CULTURAL CENTERS –
PARADIGMS OF THE PAST OR POTENTIAL FOR THE FUTURE

Introduction

The concept of culture is so broad that it covers almost all areas of human activity, including the creation of new ideas. Culture can be defined as the overall heritage of a certain group of people, comprised of patterns of thought, feelings and actions adopted by an individual from other members of a group, community or society.[1]

Cultural centres, as one of the focal points of the elementary diffusion of culture*, were established to cancel out the processes of alienation. In their beginnings, they acted as gathering places where people spent their time communicating and exchanging ideas or discussing how to improve life in their communities. This connection between cultural centres and local communities is still one of the key features of cultural centres.

The subject of cultural centres is in itself a complex matter because neither their names, contents nor activities can fall under a single definition. When attempting to define the focal points of elementary diffusion their chaotic terminology comes to the fore under various referents such as centre for culture, centre for culture and information, community centre, centre for social and cultural activities, house of culture, community house, house of cooperatives, youth centre, institute of culture, workers' university etc.

In addition, there is a certain ambiguity concerning the role of cultural centres – are they the relics from the previous system or the potential for the future? What is the primary function of cultural centres? Who is their intended audience? Do they conduct their work in accordance with professional standards? Who are their users?

These are the questions that this exhibition will attempt to answer by presenting a historical overview of cultural centres and by performing an analysis of selected cultural centres in Zagreb and other regions in order to contextualize the situation in Croatia within the region. This exhibition is the first phase of research which investigates the rich history of cultural centres, thus opening up a series of questions and dilemmas, and potential topics for further elaboration.

The Variety of Cultural Centres' Definitions

When it comes to defining cultural centres and their role we again find ourselves caught up in a similar terminological chaos. In some countries, cultural centres do not indicate the same type of an organization and its related activities, while in some countries they are known under different names. A single, comprehensive and generally accepted definition of a cultural centre does not exist. Stella Mihelj defines cultural centres as "institutions which undertake regular and event-based socio-cultural and art activities intended for different types

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[1] Bogdanov, N., Grlić, D., Iveković, M., Krstić, K., Podhorsky, R. and Vranjican, B., ed. (1967) *Opća enciklopedija,* Zagreb: Jugoslavenski leksikografski zavod,p. 693*the phrase "elementary diffusion of culture" is derived from the Enlightenment's project of cultural disemination, and thereby implies the cultural practice in a local community aimed towards self-determination in terms of differences, specificities i.e. the local cultural identity.

of audiences; their activities are flexible thereby reflecting the changing cultural needs and demands which they strive to fulfil through promoting local activities and establishing cooperation and exchange at the national and international levels."[2]On the other hand, at the Zagreb's Cultural Centres' web page we can read the following definition: "Cultural Centres are polyvalent cultural and educational institutions which elude all classification and standardization, given the wide scope of their programme activities, as well as the variety of their intended users and audiences. Nowadays, cultural centres are socio-cultural centres which are becoming the focal points of cultural events within the local community. Their function is not limited to the diffusion of culture or encouraging creativity. Their activities also have an influence on the life of the local community."[3]Generally speaking, every institution whose primary activity is culture can be called a cultural centre. Through the analysis of various definitions, we can come to a conclusion that the ideal-type cultural centre is an institution where diverse socio-cultural activities intended for diverse audiences are constantly being enacted. Enabling access and participation to all social groups which the centre seeks to attract is a key issue. The centre's activities should be developed according to the needs and demands of its immediate surrounding, with a focus on promoting local cultural activities and maintaining national and international cooperation.[4]

The particularity of cultural centres lies in the fact that unlike other cultural institutions which are defined by the means of their work such as libraries, theatres, music and visual arts, a cultural centre can incorporate all of these cultural activities and offer performances, concerts, exhibitions and other cultural events within its own venue. While traditional institutions continue to presuppose a passive visitor, a cultural centre enables its visitors to actively participate through the expression of their own creative capacities. It is clear that cultural centres put an emphasis on culture and education in all their domains of activity.

Cultural Centres in the Region

The development and history of cultural centres in the region is inextricably linked to the political and economic upheavals during the late 1980s and early 1990s, which had an immense influence on the cultural scenes of the ex-Yugoslav countries.

The cultural diversity of the countries in the region became noticeable after the collapse of Socialism and the initiation of the transformation process. It was when the cultural identities of these countries came into the focus of attention. Not only did the ex-Yugoslav countries have to revise their histories, but they also had to adopt a new value system and new ways of connecting and cooperating on the global and, especially, European, level.

