

NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF PROFESSIONALS WORKING IN CULTURAL SECTOR IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

mapping needs of selected professionals involved in
Creative Mentorship and Balkan Museum Network

Implemented under the project: The role of art and culture in
changing societies – Developing capacities for cultural leadership

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Project partners: Creative Mentorship, Belgrade, Serbia and Balkan
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Introduction: needs analyses within the seed cooperation project on cultural leadership

The mapping of educational needs of professionals working in culture sector in the Western Balkans reflected in this report has been implemented as one of the activities of the seed project "The role of art and culture in changing societies – Developing capacities for cultural leadership". The project has been implemented from autumn 2015 to summer 2016 as a cooperation, exchange and learning exercise between three organizations: Nätverkstan¹ from Sweden; Creative Mentorship² from Serbia and Balkan Museum Network³ from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The project aimed to connect the partners in exchanging experience, knowledge and successful practices in the field of professional development, leadership and mentorship in cultural sector. It included study visits, joint working sessions, focus groups, questionnaires and public debates which served to map the current practices of three organizations, as well as to understand needs of selected cultural professionals from the Western Balkans in order to develop capacities of all partners for future work in the field of professional development in culture. The project has been supported by the Swedish Institute through the program Creative Force exchange between Sweden and the Western Balkans.

The topic of capacities development for cultural leadership has been the starting point for explorations and discussion for several reasons. We, the three partner organizations, have dealt with or used the notion of leadership in culture in our previous work and had the need to rethink what this term meant for our own discourses and practices. Natverkstan has been implementing cultural management vocational program for more than a decade in Sweden and since 2014 has been the coordinator of Erasmus + project "European Cultural Leadership Project"(FIKA Project) aimed at creating future European diploma program on cultural leadership together with few other partners from UK, Sweden and Belgium. In this regard, our project was a good opportunity to offer another perspective, from the Western Balkans, to the process of conceptualizing education for leadership in culture. Furthermore,

1 <http://www.natverkstan.net/>

2 <http://www.creativementorship.org/home.php>

3 <http://bmuseums.net/>

Creative Mentorship has been implementing the professional development mentorship program for emerging professionals in cultural sector since 2012, naming them "emerging leaders in the field of culture" in order to underline their activism, impressive track record, innovations and experimentations in their area of work or efforts in addressing social issues through culture and arts. From this perspective, Creative Mentorship was interested in how the mentoring program can be supplemented with other educational activities in order to support its participants. Finally, Balkan Museum Network has been gathering museums and museum professionals from the Western Balkans since 2012, and has been offering educational programs as a part of its annual conference (where leadership has been one of the topics). Furthermore, from 2013-2015 BMN has implemented program "WILD – Women in Leadership Development", which was a mix of capacity building and mentoring activities to support female leaders in museum sector.

On top of the specific interests of project partners, the project aimed at addressing the issue of the lack of discussion on concrete educational and developmental needs of professionals working in the field of culture in the Western Balkans. It focused specially on the educational needs that can be fulfilled outside the formal academic education, since through informal education which is at the moment mainly limited to short term educational programs (one or few days seminars, trainings and workshops) and mainly related to particular area within the field of culture (theatre, heritage, visual arts, dance...).

We approached the questions about the role of culture and cultural leadership in today's society as closely connected to artistic experimentation, freedom of expression, as well as the use of culture as a medium for rethinking contemporary social and political issues. Through focus groups, public discussion and the questionnaire we used the opportunity to make leadership in culture a subject to common reflection and discussion. Perceptions, definitions and attitudes towards the term leadership in culture turned out to be diverse and often contradictory. They ranged from those voices that praise the social role of leadership in culture defining it as "leading culture itself - making work, productions and projects which show different ways of thinking, feeling and experiencing the world - bringing dynamism to the economy and wider society"; to voices which obstruct the use of term leadership within cultural field claiming that the concept is bringing neo-liberal business and capitalist

logic into culture and artistic fields.

Some voices still hold up to the ideas which reflect the ideals of authoritarian, charismatic leaders, while some underlined the idea of democratic form of leadership - participation in/through leadership - as suggested by Dalborg and Lofgren (2016), which is not restricted to a post or a person, but it denotes responsibilities, roles and tasks that are assumed and fulfilled by different workers at different times.⁴ Even though there was a clear critique to participatory leadership as a feel-good discourse that hides power relations, privileges of particular individuals or group dynamics, it has been appreciated that ideally, this leads to a profession or rather a professionalism characterized by participation, reflexivity and capability. Recognizing the importance of multiple perceptions and stand points on cultural leadership, this report does not restrict itself to a single, narrowly defined, concept of leadership. Instead, it deals with what is perceived as needed by cultural professionals in terms of capacities for more professional and strong cultural sector, irrespective of what these professionals assume that leadership is or should be.

