

BALKAN- MEDITERRANEAN REFLECTION MEETING

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Having supported and advocated both Euro - Mediterranean cooperation as well as cooperation with and within the Balkans, the ECF, in partnership with Bunker Ljubljana, organised a workshop on experiences, convergences and synergies between North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey and the Balkans. Mutual interest in experiences and practices of cultural actors from these two regions is indeed growing and the ECF, among others, wants to facilitate a platform for debate and encounters.

The following report is an attempt to sum-up the extremely rich debates during the Balkan-Mediterranean Reflection Meeting, where we gathered approximately 20 cultural actors from 12 countries. It tries to highlight some of the concrete examples given by the participants and suggesting new food for thought. Since debates have been quite lively, it mixes summaries of the participants' interventions, reactions and part of the "conversations" around the main themes.

NB: Both during the meeting and this report, we speak of "Balkans" and "Mediterranean" knowing how imperfect these two words are to describe much more complex realities.

Thematic clusters:

- The Med Reflection group, an ongoing process
- (Alternative) Spaces and cultural action
- Responsibility and Audience development
- Public versus private funding
- Regional cooperation
- Questioning regional co-operation in areas of post or ongoing conflicts
- Some common points to work on...

It all began with the Visa...

Not only participants and invitees from the Mediterranean faced problems in obtaining their visa to Slovenia (which is partly due to the fact that the country has only a limited number of Embassies in the region). Even on a regional scale, visas have been an issue: since Slovenia is a member of the EU it is also quite difficult for Macedonians, Bosnians, Serbians and other neighbours to enter the country. Both in the Balkans and in the Middle-East and North Africa, it is difficult to fly from a city to another. Mobility barriers are crossing the group not just theoretically; it is definitively one of the first common points.

Even with a visa, there are no millionaires at this Workshop

"We can hardly survive with our job, but we are doing fine" says Edin Zubčević.

A second main common point of the participants' presentation is that working for independent, and autonomous cultural productions is not making cultural operators and artists any richer. Even the impressive place where the meeting is taking place, Stara Elektrarna - Bunker's venue for public events- is active since 15 years but is still in a fragile situation. Indeed, it raises the issue of cultural actions' sustainability...

However, everybody "is doing fine" and is curious about the others

Given all the above mentioned financial and mobility problems, the participants are achieving great projects in their respective countries as well as in regional cooperation. Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes from France underlines the importance of such a meeting: "introducing the Balkan in the bilateral communication between Europe and the Mediterranean helps breaking the negative face to face". And it works indeed: all participants are genuinely curious about the others but do not really know each other's work or cultural scene.

I The Mediterranean Reflection Group, an ongoing process

a) Where does the Balkan-Med Meeting stand within the ECF's Mediterranean Reflection process?

Susanne Mors (ECF) explains the broader context of the ECF's Mediterranean Reflection Process, an ongoing activity during 2006 and 2007: it started with a seminar in July 2006 where the main issues to be addressed and preliminary recommendations had been identified. Building upon this, a seminar in Algeria has been organised focussing on the funding situation in the country in comparative perspective (February 2007); subsequently another group discussed the triangular relation between Istanbul, Turkey and the EU (March 2007), while an expert meeting in Amman (June 2007) focussed on artistic practices, audiences and the position of curators in Euro-Mediterranean cultural exchange. In October 2007 a conclusive seminar in Egypt deals with NGOs' practices putting them into more legal and political perspectives.

The reflection process is accompanied by an on-line dossier (<http://medreflection.eurocult.org/>) on the ECF website, which collects portraits and essays as well as interviews of cultural actors in the Mediterranean (the latter realised by the journalist's network of Babelmed.) As one result of the process, a North-South pilot placement programme for cultural managers is being envisaged.

b) Why this specific Balkan–Mediterranean Reflection Meeting?