Even though every country in the region faced its own difficulties during the process of cultural transformation, there were still many similarities which were particularly noticeable when it came to institutional changes and changes in the value system. Amongst the processes that affected both spheres, two stand out: the change in the relationship between the individual

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[2] Perišić, Lj., Hromatko, I., Leutar, V., (2011) *Istraživački projekt: Scena centara za kulturu Grada Zagreba,* Zagreb: Centar za kulturu Trešnjevka, p. 8

[3] *Centri za kulturu,*www.centrikulture.com/projekt (accessed on: 7 June, 2015)

[4] Malešević, S., (1997) *Culture in Central and Eastern Europe: Institutional and Value Changes* http://www.culturelink.org/review/s97/s97intro.html (accessed on: 20 August, 2015)

and the state and the conflicting relationship between globalizing tendencies and the preservation of indigenous cultures.[5]

Despite the hope for a better future, serious doubts have been raised. The question looming large before the newly formed countries was do they have – due to the transition process and the adoption of market economy – any chance for an authentic, independent development, or were they required to conform to Western models.[6] Thus, on the one hand, they have cautiously embraced the idea and practices of globalization; on the other hand, the societies have clung to their own cultural traditions, languages and customs for the fear of loss of their identity and all-inclusive 'Westernization'. At the institutional level, functional and successful organizational systems were often discarded on the grounds that they were emulating western models which would have surely undermined 'our cultural specificities'.[7]

The new model of market economy brought about fundamental social changes. Habitual relationships between individuals, groups and society, i.e. protected and privileged state artists typical for Socialism had become a thing of the past. The state budget for culture had been drastically reduced, while profitable cultural projects replaced those based solely on artistic merit.[8]

During the democratization process, the role and influence of the state in the cultural sector changed. The state reduced its funding of cultural institutions and the arts, so they became dependent on the laws of market economy and private initiatives. New forms of cultural investments (sponsors, foundations, sponsorships) were sought for, while parts of the cultural infrastructure were privatized and commercialized.[9]

Although the transition process was a lengthy one, time has shown that it has been successful in creating new values and new ways of regulating cultural activities. Generating a stronger interest in intercultural communication and international cooperation was of great significance, particularly noticeable in the spreading of cultural networks. The processes of deinstitutionalization facilitated the strengthening of these informal types of cooperation. In the countries where the old structures were destroyed and the new ones sluggishly developed, the establishment and development of cultural networks was of particular importance. Due to the networks' openness, flexibility and dynamics, the cooperation and partnership between

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[5]　Malešević, S., (1997) *Culture in Central and Eastern Europe: Institutional and Value Changes* http://www.culturelink.org/review/s97/s97intro.html (accessed on: 20 August, 2015)

[6]　Cvjetičanin, B., (1995) *Some Cultural Aspects of the Transformation in Central and Eastern Europe* http://www.culturelink.org/review/s95/s95cvjeticanin.html (accessed on: 20 August, 2015)

[7]　Malešević, S., (1997) *Culture in Central and Eastern Europe: Institutional and Value Changes* http://www.culturelink.org/review/s97/s97intro.html (accessed on: 20 August, 2015)

[8]　Ibidem

[9]　Cvjetičanin, B., (1995) *Some Cultural Aspects of the Transformation in Central and Eastern Europe* http://www.culturelink.org/review/s95/s95cvjeticanin.html (accessed on: 20 August, 2015)

individuals, groups and societies was encouraged, as well as the onset of dialogue between cultures.[10]

To demonstrate the desire for a complete and final break with the past, some institutions have changed their names, others implemented changes to their programmes and activities, while some simply closed down. Therefore, a large number of cultural institutions have taken up new, westernized and "ideologically neutral" names and, virtually overnight, came up with new programmes. [11] The old Marxist-Leninist centres, houses of culture and workers' universities vanished, soon to be replaced by institutes for European studies, institutes of applied social research, cultural centres, open universities, etc.[12] Most cultural workers were not interested in making thorough change but – by a public display of superficial name changes and new programmes – they wished to ensure the survival of their institutions within new social and political circumstances.

Among these institutions were cultural centres which were established in the 1970s all over Europe. However, there was always a noticeable difference between the Western and Eastern models of these centres. While Western cultural centres were market-oriented, non-governmental and independent in the development of their programmes, the Eastern ones were institutions whose objectives were not only educational, cultural and recreational, but also political. [13] Educational programmes of the centres spread ideology and politically socialized the adults. Due to their strong ties with government institutions, they were not independent or centralized, thus mirroring the ruling social organization and its structure. Since the end of the Cold War and the onset of political transformations in Central and Eastern Europe, the processes of transition left its mark on the cultural spheres, determining the fate of cultural centres. [14] Cultural centres in the region faced great difficulties in performing their activities, while they were particularly affected by the shortage of financial resources. However, there were some structural features (i.e. elements of market-oriented approach and the commercialization of cultural products and services) that facilitated their activities and the restructuring processes, as well as helped in creating an effective networking system.[15]