The main aim of the report is to map the areas of capabilities (knowledge, skills and capacities) perceived as lacking or in need of further development by cultural professionals that are part of the Creative Mentorship community and Balkan Museum Network, with the main purpose to guide future development of educational programs of project partners. However, besides this internal purpose, we hope that this assessment will serve as an inspiration and starting point for all those organizations, networks and universities involved in development, capacity building and education of future and current professionals in the field of culture.

⁴ Dalborg K. and Lofgren M. (2016) "Cultural Leadership n 3D. Introduction" In: Perspectives on cultural leadership. Goteborg: Natverkstan.

Methodology: scope, sample, methods and framework for analyses

The scope of the needs assessment was closely connected to two professional groups in the field of culture operating in the Western Balkans: Creative Mentorship participants of 2014/2015 program and alumni of 2012/2013 program and Balkan Museum Network members – museum professionals attending annual conference in 2016. These two networks significantly differ in their geographic, professional and sectoral scope, but do share some important characteristics for this analysis. Characteristic for both the Creative Mentorship network of participants and BMN network is the voluntary aspect of education and professional training, in which the involvement in these two professional development programs is fully based on individual's own motivation, ambitions and applications. Therefore we could claim that these two groups consist of professionals who approach their profession proactively, invest in their continuous learning and use opportunities to meet and cooperate with other colleagues.

The key difference is that Creative Mentorship reflects the diversity of culture as a sector which brings together incomprehensibly diverse actors. The participants, especially mentees, come from organizations that differ widely in terms of size, financial resources, reputation and seniority. Some are working within the civil society, some are freelance artists, managers, curators, some employees of public sector institutions, and some run small businesses within creative industries. Furthermore, they cover variety of culture and arts professional areas – from performing arts, heritage, design, cultural management, research, cultural policies, visual arts, communications, etc. Finally, mentors in the program come not only from culture field, but from diverse industries within business sector, politics, diplomacy, science and sports. Both mentors and mentees voluntarily participate in sharing their knowledge, experience and ideas, as well as in learning from each other.

Balkan Museum Network on the other hand is a network of museum professionals and very diverse museums from the Balkans – from big national institutions, to local homeland museums or town museums; from general to thematic ones. All of them are characterized by being public institutions that deal with heritage, be it on local,

regional or national level. As BMN is a network with voluntary membership, those attending the annual conferences, thematic working groups and meetings are a group of museum professionals eager to develop, continually learn, network and establish regional contacts and cooperation.

The analysis of development needs of these two groups was done from January to May 2016, and included questions in two questionnaires and three focus groups. In January, as part of the evaluation questionnaire of Creative Mentorship program aimed at alumni and participants (100 people in total) respondents were asked to answer what kind of knowledge, skills, perspectives, contacts and resources are needed for development of professionals working in the field of culture. The same question was asked to participants of the Balkan Museum Network Annual Conference which took place in Shkodra, Albania in April 2016 (80 participants), as a part of the evaluation sheet aimed at gathering information for the future educational and training activities of the network. Apart from these two direct questions in written surveys, three focus groups with participants and alumni of Creative Mentorship and members of the Balkan Museum Network have been organized on 6th of February 2016 in Belgrade. The focus groups were lead around three key themes related to leadership in culture: perceptions and exercises of leadership; challenges faced in participating in leadership; and development needs and types of capacity building programs and activities that would be helpful in professional development of professionals in the field of culture. The following quote from the focus group about what it takes to be a professional and exercise leadership best represents the diversity and interrelations of different knowledge, skills and capacities expected and needed from an individual:

"I see different levels: leadership has to be connected with ideas, execution and external audience. In the level of ideas, you need to handle ideas and values and be involved in creativity and innovation process, because it has to be essence where the leadership is going on. You either are creating based on your own ideas, but mostly you build the blocks in other peoples ground through vision and mission. And then you go to operation level. And, as a leader, you have to work with project management issues, and with organization and you have to provide motivation for the members and to transfer the mission and vision to them. But I still think that's not official, and you have to play your social role also - to transfer these ideas to

the wider audience and community and be recognizable in community in relation to that idea." Đorđe Krivokapić, assistant professor at Faculty of Organizational Sciences, founder and CEO of Share Foundation.

This quote distinguishes between three key levels – ideas, creativity and innovation as a basis usually coming from one's core professional field or connections with other fields; then the level of execution which is managerial and operational, but also connected to teamwork; and finally how you get known by your ideas in wider society and particular context, through communications and relations with audiences and wider community. In order to reflect this diversity of expectations and professional development needs in this report, we adapted the framework developed by Natverkstan within "European Cultural Leadership Project" (Fika Project) when presenting the responses of Creative Mentorship and BMN network of participants. This framework recognizes three dimensions or spheres of activity needed for working in culture sector- operational, contextual and relational, - to which we have added two more - core professional and self-leadership area. These dimensions are interrelated and each of them requires certain capabilities, knowledge, skills and competences.