For Odile Chenal, Deputy Head of the ECF, this very meeting is an old wish that awaited to be realized since a long time...Comparisons between the two regions at stake are not easy to make at a first glance. But if there are now similarities there are 'areas of recognition', 'of shared experience'. This meeting is about exchanging these experiences and comparing each other's working contexts without paying attention to political correctness. Within the European Union cooperation frameworks, it is about cooperation between the EU and "the others"; but there are no frames for working 'transversally'. As a result, there are very little flows of cultural cooperation between both regions, the Balkans and the South Mediterranean, while both are so called 'EU neighbouring' regions.

c) Some starting points for the discussion:

- From an EU perspective both regions are perceived as conflict areas
- The state is both weak and very present. It controls, and also produces itself, more than it supports or regulates.
- Cultural actors largely depend on international funding. What are the main impacts and constraints of this funding?
- What can we learn from the current regional cooperation (examples of 'Balkan Express and Al Mawred)?
- What is the relation of artists and cultural actors *vis à vis* cultural policies in their region?

II (Alternative) Spaces and cultural action

a) Case study:

By sharing her experience on the Zagreb Cultural Kapital of Europe 3000 and the conflicting and/or negotiating relationship with public authorities, Ivana Ivković launches a concrete reflection on Spaces and cultural action:

“Invisible Zagreb”

The 90’s brought a partially criminal privatisation of Croatian public domain, which led to a wild urban development, the collapse of the housing policy and social planning in Zagreb.

*In 2002, a Platform of young architects implemented a project called “Invisible Zagreb”. They produced a mapping of spaces that could be used for cultural purposes along the railways tracks: many of these spaces were temporarily occupied. 5 years later, nearly all of them had disappeared: they were either sold or loaned. **We created a platform to initiate the policy action** which is lacking at Zagreb’s municipality. We wanted to trigger discussions and stress the inadequate responses for cultural spaces. **We produced a declaration in 9 points before the elections.** In the aftermath of this highly positive discussion with the political parties, an event was organised in September 2005, which involved 27 organisations. “Organising the city” included two international festivals, one international symposium and a multilingual publication. We did not want to create new programmes but to locate all the programmes in the same place for higher visibility.*

“Our role as artists is to conquer the spaces” Maja Vižine - Slovenia

Increase the visibility of the cultural scene

*The aim was to give visibility to the cultural scene and push for a centre for youth organisations and the artistic scene. Out of the 27 organisations of our Platform, only two organisations have a proper venue, though still very fragile. Local authorities have transformed possible artistic locations in commercial zones. They did not implement their policies despite the fact that we tried to put a constant pressure on them. Under the banner “Reclaiming the city” in 2006, once again we underlined the city Mayor’s incompetence. **It is extremely difficult to make city officials understand the importance of planning policies in the long term rather than supporting isolated projects.***

Interdisciplinary Cooperation between NGOs: culture and environment

*The city of Zagreb has recently decided on the construction of a shopping mall and a parking garage in Zagreb’s central square. Of course, the city urban planning would not allow for such a project but it passed anyhow thanks to political acquaintances. Networks of cultural, youth and green action activists got together to stop this construction. We now gathered 50,000 signatures (10% of the population). The elections are coming soon and officials try to keep a low profile on this issue. The question is: **How can we preserve public space?** Here, culture, not only politics is at stake. After the 90’s and following to a great need of political mobilisation, we are currently witnessing a diversification of civil society organisations. What is crucial though is **to adopt an interdisciplinary approach** (architects together with film makers, dancers, philosophers) and to keep a high level of networking, especially on Youth and environmental policies.*

“We are lacking public spaces, i.e., spaces for the public. Space is not only material, it is a resource to facilitate public and free speech” Ivana Ivković - Croatia

Further questioning

>Who rules the public space? In concrete terms and in terms of public memory, what does the confiscation of public spaces for commercial purposes mean? >How could the interdisciplinary approach be used to fight this phenomenon?

b) Organising public space where it is not expected

It is important to organise public (space) where it is least expected: Saša Asentić recalls, for instance, the street events that took place against Milosević in Serbia in 90's. But nowadays the situation has changed: Public space which used to be an "arena of change" has transformed into a "circus of easy entertainment and consumerism"; the public space has physically transformed too – thus thinking of political potentials of live (artistic) action in public asks for the development of new approaches. Considering the situation in which artists work it is difficult to obtain spaces. **Cultural actors need, in parallel, to "contaminate" and break into the public space.** Vice-versa, in Serbia, the mass media excludes certain issues. Therefore his organisation hosted "SMS Guerrilla", a project of TkH Centre from Belgrade. "SMS guerrilla" has been realised in Novi Sad and Belgrade with the aim to "kidnap" space from the mass media for (excluded) contents of contemporary arts, culture and society and to re-politicise non-political space of mass medias in Serbia through contemporary art.