The strategic cultural objectives, instruments and assessments determined the structure and activities of cultural centres. The decentralization, market-orientated financing and autonomy in programme development were set as primary cultural objectives of most countries in the region. At the same time, the West turned to developing new models of cultural centres setting aside educational and library activities (which were the primary objectives of Western

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[10]   Ibidem

[11]   Malešević, S., (1995) *Changes in the Status and Functioning of Cultural Centres in Central and Eastern European Countries in Transition*
http://www.culturelink.org/review/s95/s95malesevic.html (accessed on: 21 August, 2015)

[12]   Ibidem

[13]   Malešević, S., (1995) *Changes in the Status and Functioning of Cultural Centres in Central and Eastern European Countries in Transition*
http://www.culturelink.org/review/s95/s95malesevic.html (accessed on: 21 August, 2015)

[14]   Ibidem

[15]   Ibidem

and Eastern centres in the 1970s) and focused on providing modern consulting and information services.[16]

By describing the role of cultural centres caught up in new cultural and political circumstances, we have brought attention to the overall complexities of the restructuring and transformation processes of cultural policies in the post-socialist countries in the region. In this regard, cultural centres can be considered indicative and representative of a general cultural climate in these countries.[17]

The History of Cultural centres in Croatia

Cultural centres in Croatia have more than one historical origin. There are two initial models which stand out – the tradition of Croatian people's universities starting with the early 20th century, and the French model of cultural centres devised by André Malraux, De Gaulle's Minister of Cultural Affairs.

All the way to the 20th century, only privileged individuals had access to education which helped to sustain the unbridgeable gap between the social classes. Things began slowly changing at the beginning of the past century when the educational system became more socially conscious and democratic. "The light of education (...) should shine its beam upon the lowest and widest social strata, the proud queen of science should bend down to the peasants' cottages and workers' dwellings,"[18] were the famous words of Dr. Albert Bazala, Croatian educator and philosopher.

Spreading literacy was not enough and did not satisfy the needs of the time. Despite the establishment of public libraries, issuing of magazines and holding public discussions and lectures, systematic or comprehensive universal education still did not exist. Therefore, the universities had to come to the people in order to spread knowledge to anyone who wished for it, thus satisfying the demands of that time. The lectures at the people's universities were intended for all people – regardless of their age, interests or social standing – who could not or did not have the right to attend academic lectures, and even for those who had already acquired an academic education. The objective of people's universities was to provide each individual with means to care for his own needs, to ensure his own well-being, to know and exercise his rights, to fulfil and expand his duties, that is, give him the opportunity to perfect his craft, develop his talents and thus achieve civil and political equality. [19]

The groundwork for people's universities was laid in 1844, when a Danish philosopher, poet and politician, N.F.S. Grundtvig organized courses which educated people on issues of life and democracy.[20] The title of the oldest people's university in the South-Slavic region is held

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[16]   Ibidem
[17]   Ibidem
[18]   Bazala, A., (2007), *Pučka sveučilišna predavanja (njihova uredba i svrha), preštampano iz „Hrvatske"*, Zagreb: Pučko otvoreno učilište, p. 3
[19]   Bazala, A., (2007), according to Condorcet, (1792), *Rapport et projet de decret sur l'organisation générale d'instruction publique*, p. 8

[20]   Žiljak, T., (2003) *Osnaživanje gradskog susjedstva i lokalne zajednice kulturnim razvojem, Mogućnosti gradskih kulturnih centara,* Zagreb: Pučko otvoreno učilište, p. 1107

by today's Public Open University in Zagreb modelled after its Prague and Vienna counterparts. It was founded in 1907 at the initiative of Dr. Bazala who was inspired by the motto of Czech politicians – Through education towards freedom! – and who was well aware that only a cultured and forward-looking nation can thrive in the modern age.[21] Just before the onset of World War I, the committee of the Public University organized lectures in Croatian provincial cities which attracted a great public interest. Soon after, following the example of Zagreb, similar institutions were founded in a number of Croatian cities, although, in the first half of the 20th century, they hardly resembled an educational system having but only rudimentary features of public education.[22] In 1964, the Union of People's Universities drew up an outline of programme activities dividing them into three main categories: primary activity (education), extended primary activity (vocational education, cultural and library activities) and additional secondary activity (schools, cultural institutions, cultural and art groups).[23] Therefore, in addition to educational programmes, they also implemented cultural, publishing and information activities. Culture was of special importance and workers were encouraged to participate in various cultural activities. Due to a large number of well-structured people's universities, numerous workers' universities, elementary schools for adults, night schools and colleges with many students and andragogues who were systematically trained, the educational system in Croatia was considered as one of the most developed ones, not only in Yugoslavia but in the whole of Europe. Therefore, the assentation that the adult education system in Croatia in 1960s was going through its "golden phase" is not exaggerated in any way.[24]

