priorities and strategic thought, with regard to the actual cultural development of the country and knowledge of the actual cultural needs and models of the population. Along with this it is worth to note that the run of a similar significant redirection, noticeable nowadays, may not depend solely on the conditions of a separate subject. Redirection of the kind depends on the directed efforts of the whole society.

Generally, modelling of cultural policies in Bulgaria, as well as in the countries of the Eastern and Central Europe, is commensurable with the model of the Northwest Europe. In discussion of the cultural processes and situation in Europe, many of the representatives of the elite in Eastern and Central Europe see in culture the prerequisite, necessary for the overall social development and social modernization. Moreover, culture is considered as the cheapest advertisement for European integration.

The remarks made so far, although in brief, mark part of the difficulties that the development of our cultural policy is now facing. The various stages of periodization of the Bulgarian cultural policy, briefly mentioned herein, need a more detailed analysis and profound research. Our conceptual instruments need further development, so as to sufficiently express the content of the separate periods in the cultural and political thought and action, the nature of the change of the paradigm of our cultural policy that we meet now, and together with that, to express the relation between the various stages.