c) In the South Mediterranean, public space is a restricted area

Ahmed Al Attar stresses a fundamental difference between the two regions from the perspective of the Arab world: due to the political situation, in the Arab world, public space is restricted. Organising a street event for instance, is extremely complex: you would need to ask for State authorisation and might have to face other political risks that go beyond your artistic involvement.

d) The concept of independence does hardly exist in the South Mediterranean

The whole concept of "independent scene" does exist to a much lesser extent in the South Med Region, Ahmed continues. It mainly stems from the region's political history of the past 50 years. You are forced to look at religion, culture, history under a single perspective and the concept of independence is just not understood. In Egypt, people consider that if you do not work for the ten public theatres, it just means you are not good. The other possible option is to go to the private sector and work with stars. **Being in between the public and the private sectors means either that you are not good or that you are a subversive person following foreign agendas.**

"It is fundamental to organise the public space where it is not expected" Saša Asentić - Serbia

e) An independent space in Turkey is considered a "dangerous place"

From a Turkish perspective as Esra Aysun explains, an independent space is considered as a dangerous place: it will always be put under police control. State theatres have been the symbols of modernisation since the Republic; their repertoire is connected to the Ministry of Culture. In view of Istanbul's candidacy - to become Europe's cultural capital in 2010 - a vast land selling to big companies is taking place. You could not occupy a place either: if artists were to invade a place, the neighbourhood would kick them out even before police intervention. From the 80's onwards, artistic places have started to loose their spirit while **the city administration changes with every change of government and therefore never manages to develop a real know how.** Now, the Municipality is speaking of destroying the Atatürk cultural centre to build a new one, but artists are not being involved in this issue. In view of the IMF meeting, officials are building conference centres to be used and rented to companies: **the government is not acting as a social entity but as a profit oriented organisation.**

"The first space to create is in the mind, we need mental space and space for creation. But we live in countries where the individual space is very tight." Ahmed Al Attar, Egypt

f) Enlarge the creative space for individuals

The mental space and the space for creation is more important than any material place. In the Arab world individual space is very tight and it is increasingly reduced by satellite television and the lack of individual rights. This limits individuals' creative space. Young creators do not have a clear image of themselves. **It is very important to have a space to be free, try, and not always succeed; a place to develop one's creativity.**

In Serbia, since the beginning, NGOs have been playing a contesting role. At the same time, to step out of artistic institutions you need to become an NGO. **Being independent is therefore considered as a protest against the State.** And nationalism in Serbia is coming back; it actually dominates the public sphere.

Further questioning

>Whether the space is public or not, aren't we all facing the risk of speaking in an empty space? > How can we avoid creating marginalised spaces and how can we liaise with the general public? How can cultural spaces be linked with their social historical contexts?

III Responsibility and Audience development

a) Case study:

By sharing his experience with the Centre for Digital Arts in Israel, Eyal Danon questions the political role of cultural operators and opens the debate on artists' responsibility towards their societies:

What is our political responsibility as curators of an independent space in Israel?

*The Centre for Digital Arts, located in Holon, south of Tel Aviv, is quite a unique experience in Israel: 10 years ago, the new mayor decided to change the image of the city and to invest in culture, for mainstream art as well as smaller initiatives. We actually found ourselves today with an inflation of museums in the city! We have a comfortable financial situation since we are financed by the city. **During 2002-2003, at the climax of the second Intifada we started asking ourselves: what is our responsibility as curators, artists? We gradually started to shift our programme towards politics.** We wanted to change Israel's traditional affiliation with the West and connect more to our region. We started to do a mapping of places similar to ours, and then think of possible collaborations. We had, for instance, a video exchange programme with 8 curators from Turkey.*

Cooperation with Palestinian organisations

*With "Artists without a Wall" we started a kind of think tank by meeting on an informal basis. We created connections with the Palestinian Association for Contemporary Arts (PACA) and launched our joint project: a 3 day conference in Kalandia (the famous checkpoint between Jerusalem and Ramallah), a tour of the wall and the road blocks. We also organised a residence for European artists in Ramallah and Jerusalem. In October we held a conference in Leipzig, Germany. What is important for us is to get to know our region since **because of politics and lack of interest we are completely isolated.***

"As artists and curators in Israel, we want to change this traditional affiliation to the West. It is important for us to know our region while in Israel, the general public considers it both irrelevant and uninteresting". Eyal Danon - Israel.