1. Core professional dimension - is the one traditionally associated to the core of one's professional as cultural worker and consists of capabilities related to one's own discipline and area of work in arts and culture, including new trends within one's disciplinary or artistic field, research, conceptualization, innovation within the field. This field is usually the basis of experimentation, innovation and advancement in one's own field.
2. The operational dimension relates to the tools needed to enable the cultural professional to work efficiently and professionally, which are more managerial ones: strategic planning, project management, resource planning, financial management, evaluation. This is not just about specific skills, but also about the knowledge and awareness of values and agendas behind specific managerial tools.
3. The relational dimension is about the relationships and communication within the team or organization (institution, NGO, company). It is about the human resources, team work, participation and delegation, communication, conflict and

stress management, etc.

4. Self-leadership dimension is the one that was not foreseen as a separate field but grew out of the responses of participants, in which many underlined the self-management, personal efficiency, time management, self direction and focus, confidence. These aspects point out to a greater trend of freelancing and interrelatedness of personal and professional development in which your profession becomes your call. Ultimately it is also connected to precariat and neoliberal market logic that requires adaptation, flexibility and hard work.

5. The contextual dimension requires an analysis of the context in which the project, activity or organization operates – political, economic, social, disciplinary... how this context influences the organization and how the organization or activity want to influence the context. What is needed in this area are one's capacity for research and understanding of cultural trends, political and social issues, policies, market analyses, etc.

These five dimensions, as well as relations among them and additional insights are presented in the third section of this report. The fourth section grew mainly from the focus group discussions in which it was indicative that majority of participants did not talk about specific skills and knowledge as key need, but about a specific spaces and methods of learning that are experiential, experimental, relational, multiperspective and interdisciplinary. These insights required separate reflection in the fourth section of this report, a reflection which triggers questions about the new ways of learning, being challenged and developing professionally.

Key findings: capabilities of culture professionals needed in contextual, operational and relational area of work

Core area: know how in one's artistic and disciplinary field

As opposed to managerial aspects of operations, the core professional aspects such as advancement within one's own area of work or discipline - collections management, curating, artistic production, research methods - has not been mentioned often. Only few respondents tackled only few aspects of what advancement in one's core profession would require. One of them is about creative processes and ways and methods of thinking and producing creatively as important to arts and culture. Furthermore, examples of good practices in one's core field are perceived as a way of following the latest trends. Finally, academic and research skills have been indicated as a way of practicing one's profession in more reflective and legitimate manner:

"I think academic and research skills need to be improved in society as a whole. We already have too many programs on the topic of managing in culture. In order to make work more legitimate, research skills are what I think we are lacking as young professionals since university-based education is not always enough." Irena Molnar, anthropologist and curator

The importance of research as basis of analytical and critical thinking has been underlined in focus groups as well referring to trouble with skills based education that does not deal with values, social role, context, innovation and content of one's core profession. This will be reflected upon in section four when discussing new ways of learning and capacity building.

What however remains puzzling is answer to why there have been so few and so marginal reflections on this core area despite the fact that most culture professionals think about their vocation not only as profession, but even as a call. One interpretation could be that new circumstances, entrance of culture on the market and broader change of position of cultural sector in society (less privileged and with less

symbolic capital then in time of creation of nations or strong welfare states) suggest the need to focus on the skills and knowledge lacking in order to be relevant and competitive. This perception of the need for some skills that are external to one's core profession comes irrespective of the attitude towards learning within one's profession. It could be said that on one hand this attitude can be taken by some because they take their learning and development in this area as something they do anyway on regular basis, or as something they could get through their already established networks and learning environments. On the other hand it can be as well taken by those who do not perceive that they do need advancement in their core area at all. Here, it could be interpreted that, as in socialist times and in the time of lifelong posts to certain job, some perceive that university degree (and everyday practice) is a good enough basis for acquiring capabilities in one's own profession. This puzzle is something worth researching and addressing in the future.

The lack of capacity development and experimentation in one's core field is what sustains the status quo of one profession and impedes new ideas and practices. Some of the discussants during focus groups put ideas and approach to one's core profession as a basis of professionalism and leadership. Here, "ideas that inspire and influence" has been understood as the key of creative work – specifically in discussing what leadership in art is, where there are no official leaders as managers of institutions or organizations. Instead, one becomes leader by innovation in his/her creative work and way of re-thinking one's own field that latter inspires and influences ideas and way of work of other artists.