Malraux's model of spreading cultural contents in all parts of the city was based upon his belief that access to culture – as a public good – was a civil right. In 1966, Malraux presented his views before the French parliament, saying that: "Cultural centres should become cathedrals without religion, i.e. places of encounters – where people encounter what is best in them." [25] This democratization, that is, de-metropolization of culture known under the slogan "culture on a plate" was carried out through the process of making culture and its positive aspects more accessible to all citizens. The role and function of an animator as "a trainer in the cathedral of culture" was taken over from the French model. The animators of culture

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[21] Sirotković, H. (1987), *50 godina obrazovnog djelovanja Narodnog sveučilišta Grada Zagreba u: 80 godina Pučkog-narodnog sveučilišta Grada Zagreba*, Zagreb, pp. 8-10

[22] Matković, D., (2014), *Šezdeset godina Hrvatske zajednice pučkih otvorenih učilišta*, http://www.hzpou.hr/?gid=4&aid=20 (accessed on: 6 September, 2015)

[23] *Narodna i radnička sveučilišta u SR Hrvatskoj (1965 -1973) u:Vrednovanje odgojno-obrazovnih rezultata u narodnim i radničkim sveučilištima*, Zagreb: Andragoški centar Zagreb, 1975, pp. 39-48

[24] Matković, D., (2014), *Šezdeset godina Hrvatske zajednice pučkih otvorenih učilišta*, http://www.hzpou.hr/?gid=4&aid=20 (accessed on: 6 September, 2015)

[25] Petrović, T., ed. (1976) *Arhitektura – časopis za arhitekturu, urbanizam, dizajn i za primijenjenu umjetnost*, Zagreb: Savez arhitekata Hrvatske, p. 15

collaborated with local communities, while cultural centres assumed the function of cultural "incubators and promoters" in local communities.[26]

The first houses of culture were built after 1945. The houses of culture were intended to provide the counterbalance to the traditional gathering places, namely churches.[27]The issue of connecting and networking the houses of culture was resolved at the national level. Guided by the core values of humanism, solidarity, democracy and freedom, the elementary diffusion of culture was implemented at peoples' universities, libraries and reading rooms. In addition to promoting creativity via amateurism and as a recreational outlet, the emphasis was placed on education, bringing valuable works of culture and art closer to the wider public.

National enlightenment was regulated by the "Provisional Rules of Procedure of National Enlightenment" and "Guidelines for Organizing National Enlightenment", issued by the ZAVNOH's Department of National Education in late 1944. [28]In 1943, ZAVNOH's Initiative Committee issued a proclamation stating that it was necessary to rebuild "schools and houses of culture which the fascist barbarians burned down in their frustration." Furthermore, the guidelines – issued by the same Committee in May 1943 – state that "the easiest way to initiate cultural and educational progress of all social classes is by establishing houses of culture. A house of culture is a cultural institution where people will meet, where their lives will intersect, revolving around a well-conceived programme as its focal point, thus spreading education and culture throughout the town, municipality, district or county."[29]

From 1947 – when the first provisions on systematic adult education were issued –till the end of 1960s, the key objective of houses of culture, centres of cultural action and libraries was the democratization of culture realized through continued education and socio-cultural animation.

The 1970s were marked by the creation of cultural centres which became new cultural focal points. Cultural democracy was implemented through daily participation in cultural life, while local cultural centres were its primary facilitators. Their main objective was social integration at the local level.

In the so-called "Red Book", published in 1982, the cultural policy and direction of cultural development in Croatia were explained in the following way: "labour and leisure should be 'filled' with cultural content on a daily basis in order for culture to be inscribed into the way of life, to manifest itself in creative labour and life of every individual, so that every individual could become an intellectual in his work and life, remaining in the realm of necessity only as much as it is historically necessary, and in the realm of freedom as much as it is in his power and dependent on social powers of progress leading towards the liberation of labour, as well as life outside labour (if the division between labour and leisure can still be

[26]   Lazarin, B. (2014) *Neželjena ostavština iz socijalizma koja još traži svrhu* http://www.forum.tm/vijesti/nezeljena-ostavstina-iz-socijalizma-koja-jos-trazi-svrhu-2415 (accessed on: 5 July, 2015)

[27]   Petrović, T., ed. (1976) *Arhitektura – časopis za arhitekturu, urbanizam, dizajn i za primijenjenu umjetnost*, Zagreb: Savez arhitekata Hrvatske, p. 26

[28]   Rogić, I., Mutnjaković, A., (1984) *Centri kulture, domovi kulture i društveni domovi u SR Hrvatskoj,* Zagreb: Zavod za kulturu Hrvatske, p. 12