Is Art a threat to the State?

*Public opinion considers our projects irrelevant and uninteresting. With our project about unrecognised Bedouin villages - forty unrecognised villages with no infrastructures in the Negev desert - we went in contradiction with the official policy of our State. With our recent exhibition "Forbidden games" dealing with political computer games we tried to question the role of computer games for propaganda. Authorities nearly never try to interfere, we cannot complain about having full freedom, but **it raises a question: if you don't manage to provoke with your work, is your work important at all? Is Art a threat to the State?** Are we not being used? Where to stop not to serve the State? We are also much freer than Palestinians would be: How can we use this privilege? How far can we go?*

"How far can we go in opposing the Israeli state? As critical as you can be you are always playing the game". Eyal Danon - Israel

There is no public aggressive reaction because it is art

*There is no major public reaction to our work because it is art. In return we had a huge media coverage with the computer games exhibition because it was not art! **We are considered harmless because we are artists and our audience is limited.** I actually believe that we can create a change within the artistic world, other institutions are getting more interested. And this is our immediate responsibility. From there, and even if it is more complicated we could influence other fields in the long term.*

Further questioning

>How can we increase impact on media when dealing with independent cultural production? >How can we deal with censorship and/or complete freedom from the State?

b) Case study:

When telling about his experience in the setting up of the Sarajevo Jazz Fest, Edin Zubčević illustrates the difficulty of Audience development and the Kafkaian relationship with Public administration and International funders in Bosnia Herzegovina:

Audience development in the setting up of Sarajevo Jazz Fest

The question of audience and audience development is key to our work at the Sarajevo Jazz Fest. The first time we organised the festival everything was scheduled in the open air and it rained. Following this, year after year, our main objective became audience development.

We started without local funding, because looking for international funding is like entering Kafka's world. We had private sponsors, then we doubled our audience and we lost them. Their support used to depend on Audience development though! We now get international funding from the Goethe Institute, Pro Helvetia, private institutions.

Public administration and culture management

Funding in Bosnia entails politics, unavoidably. We now have 11 Ministries and public institutions for culture fully funded by the government. They often even lack programmes but we still have to rent a place from them when we are doing something. We sometimes pay them to let us work. State owned companies are managed by people nominated by politicians.

The "Backpack tactic" is the only efficient way to put pressure on them, by putting their names in the media until we obtain something.

The media world is similar, their main motto being: "let's get as much as we can". As for the theatre, tribes are fighting each other and on the whole there is a good deal of corruption. Actually, big budgets are allocated for culture, but we are facing a problem of distribution.

We need new institutions: advanced institutions for advanced knowledge. In Sarajevo, the administration spends its entire budget for venues not for programmes.

"In Bosnia, out of 11 Ministries of culture there is a lot of money, the problem is distribution. We need advanced institutions for advanced knowledge" Edin Zubčević - Bosnia

c) Ministries of culture with no budgets

In the Mediterranean world the ministries have, often, important means. In Egypt, or Morocco, you can find very similar situations to that of Bosnia. In Egypt the government, like the private sector would rather give money to a fashion show than to theatre. **In Morocco, they build venues, but do not provide them with autonomous budgets for running and programming costs.**

d) The question of audience – culture consumers in Palestine and private funding

In Palestine, the question to be asked is: who are our customers? There are so few culture consumers. The major issue to be faced is education. **Education is fundamental to raise the number of potential consumers of arts and culture.** That's why it is important to develop projects for people who do not get in contact with art, especially children and poor people. Another Palestinian specificity is that having no state, one cannot get public funding. In a way it gives a certain freedom, on the other hand, one doesn't have stability and depends on private (rich Palestinian Diaspora) and international funding.