Operational area: being a manager

Unlike the underrepresented and undervalued area of core professional capabilities, the managerial operational aspects of professionalism have been perceived as highly important and highly lacking when it comes to professional education in cultural sector. This involves different aspects of project management, operational and financial management and strategic planning. One of the important insights from the discussions and in particular the questionnaire with BMN members was the lack of management education of people in the key managerial positions within institutions. As one of anonymous respondents underlined:

"Heads of the museums are mainly professional staff in their primary curatorial discipline - historians, archaeologists, ethnologists - and not managers. Lack of professional training and formal education in museum management causes lack of knowledge and skills among the current museum managers."

This quote also stands for theatre directors, directors of cultural centres and other public institutions in the region. The lack of managerial education and skills is reflected in the responses to questionnaires, both in the frequency of responses and in their formulation. Most respondents referred to "managerial skills", "business skills" and "entrepreneurial skills" as to some sort of abstract and homogenous package of know-how. A more specified set of managerial knowledge and skills is reflected in responses of Creative Mentorship mentors from business sector which referred to the need of setting and measuring Key Performance Indicators, cross-functional collaboration and leadership skills as lacking in cultural sector from what they could observe through their mentees. Furthermore, two particular knowledge and skills segments have been specified and underlined by majority of respondents: fundraising and financial management as one; and project development and management as the other.

Financial management and fundraising has been the most underlined knowledge and skills segment in operational area. An interesting insight is a slight difference in the ways that respondents working in institutions and those working in civil or private sector formulated their responses regarding the finances. In the case of institutional actors, there was more focus on "financial support" that should not be earned or raised, but come from somewhere (usually the government or public authority). On the other hand, mainly civil and some private sector respondents underlined "fundraising skills" as important development needs that are currently lacking. This being said, only respondents from business sector mentioned "financial management" as a more complex set of knowledge and skills that encompass the whole cycle of financial planning, budgeting, fundraising, monitoring and reporting, instead of just collecting funds.

In responses, the relationship of project writing and project management stand in the similar position to the relationship of fundraising and broader financial management. Indicatively again, respondents from the cultural sector mentioned preparing

and writing project proposals and project development as needed skill, while mentor from the human resources sector mentioned project management as a whole set of skills from developing, writing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating. This relationship could indicate two specific insights. First one is that the familiarity with managerial and financial sphere is too low so that there is no particular awareness of the diversity and specificities of sets of skills and knowledge related to these matters. The other however is the impression that majority of respondents perceive the lack of funds as a main threat to their work, meaning that if money was there either through project funding or other fundraising activities, there would be ideas on how to spend it and knowledge to manage it.

If these insights could be interpreted as specific to cultural sector, and institutional actors in particular, the planning and strategic management skills have been put it in the relation with the society which does not foster or teach you to think strategically. As one of the participants underlined:

"How to dream, envisage or have a vision in realistic and sustainable way? No one is prompting you to think strategically. The system is not teaching you to think strategically. Change into what and in comparison to what? You cannot be dreaming by yourself." Vesna Danilović, program director, Belgrade Cultural Center.

As opposed to other operational skills and knowledge that have been perceived by respondents as value-neutral and context-neutral, the lack of strategic thinking and planning has been a way to pinpoint the short term thinking, insecurity, instability and improvisation as characteristic to societies in the Western Balkans. This indicates the economic, political and social transition from socialist to capitalist governance that creates the perceived and practiced lack of stability in which one can easily externalize and excuse the responsibility for long term planning, because: one cannot plan secured funding, or director will change with next elections, or there might be some external social issue that will threaten one's plan.

Relational area: relating, influencing, cooperating

The significance of socio-political context is particularly evident when talking about the relational area and the ways in which social capital and one's position in particular network influence professional possibilities. Even though one could claim that every idea or activity relates to something and someone, the narrowly defined relational area deals with ways of relating to one's team members, colleagues and organization, partners, donors, audiences, decision makers and other stakeholders. For this reason relational area in respondents of participants encompasses at least four diverse segments of knowledge, skills and competences: human resources; networking and collaboration; external communication; and stakeholders' relations.

In the first segment broadly defined as human resources management, participants pointed out to few specific aspects. One is about leading and managing teams, including recruiting staff and choosing people in the team, delegating tasks, motivating and inspiring team members, working in the team. Particularly interesting here is a way institutional actors formed their answers, many stating "good team", "chance to choose people for the team" and "changing the idea about recruiting staff" as their key need for practicing their profession better. This is yet another indicator of interrelatedness of context with other capacities areas. Here, the need for good team indicate that lot of recruited staff has not been chosen based on their professional skills and knowledge but based on social capital, and political or family contacts in particular:

"Public sector is facing a lot of political influence. Nobody is bothered by culture - not aware of the fact that it is the creation of the future heritage. Thus directors are recklessly appointed. The system of values should be changed and self-responsibility to refuse the post if you are not competent for it. Competences are disregarded."