[29]   Ibidem, p. 13

sustained)."[30]The text further defines the programmatic focus and the role of cultural centres and houses of cultures as mediators of cultural policies: "Cultural centres are not conceived as some bureaucratic institutions which buy and sell culture and in which people who live off it 'produce' culture and make workers and citizens happy with enlightened cultural activities or by mediating culture or organizing events, and in turn profiting on the basis of these activities etc. A cultural centre would simply be a place for the professional development of cultural policies and for the planned implementation of cultural actions, and for the professional preparation of cultural plans and programmes, and a place for gathering of all professional and amateur workers, animators and enthusiasts who are active in the cultural field. It is necessary to create several types of centres, depending on economic development, class and social structures and other relevant circumstances which vary from one commune to another."[31]Along the same lines of the aforementioned postulates, present-day cultural centres also function under the obligation to develop citizens' self-awareness in their creative workshops with the help of various research methods, animation and education. The objective of cultural, art and social activities of cultural centres – intended for citizens of all ages and social groups – is the promotion of culture and artistic expression and the development of creativity and social responsibility of individuals and social groups.

The fall of socialist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe marked the final break with the model of self-management and organization of social life. Major changes took place; the old houses of culture and workers' universities were replaced with cultural centres and open universities. Rather than being guided by political imperatives, the new way of thinking focused on the needs of citizens. In their desire to achieve a complete break with the past system, a large number of cultural institutions took on new western names, free from ideological connotations. Their activities were focused on achieving cultural development and social goals.

In the early 1990s, all the activities of cultural centres came to a halt – the network established in the former system dissipated; the position of a cultural animator was terminated; the funding of programmes had stopped, and the centres were on the verge of being shut down. However, most of the centres managed to keep afloat, while a special mention has to be given to the thirteen cultural centres in Zagreb which managed to run overhead operations and maintain their institutional frameworks for over a decade.

The question of cultural centres' purposes and functions came to the fore in the last couple of years when first comprehensive surveys were conducted on the subject of their quality, efficiency and the scope of their cultural reach. When Croatia entered the European Union, every Croatian city was required to develop a cultural strategy thereby imposing the need for revaluation and repositioning of cultural centres in Croatia. Although EU policies promote local cultures, most of Croatian cultural centres still shy away from cooperating or applying for EU funds.

The new models of today's socio-cultural centres are significantly different from the traditional places of culture and cultural institutions. They are founded on the model of a civic

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[30]   Ibidem, p. 51
[31]   Rogić, I., Mutnjaković, A., (1984) *Centri kulture, domovi kulture i društveni domovi u SR Hrvatskoj,* Zagreb: Zavod za kulturu Hrvatske, p. 51

and public partnership; their programmes are developed by a number of different organizations and they are cooperatively managed. They are open for new interpretations and cultural processes, while their facilities and infrastructure can be easily adjusted to fit various purposes. [32] Their goal is to transform the abandoned and devastated buildings into new cultural centres, to establish international cooperation with similar institutions and associates, and enable the affirmation of independent contemporary art and cultural practices.

Typology of Cultural Centres

The terminological issues concerning the focal points of the elementary diffusion of culture were brought up in a research conducted in 1981/1982. The research included a number of terminological constructs such as: institute for culture, cultural centre (centre for culture), centre for culture and information, house of culture, community house, house of cooperatives, youth centre, workers' university, people's university, house of nations, social centre, centre for social and cultural activities, etc.

Rogić and Mutnjaković have examined in detail the terminological issues in the publication based on the aforementioned research, dividing the names of the institutions into seven categories[33]:

a) the names and designations which emphasize the general social character of the focal point: the house of nations, people's reading room, house of cooperatives, community house, house of culture – the emphasis in is put on global integration and connecting with the society as a whole

b) names which emphasize enlightenment: people's and workers' universities + people's reading room (reading – as the agenda of the Enlightenment) – created in the post-war period

c) the focal points of particular social classes or ethic groups: workers' house, craft centre, Illyrian house, houses of individual ethnic groups

d) the focal points of particular age groups: youth centre, retirement home, house of pioneers

e) the focal points of particular professional organizations or associations: firehouse, seamen's club, INA workers' house + all community houses of major labour organizations (in companies' ownership, but focused on local or urban communities)

f) the names which emphasize their specialization in cultural affairs: cultural centres (centres for culture), houses of culture, institutes for culture (The Castle of Culture) etc.

g) informational focal points: centre for culture and information, information centre

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[32]   *Sadržaji novih kulturno-društvenih centara*, (2014) http://www.kulturpunkt.hr/content/sadrzaji-novih-kulturno-drustvenih-centara?quicktabs_rss=2&quicktabs_izdvojeno_i_komentari (accessed on: 7 July, 2015)

[33]   Rogić, I., Mutnjaković, A., (1984) *Centri kulture, domovi kulture i društveni domovi u SR Hrvatskoj,* Zagreb: Zavod za kulturu Hrvatske, p. 3