Further questioning

>For many years, after the war in Kosovo the cooperation went through Serbia but Bosnia was always left aside. Why? > When International funding has left and there is no alternative, how can we keep on going? >Could we further explore similarities between the Bosnian and Palestinian situations?

IV Public versus private funding

a) Public institutions in the Arab world: the impossible dialogue

In Egypt you cannot communicate with Public institutions. The communication partner is just not there. Culture is still a sensitive issue: nearly everything was privatised except culture. **Television and radio stations are still state owned because the State wants to keep control.**

b) Private funding: no political stands

The main issue with **private funders is that they fear to be involved with anything that could look like politics.** They prefer to fund children programmes because politics are not involved. Since businessmen do not benefit from tax reductions, they obviously prefer to invest in sports where they get more visibility and fewer problems.

c) Developing lobbying campaigns to address the private sector

Khadija el Bennaoui has witnessed in South Africa the development of cultural lobbies to address the private sector. This could be an example to monitor and follow. It should be our duty to **raise the awareness of representatives of the commercial sector** who are not familiar with issues artists and cultural operators deal with, she says.

d) The Balkans' "Soros syndrome": sustainability of cultural projects

The Soros foundation has left the Balkans recently. Big funders often fund for three years and then move on. When the Soros moves on, there is nowhere else to go to...Nothing steps in place. **There is no self-sustainability at local level.**

In the meantime, after years of Soros funding in the region, NGOs are considered as rich organisations and they have lost their representation image of the society. For Biljana Tanurovska, there is an urgent need to build a new image of cultural NGOs and strengthen their local image.

Further questioning

>How can we invest in Sustainability for funders? > How can we measure the success of an initiative?

>The importance of contextualisation for funders > How can we strengthen the local image of existing NGOs?

V Regional cooperation

a) Examples of regional initiatives:

Al Mawred al Thaqafy/ Culture Resource

“At Al Mawred al Thaqafy” we try to cooperate regionally in the Arab world to support creativity and nurture a new generation of creators” Asmaa Yehia - Egypt

The main objective of Al Mawred is to support creativity in the region in order **to nurture a new generation of creators and assist the formation of a stable economic base for independent cultural work in the region**. Al Mawred also contributes in opening channels for collaboration among creators within the region and to stimulate dialogue among intellectuals. Al Mawred is an Arab organisation that funds Arab creators and cultural operators.

Balkan Express

Balkan Express started off with a few people from the region who started to analyse the common issues. They realised they did not know what had really happened in the other countries and started to rediscover the region: there is a big lack of good cultural policies, of knowledge and communication between the people of the region and a crucial issue of mobility. Tamara Bračić explains that after having been so connected with Yugoslavia, **it was actually time to rediscover each other again**. As an informal initiative, Balkan Express started by setting up an e-mail list to send around the news and then continued as a network developing regional exchange projects.

“Balkan Express is an informal initiative that tries to rediscover and create new communication between cultural operators and artists of the region” . Tamara Bračić - Slovenia

The Young Arab Theatre Fund (YATF) Meeting Points Project: networking and circulation of art work production in the Arab speaking region.

The YATF Meeting Points' international festival is based on collaboration with local partners in the Arab region and is designed to create mobility in the region. They aim to create connections and platforms for interaction amongst artists, cultural operators and programmers in the Euro-Med region. Khadija al Bennaoui underlines that it is a **concrete practice towards creating links among independent spaces and the establishment of a diffusion platform in the region**. YATF is also planning to develop local programmes for cities. YATF is also organising an informal meeting for programmers in the Arab region which gathered last year in Tangier 26 cultural spaces in the region to facilitate exchange.

b) Local networks

It is fundamental to implement networks locally and regionally -even on an informal basis: it can be exchanging information or sharing material. Before speaking regionally we need to know each other and this is not so obvious. Some organisations in the same country in the Arab world cannot even sit next to each other. Locally, clusters and clans often clash against each other.

c) We are no network societies

The idea of networks is often imposed from the outside. In Istanbul, visual artists, for instance created networks thanks to the EU funding. In that case, the network becomes an identity in itself and does not reflect the organisations' creative identity anymore. Turkey is not a network society.