This quote indicates that other competences than core professional and operational are regarded as an entry ticket to public sector institutions in culture. Relations, connections and contacts within certain political (party) networks have become more important than one's position within professional network. This idea of importance of connectedness within particular network will be further reflected when discuss-

ing why so many participants pinpointed to networking capacities and contacts as highly needed.

The other aspect of human resources knowledge and skills referred as needed are the interpersonal skills, communicating and acting within a team – listening skills, assertiveness, communicating in an assertive and argued fashion. Furthermore, negotiation, dispute resolution skills, problem and conflict solving strategies and skills have been underlined as important – showing that there is an awareness about different aspects of working within teams which are currently done in intuitive manner.

The second segment of relational capabilities concerns the broad area of external communication, promotion and advocacy – the capacities to present and communicate ideas externally. Skills such as public speech, pitching, presenting and effectively communicating ideas that are often not tangible or apparent have one of the highest frequency of appearing in responses to the questionnaire. Here, ICT and use of new technologies have been mentioned by just two respondents, while marketing, PR or communication via diverse media hasn't been mentioned. Communication skills however, give basis for cooperating and networking, as well as to relating to wider community.

Cooperation skills and networking are again among the top frequent responses. Here cooperation is understood by different respondents in different ways. Some put focus on intersectoral cooperation between institutions and NGOs; some on cooperation between culture and business or culture and other sectors; while some put geographic cooperation in focus, underlining the need for international contacts, partnerships and cooperation – and inclusion in particularly European networks, funds, projects and programs. Obvious is that many who referred to cooperation also stated the importance of contacts and focused networking and effective networking, that eventually can lead to support or cooperation. Some underlined the term "effective and focused networking" as the ability to make most of potential opportunities (*"when at mingles not to talk to their friends with whom they spend every day but go out there and meet new people"*). This skill is perceived not only as being able to approach new people, but being able to communicate your ideas and open the possibility for new cooperation:

"I think the capacity for networking is so important - being aware of the value of different people's perspectives, the ability to meet new people and knowing how to communicate your needs and ideas. I feel that this is not only valuable as a general skill, but particularly useful to those working in the cultural sector in Serbia, where there is often a tendency to perceive a lack of opportunity or be discouraged." Relja Dereta, freelance trainer in presentation skills.

In discussions some participants went as far as to relate one's position within the network as the key to one's leadership capacity, underlining that if relations with diverse stakeholders and key actors do not exist, there will be no opportunity to influence no matter how good one's idea is:

"When I was thinking how to explain this on a practical level, applying the social network analysis, the leader is known within the network that has important connections with other important nodes. He/she also has connections with smaller groups, people who he/she works with and so this amount and quality of connections are making someone leader." Đorđe Krivokapić, assistant professor at Faculty of Organizational Sciences, founder and CEO of Share Foundation.

It is interesting to observe that the reference to importance of one's network and active approach to networking came mainly from non institutional actors. In responses of institutional actors one could note a more passive attitude, with "support" being the key word for relating with government, one's own institution and local community. These signal that relational area is not as much about one's skills for communicating, advocating or networking, but about the willingness of someone else should simply have awareness of your intrinsic importance and award you with funding and support – exporting responsibility to the context itself. This externalization of public recognition towards government support is particularly contradictory with the expressed need for being more independent from political influence in recruiting the staff, choosing programs, etc.

This independence however can be established only with active approach towards building one's capacities in creating alliances with stakeholders other than political parties and showing relevance of one's work within professional networks and wider society. Here in particular the last, fourth segment of relational area plays role,

which is relation of cultural production and practices to society, and in particular insights into audience development, including the concepts such as cultural consumption, tastes and habits of diverse groups. These skills and knowledge serve as a basis for creating content that can relate to, communicate with and influence beyond one's own organization.

Self-leadership area:

"Self-leadership" area, named according to most common keyword in responses of the participants, points out to trend that puts importance on individual's discipline, confidence, efficacy, efficiency and attitudes. On one hand it reflects the long standing specificity of cultural sector where focus on individual talent, skills, ideas and creativity is the core of artistic and cultural production. On the other hand however, it indicates a growing trend of freelancing and managing one's own work in which focus, dedication, individual managerial skills and can-do attitude are the ones that eventually position some artists, producers, curators, designers or researcher well on the scene and market.