Furthermore, Rogić and Mutnjaković divided the abovementioned institutions according to their level of centralization:
1. the municipal level – cultural centre (and its respective municipal house of culture)
2. the local community level – local community house and labour associations
3. the neighbourhood level – the neighbourhood's focal points of social life(cultural subsidiaries, elementary schools, clubs)
4. the urban attraction level – informal focal points or places of "cultural interventions"

According to the proposed scheme, the authors divided the current focal points into the following groups[34]:
a) in the category of "cultural centres" we include: workers' universities, peoples' universities, centres for culture and information, specialized cultural centres, workers' self-management clubs and the houses of culture at the municipal level which actually function as cultural centres
b) in the category of "community houses" we include: people's reading rooms, workers' houses, firehouses, houses of local communities, houses of workers' organizations, houses of nations, craft centres, elementary schools at the level of local community, etc.
c) in the category of "neighbourhoods' focal points of social life" we include all the focal points which emerge below the local community level; these are different subsidiaries of socio-political organizations, rural elementary schools (below the local community level), neighbourhood gathering places in urban areas, areas for social gatherings in residential buildings (where such exist), etc.
d) in the category of "cultural interventions" we include all the places-sources of urban attractions with high concentration of tertiary activities or other social activities which attract a large number of people – places of "cultural interventions" are public spaces where the centre performs its activities

We should also elaborate on the differentiation and chronological development of individual focal points of the elementary diffusion of culture. Although similar in more ways than one, the names of 'houses of cooperatives, 'people's universities', 'houses of culture' and 'centres for culture' each stand for different historical periods and institutional activities.
The first house of culture, i.e. community houses, was established after the War and was called *the house of cooperatives*. They were most frequently established in rural communities, while as one approached urban areas their numbers decreased. As the name itself suggests, houses of cooperatives were closely connected to the 'workers' cooperatives', with their primary function being the presentation of work, accomplishments and results of the cooperative. [35]Numerous internal constraints have led to their termination.

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[34] Rogić, I., Mutnjaković, A., (1984) *Centri kulture, domovi kulture i društveni domovi u SR Hrvatskoj,* Zagreb: Zavod za kulturu Hrvatske, p. 72
[35] Rogić, I., Mutnjaković, A., (1984) *Centri kulture, domovi kulture i društveni domovi u SR Hrvatskoj,* Zagreb: Zavod za kulturu Hrvatske, p. 13

Another focal point of the post-war elementary diffusion of culture was *the people's and workers' universities* whose main purpose was to raise the level of education among the working population in order to facilitate the development of self-management.[36]While some people's and workers' universities kept their original names, most of them were renamed into open universities.

When the universities became unsustainable, they were transformed into *the centres for culture* which were first financed though funds, and later on as a Self managed Community of Interest (SIZ), thereby begetting a new generation of focal points of elementary diffusion of culture in the 1970s.[37]

Houses of culture or community houses were established to serve the function of gathering places in order to facilitate social integration at the local level. Most of them were erected in the cities which had developed on the foundations of post-war industrialization.[38]The house of culture was considered a "temple of culture", demonstrating its relevance through its sheer size and monumentality. The house of culture thus becomes one of the most prominent places of creative cultural activities.

Since houses of culture often performed the functions of community houses in order to fill the general social demand for organizing community work, these two institutions were perceived as interchangeable. On the other hand, houses of culture and cultural centres significantly differed.

Contrary to cultural centres, houses of culture were almost never organized as independent labour organizations. The highest percentage of houses of culture was under the direct administration of local communities, while in smaller communities, spontaneous connections were established between the houses and local elementary school. On the other hand, cultural centres were primarily municipal cultural institutions. [39]

The activities of houses of culture and cultural centres differed not in their quantity but in quality. Cultural centres had higher quality programmes which came closer to meeting the occupational and professional standards due to the fact that they were independent organizations with a higher degree of centralization and a better financial standing.

The main activities undertaken by cultural centres ranged from film, music and theatre to library activities. In comparison, the houses of culture had to primarily fulfil the local socio-political needs, so they most frequently hosted dance parties, meetings of socio-political organizations (political assemblies, jubilees, celebrations). However, in addition to being engaged in the conservation of nature and monuments, they simultaneously maintained their theatre, film and library activities, as well as museum and gallery work.

The primary purpose of houses of culture was to function as community centres dominated by socio-political and cultural activities. Their main source of income came from subletting their facilities for local parties, dances, weddings, while the implementation of individual programmes accounted for a significantly smaller fraction of the revenue.