d) Strategic platforms rather than networks

Ivana Ivković experienced a success story as a strategic platform and does not feel that there is a loss of identity in it. It goes back to the idea of centre and periphery: the programme Clubture working platform gathers 80 NGOs. When the Ministry of Culture decided to cancel the councils of

architecture and new medias, the platform organised a big public debate and proposed an amendment to the law to the Ministry which actually passed. It also allows to extend the organisations' official contacts.

e) Case study:

Yana Genova and Asmaa Yehia discuss their cooperation project between Next Page and Al Mawred around Teenagers literature in Eastern Europe and the Middle-East. They speak about their initial difficulties and what could be learnt from this experience:

Yana Genova: *Our cooperation was initially donor driven as our funders asked us to broaden our remit towards Arab literature. At Next Page, we quickly realised we were unprepared and started two researches around the UNDP statement that noted, famously, in 2003 that the entire Arab world translated fewer books in ten years than Spain in one year; we eventually found out it was untrue... Initially, we were quite cautious about working with the Arab world since the link was a bit artificial.*

Asmaa Yehia: *The context in which the cooperation was taking place was first thoroughly discussed: for instance we carefully discussed the age group. Literature for teenagers was going from 13 to 20 years old. We argued that in the Arab world 13 years old is still childhood. We also emphasized the importance and the role of poetry which has quite a peculiar status in the Arab world.*

Yana Genova: *We also realised that to set up a real cooperation, you need to go and meet the people personally, you can't work with e-mails. Finally, we found plenty of other points of interest. We also noted the importance not to rely only on the "gate keepers", i.e, the translators who translate "our" culture for the Western donors and explain what "we" want. We experienced this a lot in the Balkan too.*

Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes: *when you circulate in the Balkan the only link between the Arab world and the Balkan is religion and religious books: reciprocity is needed, and it is therefore important to convey Arab cultural images not just religious images in the Balkan region.*

Saša Asentic: *Understanding the local specificity and the context to which we belong is crucial. At the beginning of a partnership there is always the risk to have one part imposing something and it can easily become a matter of geopolitics instead of mutual cooperation, interest, trust, etc. I would rather look for means to understand specificities, to exchange the experience among the individuals and groups that practice concepts of rethinking the actual reality. I would suggest thinking towards the new cultural sphere rather than "winning territories".*

VI Questioning regional co-operation in zones of post or ongoing conflicts

a) Addressing the refused inner mobility: a conversation

What about inner mobility when the war is not forgotten? When the “memory” work did not take place yet?

Edin Zubčević: *In Bosnia, after the elections we have now the same atmosphere than at the beginning of the 90s. The only difference is that people are tired of fighting. In Sarajevo some artists are not interested to travel to Serbia, in particular those who are active politically. We have a famous music festival called Exit and one group performed for the anniversary of Srebrenica. They played a speech of Natasha Kandish which spoke about the situation: after that all went wrong. Some people in Serbia deny the Genocide and it is difficult for these artists, for instance to accept it. They would then refuse to perform in Serbia.*

Saša Asentic: *Some successful collaboration has occurred though (in the field of performing arts). It is the role of NGOs to push towards exchanges. For example, our partner Centre for Regionalism from Novi Sad is the only one who managed to bring the presidents of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro to give public statement related to 10th anniversary of Srebrenica and to sign the Declaration of cultural cooperation in the Dayton triangle. And it happened thanks to the NGO sector. NGOs in Serbia are quite powerful, this is just one example. But let's be careful too - international organisations will redraw from the region one day and then it will be up to us to deal with it all so in this process we have to include and cooperate with local / state structures.*

b) Collaborating during an ongoing conflict: a conversation

Mazen Quity and Eyal Danon have been collaborating for a cultural project around the Kalandia checkpoint during the second Intifada: in the heart of the conflict. Where does collaboration and/or the betrayal of ones' people start? How can we structure cultural cooperation in times of ongoing war?