In this area four important segments stand out. First one is related to defining one's own strengths and weaknesses and identifying necessary skills and concrete areas of professional and personal development related to personal analyses. This segment is complemented by those answers reflecting on importance of understanding oneself, personal motives and challenges, and being able to motivate oneself and work on self-confidence. Second segment is about defining professional goals, prioritizing and focusing vs multitasking reflects the desire to define and choose your professional path clearly and be dedicated to it. On the other hand, it suggests the transformations in cultural and creative sector under the global capitalism and new technologies, in which one has to multitask and play on multiple arenas in order to earn for living, which make it necessary to multitask and adapt, and at the same time hard to choose narrow career path as was the case few decades ago. Third is personal effectiveness, including self-motivation, time management and self-organization. Through these three segments it is suggested that similar approach to planning and strategically thinking about organizations could and should be applied in order to create awareness and structure the activity of an individual.

The fourth segment relates more to what kind of attitude will take you far as a professional, painting an image of a superhero: positive, tolerant, hard working, open-minded, entrepreneurial, persistent, creative person who is self-confident, full of understanding and able to work with different types of people, to name some of the keywords mentioned here. Staying positive and finding solutions instead of moaning is one of important themes in this area, reflected in following quotes:

"It is important learning how to have "can do" attitude, positive attitude, not moaning about the situation, but finding ways to do something about it."

"Lot of work, instead of moaning."

"Learning how to stay optimistic and proactive."

Here, it is interesting to observe how the whole self-leadership discourse is both a solution and an escape route from the context in which cultural professional is marginalized. The insistence on personal persistence (Personal persistence is of the utmost importance) is the sole reminiscence to traditionally used "artist as a misunderstood genius" discourse. What is more present here is the "can-do and staying positive" discourse that should not be viewed as a grass-root solution of overcoming the difficulties of cultural production in particular context, but as a borrowed global neoliberal discourse that promotes the power of individual and suggests that working hard and staying positive lead to success. This discourse stretches to intimate and personal centeredness to oneself that some respondents suggested - relaxation practices, meditation experiences, breathing techniques, that again can be viewed in the context of global, new age focus on individual's responsibility over his/her own life and professional success, despite the context. The other side of this coin, hidden behind the supermen individualistic desired professional is the topic of precarious working conditions of cultural workers- particularly those freelance and independent, engaged in insecure, casualized or irregular labour.⁵

⁵ Gill, R. and Pratt, A. (2013) "Precarity and cultural work in the social factory? Immaterial labour, precariousness and cultural work", On Curating, Issue # 16/13 : The precarious labour in the field of art, http://www.e-flux.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Precarity_cultural.pdf (last accessed August 2016)

Contextual area: knowing the context, rethinking trends

In majority of responses contextual area has not been tackled, or has been tackled only in relation to complaints when talking about relational and operational matters, such as the importance of political and social capital unrelated to one's profession, or the lack of strategic thinking and the lack of managerial skills of people in leading positions. However, the responses gathered in this area give insights into the importance of contextual area as the basis for any meaningful activity and for core professional, operational and relational areas. The responses could be grouped in two key segments – one related to awareness of and communication with trends within cultural sector in one's own geographic area and in particular globally; while other is related to understanding, rethinking but also influencing the social, political and economic context locally and globally. The idea of geography is particularly visible here, and suggests the desire to be a part of global trends – both in following them and applying them locally, but also in sharing your work and influencing beyond one's local context.

The first segment, as mentioned, relates to awareness of working in cultural sector and what it means and takes. This means having awareness of what it means to be a professional in sector of culture, and in particular awareness of social and political aspects of being a cultural worker in one's own geographic context today. This awareness serves to be able to relate more general position of cultural worker to what one is doing or want to do specifically. Another aspect of awareness of cultural field is about knowing what is going on in the world in one's field, so that one could learn something from it or share one's knowledge with the rest of the world. Here, insights into the researches that provide overviews of the current situation and trends in culture, arts, education, cultural industries has been underlined as particularly important way of creating this awareness. Finally, there are aspects related to cultural policy topics and dilemmas, such democratization of culture, alternatives to public funding, alternatives to commercialization of cultural production, that create the bridge between cultural sector and wider public policy issues.

The other underlined segment of contextual area is about understanding the complexity of wider social, political and economic context. This means relating what one does to the rest of the world both geographically and intersectorally – know-

ing, communicating with and influencing within your own geographical space and sector but also other sectors and geographies. Importantly, respondents were not talking about the context just as being aware of it and accepting it as your reality, but also about understanding and knowing non-mainstream, critical discourses that challenge the current reality - alternative social and economic models, political theory, new social theories – that give the basis for imagining and striving towards "new social models as alternative to the imposed one". This aspect of contextual area was particularly present in focus group discussions when reflecting what is needed for leadership development and professionalism in cultural sector. Debates and mentoring sessions with professionals from other sectors, as well as reading the prominent research and having discussions with thinkers from the field of philosophy, sociology, anthropology, cybernetics, reflect the need for relating to the society and rethinking relevance and role of cultural sector in it.