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[36]   Ibidem
[37]   Ibidem
[38]   Petrović, T., ed. (1976) *Arhitektura – časopis za arhitekturu, urbanizam, dizajn i za primijenjenu umjetnost*, Zagreb: Savez arhitekata Hrvatske, p. 12
[39]   Rogić, I., Mutnjaković, A., (1984) *Centri kulture, domovi kulture i društveni domovi u SR Hrvatskoj,* Zagreb: Zavod za kulturu Hrvatske, p. 39

At the local community level, houses of culture were often the only places for socialization and education which offered socio-political, educational, recreational, cultural and artistic activities. It was back in 1968 that Zlatko Kauzlarić – in his text on the enhancement and development of cultural activities – pointed to the sensitivity and importance of this institution for the diffusion of culture in smaller towns where other cultural and art institutions did not exist, thus leaving houses of cultures as sole-bearers of all cultural activities.[40]The problem occurring below the level of the local community – in smaller towns and villages – was that the houses of culture were very rare. Sometimes, the houses of cooperatives, village halls, firehouses or local community houses acted as centres of cultural activities.

Cultural policies often bypassed smaller towns, so the local community gathered around traditional social focal points such as churches, schools and taverns. The need to transform the schools in rural communities into "multi-functional educational, cultural and social focal points" had already been acknowledged in 1976.[41]We are faced today with a radical depopulation of villages and smaller towns – especially on the islands – where local schools are being transformed into regional ones or shut down due to the absence of children. The traditional focal points of culture and education in smaller communities are thus disappearing, crippling the possibility of further education.

Cultural Centres of Today

The issue in defining the precise roles and names of cultural centres created the current inability of determining the precise number of these institutions. Namely, in 1984 there were151 cultural centres listed in Croatia; Tihomir Žiljak's research paper, published in 2003, listed 111 cultural centres, houses of culture and public universities; the director of Trešnjevka Cultural Centre (CEKATE) Ljiljana Perišić – probably excluding public universities and community houses – mentioned 44 cultural centres in Branimira Lazarin's article published in 2014. Responding to our official inquiry about the exact number of cultural centres in Croatia, the Ministry of Culture and the Croatian Bureau of Statistics stated that they do not hold that information. The only existing relevant reference is the current list of 105 cultural centres and open universities in Croatia featured on the web page culturnet.hr.

Although commonly perceived as relics of the past, the cultural centres of today are beginning to take on more active and important roles as they evolve according to the needs of the community. Founded on the tradition of popularizing knowledge, making culture accessible and engaging citizens in various forms of cultural and artistic creativity, local cultural centres help to preserve diversity and strengthen ties with other communities.[42]

As of 2010, based on the example of Zagreb, we can track the efforts of developing a popular cultural scene with the established network of visitors and well-known programmes elevating cultural centres to the same playing field as other Zagreb's cultural scenes.

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[40]   Kauzlarić, Z., Gjanković, Z., (1968) *Unapređenje i razvoj kulturnih djelatnosti*, Zagreb: Radničko sveučilište "Moša Pijade", p. 42

[41]   Petrović, T., ed. (1976) *Arhitektura – časopis za arhitekturu, urbanizam, dizajn i za primijenjenu umjetnost*, Zagreb: Savez arhitekata Hrvatske, p. 12

[42]   Žiljak, T., (2003) *Osnaživanje gradskog susjedstva i lokalne zajednice kulturnim razvojem, Mogućnosti gradskih kulturnih centara,* Zagreb: Pučko otvoreno učilište, p. 1097

Since their establishment, houses of culture retained the same functional components[43]:

1. an auditorium and entrance hall – places for meetings, presentations and joint events
2. a library – as an independent institution or functioning within the house of culture
3. groups and workshops – facilities for creative activities with various cultural, art and social contents and developed in accordance with available local resources and interests
4. socio-political organizations – their activities and workspaces are often intertwined with the functions and activities of the house of culture
5. administration and services – the administration facilities, heating and other maintenance services
6. catering – reduced to bare minimum, corresponding to the needs of the house, with the ability to expand; in addition to catering, stores and craft shops can also emerge under the same functional capacity

The aforementioned functional components are typical features of almost all houses of culture. Varying in size and proportion, they intertwine with each other within the framework of the house of culture. Cultural and social activities organized by individual centres range from exhibitions, concerts, theatre plays, dance programmes, recreational programmes, panels and lectures, eco programmes, hobby programmes, film and new media, educational programmes and programmes for children.[44]

The programmes include educational, theatrical, art and musical activities, film and audio-visual culture, urban culture and youth culture programmes, environmental culture programmes, publishing of journals and magazines, with a special emphasis on cultural and artistic amateurism passed on from the former system. The concept of cultural self-management presupposed an active and creative individual who is self-aware of his cultural needs and knows how to fulfil them. Accordingly, cultural policies of that time were obligated to develop activities which would entice the individual to make an all-out effort, to evolve and thrive through the development of his creative abilities. Applying oneself and making a conscious choice to lead a different life unleashed the feelings of satisfaction and enhanced the ability to take control over one's free time, work and interpersonal relationships. For this reason, amateurism was not perceived as a hobby or a time spent in idleness, as it is so often regarded today. Cultural and art self-management signified the breaking down of class divisions and the abolition of elitism. In other words, cultural values of a modern man were made accessible to the working man. [45]