Mazen: *Before cooperating with the Centre for Digital art, our board met to take a decision. It was 2005 and most of the Palestinian areas were occupied. Nobody could move from one city to another. In this atmosphere we had to decide if we wanted to collaborate with Israelis and bring civil Israelis in Ramallah. We had a four hours discussion and we took the decision to cooperate. We were 4 against 3. After this a problem remained: how could we get them there? Kalandia is a refugee camp where some extremist Palestinian branches live. We needed to convince them that they were “good Israelis” who were against occupation and that it was important to have them with us. Some Palestinians argued that even the leftists did not stay with the Palestinians for this second Intifada...It was a difficult bargain..*

Eyal: *We eventually had lunch in the refugee camp at the end, and the people from the camp even protected us against the Israeli army...*

Mazen: *Yes, and trust me, we were happy it happened without casualties. A few months before this project several Palestinian artists had been invited by the American cultural consul. 12 Palestinians agreed to participate to the exhibition. Two or three days later, Palestinian newspapers attacked these artists arguing that they were selling their work to America while their people were being killed with American weapons.*

Eyal: *Indeed, we witnessed a big difference, in 2005, with the setting-up of the Boycott Committee. The war is still going on. We are not speaking here about post war reconciliation. During the Oslo process we jumped too quickly to the reconciliation stage. It was too early. When our project*

started in May it was after the Palestinian elections and just before the election of the Kadima party. Speaking from an Israeli perspective, it all depended on individual artists. We did not face problems ourselves. We only needed to convince Israeli artists to take some risks and go to the Palestinian territories. For Israel it is illegal but we wouldn't go to jail for this. To us, mobility is so important: in general, artists would not cross this border. We live so close to each other but we live in different worlds. In our situation, you can't avoid having a political stand. You need to understand the political situation and then assess what you can do about it.

Mazen: *At the end, the Boycott Committee did not refuse our project. And we were not attacked within our society. After all, as an artist, if you're not the pioneer, who can be?*

VII Some common points to work on...

The **need for trans-regional cooperation** was felt strongly by all participants, even if some prior conditions were put forward: the importance of knowing the local context and not to impose some views on others; paying attention, in parallel or, beforehand to regional and local cooperation which are dramatically lacking in the two regions. This could actually be a priority before jumping to another stage.

We need something as an 'Ottoman Fund' proposes Yana not without irony, setting up **relationships that avoid the bilateral cooperation between the EU other European regions**. Still, some artists and cultural operators dislike crossing the nearest borders; they would rather go to Berlin or Stockholm to show their works. A lot has to be done to recreate bonds and curiosity between neighbours.

There is thus an urgent **need to address the young generation** in the region that is partially "brainwashed" and did not have the chance to travel or experience other contexts. Part of this awareness should be built around **internship programmes, training in cultural management and sharing of know-how**. This could be structured through regional networks, be they formal or informal, but also artists' residences abroad to give a chance to discover other scenes, practices and cultures.

Opinions have been divided on the question of networks. For some, it is a concept too often imposed from the outside and they prefer speaking about "strategic platforms" that address particular issues to tackle. **In this view, it would be more important to give priority to informal networks that can make a difference at local level**. Another fundamental point in order to trigger cultural interest and give visibility to existing cultural projects goes through cultural spaces that are dramatically lacking in both regions. In the Mediterranean, public spaces are restricted areas and the freedom to create can be hampered by this restriction. **It is fundamental for young creators to find spaces to perform, to practice and develop**. The cultural scene in the Balkans as in the Mediterranean needs to pay more attention to **audience development and visibility of their actions**: this also goes through education and dissemination plans.

Concerning the **sustainability of cultural projects**, the question is still quite difficult to solve: independent cultural actions, by definition, are not commercially driven, and the state does not invest or invest wrongly in culture in both regions. Thus, when international funders leave the region, nothing steps in to replace them. Cultural operators should make more attempts to convince and "educate" the private sector.

The **responsibility of artists and cultural operators** to raise awareness on changing and distressing political issues seemed to have created a consensus, the tools and ways to cooperate in post conflict and ongoing conflict situations could lead to rich exchanges of views and processes in the two regions. Finally, to set up a genuine and constructive collaboration, it is fundamental to jointly work on an artistic project: to meet on the stage, to meet concretely.

***"After all, if you are not a pioneer as an artist, who can be?" Mazen Qudus -
Palestine***