Key findings: towards new ways of learning, reflecting and experimenting

"When we ask a question: Is it management that you need as a leader?, and actually stop there. That's something we inherited from business: 'Good leader is a good manager, and if you have management skills, eventually you will become a good leader.' But, that means becoming the part of the system. If we have an opportunity to create a new way of leading, what would be those skills that you need if you want to create the new system of new values?" Marko Radenković, CEO, Nova Iskra Design Incubator

This reference to alternative ways of leading and imagining capacities needed for new generation of professionals is closely related to the new ways of learning and creating spaces for capacity building that go beyond usual academic and vocational programs and seminars. The ideas given in this area by participants of focus groups create an inspiring mosaic of what education for more reflective, innovative and socially relevant cultural professionals would look like. Apart from more traditional ideas of study visits and exchange of practices among organizations in the region, four groups of ideas stand out here: theoretical knowledge and research based learning including analytical and critical thinking; interdisciplinarity and exchange

with other sectors and disciplines; mentoring and peer exchange as an interactive and interpersonal learning and support based system; and creation of space for experimenting, simulating and learning by doing.

The first group of ideas referred to value of knowledge and ideas as a basis for practical work. Here, building theoretical knowledge and testing it in organizations, has been seen as important, but also reading and research based learning, as a supplement to the new trend of skills based education and quick solutions. This research based learning means exploring other disciplines than yours, reaching out for the resources from different disciplines as a way of thinking about the world, taking time and reading piece of paper that is giving you a new understanding of something, reflecting on it and seeing how you can incorporate that perspective in your work. Others suggested a kind of knowledge database, toolboxes that are easy to communicate, having all the basic skills and knowledge as well as deeper understanding of the specific knowledge and skills. Then one could organize discussions, peer groups, mentorship around that database.

Second group of ideas included examples from other fields and other disciplines all together, and in particular program such as debates, not only for people from the cultural sector but philosophers, sociologists, natural scientists, etc. Here support of mentorship from one's own and other fields have been highlighted as a valuable interactive and interpersonal way of learning. Another relational way of support and learning that got most advocates is peer learning and exchange:

"As a young professional, this kind of support groups that enable space for dialogue, but also space to connect, and to share vision and ideas – a program for dialogue, reflection and joined experimentation is needed." Maša Avramović, assistant lecturer, Pedagogy Department, Faculty of Philosophy Belgrade and founder and manager at C31 – center for culture of children's participation

Some participants did not refer necessarily to a particular peer group, but to more flexible "platform for exchange of doubts", as well as to "destabilizing sessions" in which people in the group would challenge your ideas, and where asking questions is a common practice. These spaces for discussions, together with research based learning are seen as a basis for critical thinking and for being able to articulate, ex-

press, ask questions as a way towards innovation and relevance.

Finally, reflecting and discussing is not enough and aspect of doing and experimentation has been underlined as very important. Here, different proposals have been put: simulation of situations and learning by doing as a way to put professionals in the situations to act differently, try new model and shift ideas and experiences; creating the enabling space in which one can try out and see the effects of different methodological approaches; and creating spaces in which you can go through real situations with the possibility to shift the roles and see different perspective of problem solving. All these ideas indicate that there is a need for learning spaces, methods and interactions in which participants are educators at the same time.

Conclusions

Even though the main aim of the presented report was to map the areas of capabilities that cultural professionals around Creative Mentorship community and Balkan Museum Network perceive as needed for their professional development, the findings did suggest some interesting insights that can be further addressed by both educational programs and research. In conclusion we should be aware of how expressed needs in skills and knowledge relate to expressed needs for new and different methods and spaces for learning. In questionnaires, it was evident that most frequent educational needs relate to the needs for acquiring economic, political and social capital. The need for economic capital in terms of resources and funding needed for running the organizations and programs is represented in specific managerial skills, such as fundraising and project management and writing that were among the most frequent responses. Political capital was reflected in the primacy of contacts with political parties when it comes to employment and even project funding. Alternatively, political capital of cultural organizations and workers could be acquired by more financial independence coming from diversified sources of funding; or by working more closely with citizens and audiences; or by building capacities for advocacy. Here, social capital that fosters independence from direct political influence is also crucial, and is reflected in the need for better communication, cooperation and networking skills, both across cultural sector and beyond.

Advancement in operational, relational and self-leadership areas should be therefore viewed as interrelated, as well as related with core professional and contextual area. The fact that core professional and contextual areas were underrepresented in responses, could be a result of respondents perceiving that they are already well equipped in their primary field and do not need further thinking and exploring new trends, methods, relevance of their work. However, it can also indicate that the requirement for being more self-sustainable, competitive and efficient is putting on the stage managerial skills, and decreasing the awareness of the need for investing time and effort in artistic, curatorial, educational and other aspects of the work.

Besides this, another trend appears to be significant. Answers varied significantly

depending on whether the respondents were freelancers, civil society workers or employees of public institutions. Institutional actors were more prone to refer to the government or other public authorities when it comes to funding, employment policies both of employees and directors, symbolic position of importance, lack of strategic planning, implying that political and social context, rather than education, are crucial for a better role of their institution and profession. The other extreme from this position is the self-leadership discourse by those who work as freelancers or in civil society organizations, in which one's own responsibility to develop knowledge, positive attitudes, diverse skills and contacts is the key to practicing one's profession. Both extreme positions are misleading in that awareness of both individual agency and social structure needs to exist in order to be able to thrive for desired social position and make desired changes.

Even though questionnaires reflect the priority given to skills and knowledge external to their core profession and discipline – management and fundraising, networking and team-work, or communication - the focus groups give insight into the importance of core profession, context and in particular new ways of learning. Rethinking one's professional field, having space for experimentation and improving one's social capital and connection to peers is perceived as highly important. Unlike the closed knowledge, best practices and fixed solutions, the most important needs are related to critical questions, destabilization and exchange of doubts in conceptual terms, as well as to spaces for trying out, failing, experimenting. In all this, the ability to change perspectives, shift roles and gain insights from other professions and disciplines has been the overarching need. This all points out to the need for more flexible, opened, interpersonal, experimental and interdisciplinary models, methods and spaces for learning. All this could represent desired direction for new professional capacity building programs.

Many questions and insights remained answered only on a very basic level and more detailed research with more diverse and geographically spread sample would be necessary to understand the professional development needs in more details. Apart from development needs, few additional questions would be interesting to explore further: Why there have been so little focus on capacity building and advancement in one's core artistic area or discipline and what this can tell us about the changing expectations from cultural workers? What are the discourses for professional devel-

opment as represented by individuals working in civil society, as freelancers and in public institution respectively and what this can tell us about the difference in their working conditions and requirements; perception of their profession, agency and role in society; and educational and other needs of these groups? What discourse of self-leadership that is gaining traction can tell us about (self)empowerment and independence of cultural workers on the one, and precarious working conditions on the other side, as well as how education can meet their needs? What is the role of social capital of cultural workers in societies of Western Balkans (especially those related to political parties and nepotism), and its relation to professionalism, knowledge and skills needed for particular positions?

Apart from new research, this basic mapping showed the real need for experimenting with new ways of learning. For this reason, piloting new mentoring programs, peer-to-peer support, experience based reflections and learning, research-based learning and dialogues with other professions are some of the new steps forward as indicated by respondents. This being said, we hope that this assessment will serve as an inspiration and starting point for all those involved in development, capacity building and education of future and current professionals in the field of culture.

Appendixes

Creative Mentorship

Creative Mentorship is a unique mentorship program in Serbia that provides opportunities for personal and professional development of emerging leaders working in the field of culture, by applying mentorship as a tool for life-long learning and exchange of knowledge and experience between an established professional, the mentor, and upcoming professional, the mentee. Through Creative Mentorship, talented, dedicated and engaged young people active in the field of culture get to become connected with suitable mentors according to their needs and interests, and through a scope of activities, trainings and events they gain insights, contacts and information they would not acquire on their own.

More information: www.creativementorship.org

Balkan Museum Network

The Balkan Museums Network (BMN) exists to celebrate, preserve and share the complex common heritage of the Balkans and to create, through cooperation, a strong, collective voice for Balkan heritage and the museum profession. Main goals of BMN are: 1. To improve capacity and creativity for western Balkan museums in facilitating the inclusion of disabled children and adults in museums; 2. To contribute to strengthening the role of museums as democratic and creative meeting places, valued and trusted civic spaces; 3. To embed these gains in future planning and activity and support the empowerment of disabled people and their voices in the museums that they have begun to trust. The vision of the network is to promote widely museums as institutions of learning, discovery, inspiration, and agents of social change – owned and guarded by society, open to everybody and for the benefit of all.

More information: www.b museums.net

Nätverkstan

Nätverkstan is a Cultural and Civil Society organization based in Göteborg, Sweden that provides services and projects within the independent cultural and civil society field. The main focus of the organization is education and training; bookkeeping, subscription, and accounting services; Media lab with a workshop area for artists; and national and international projects. Nätverkstan has a long experience in organizing international exchange and has been a facilitator for several such projects in India, Georgia, Kenya, and Europe. Expertise areas are several: Art and entrepreneurship, Cultural Industries, the relationship between theory and practice, cultural project management, cultural economics, cultural policy, international exchange, and leadership within cultural organizations.

More information: www.natverkstan.net

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