Cultural centres are not only perceived as places of education, art and culture, but they have also upheld the legacy of cultural centres as places of social exchange between people who

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[43]   Rogić, I., Mutnjaković, A., (1984) *Centri kulture, domovi kulture i društveni domovi u SR Hrvatskoj,* Zagreb: Zavod za kulturu Hrvatske, p. 87

[44]   Perišić, Lj., Hromatko, I., Leutar, V., (2011) *Istraživački projekt: Scena centara za kulturu Grada Zagreba,* Zagreb: Centar za kulturu Trešnjevka, p. 8

[45]   Petrović, T., ed. (1976) *Arhitektura – časopis za arhitekturu, urbanizam, dizajn i za primijenjenu umjetnost*, Zagreb: Savez arhitekata Hrvatske, p. 15

share similar interests and affinities. They provide services to the local audiences who possess the greatest potential to act on the local level, that is, within their community.

The main shortcoming of cultural centres and houses of culture is the deterioration and negligence of their standard type facilities. They are also chronically understaffed and lack organizational skills.40% of all houses of culture were built between 1946 and 1950.[46]Post-war constuction of the houses of cooperatives was often characterized as "an amateur, battle line construction, with or without a standardized building plan, but nonetheless, zealously and enthusiastically built, driven by the spirit of that time." [47]They did not make any demographic projections nor analyse visits to the existing cultural institutions in similar cities. There was no research on the economic prospects of the population, its social structure or the range of migrations. This resulted in the construction of monumental buildings unsustainable in the long haul which did not fit the needs of local communities.[48]This is the reason why most of the houses of culture are today in a poor structural condition, in a state of deterioration, neglected and shabby, especially those outside major cities.

The houses of culture and cultural centres built during the 1970s fared no better: "under qualified or even nonprofessional and unauthorized personnel were often involved in project development; the architects on the project rarely cooperated with other experts or institutions; the house of culture were often inconveniently located; many houses of culture remained unfinished, without inventory or necessary equipment and deteriorating due to inadequate financing and the allocation of insufficient funds; buildings were designed as 'static' objects, lacking the ability to adapt to new demands; materials used in the construction were outdated; multi-purpose rooms were not designed in any of the houses of culture; modern installations and equipment was also lacking, especially in the rural houses of culture. The facilities of the houses of culture were often – due to financial reasons – rented out to other institutions who were not in any way connected with cultural activities; in order to ensure their survival, many houses of culture were transformed into people's or workers' universities; houses of culture do not typically have adequate administrative and managerial staff; they lack the propensity to expand or enhance the scope of their activities."[49]

The financial situation dictates the work of many houses of culture, disregarding the requirements of the programmatic and organizational guidelines of cultural affairs. The situation is somewhat better in the more urbanised districts of Zagreb because the houses of culture were repaired on a regular basis. However, even the centres in Zagreb are in a precarious financial situation, with insufficient resources for maintenance of their buildings' infrastructures.

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[46] Rogić, I., Mutnjaković, A., (1984) *Centri kulture, domovi kulture i društveni domovi u SR Hrvatskoj,* Zagreb: Zavod za kulturu Hrvatske, p. 26

[47] Petrović, T., ed. (1976) *Arhitektura – časopis za arhitekturu, urbanizam, dizajn i za primijenjenu umjetnost*, Zagreb: Savez arhitekata Hrvatske, p. 42

[48] Petrović, T., ed. (1976.)*Arhitektura – časopis za arhitekturu, urbanizam, dizajn i za primijenjenu umjetnost*, Zagreb: Savez arhitekata Hrvatske, p. 22

[49] Petrović, T., ed. (1976) *Arhitektura – časopis za arhitekturu, urbanizam, dizajn i za primijenjenu umjetnost*, Zagreb: Savez arhitekata Hrvatske, p. 52

Most cultural centres do not have enough qualified personnel to develop a high-quality, diverse and rich programme which would be able to compete within the wider cultural scene or impose itself as a relevant focal point within the cultural system. This issue – the lack of qualified staff – has been raised and remained unresolved since the very beginnings of the houses of culture and cultural centres. The job of the professionals working in the centres is to recognize the cultural needs of the citizens living in particular social environments and organize their free time. They should also simultaneously work on popularizing and organizing cultural activities which would attract new audiences.[50] Nonetheless, some of the strongest criticism is directed at the managerial staff of cultural centres who consider their jobs well-paid and secure regardless of how much work or effort they put in. This kind of approach causes an unproductive and ineffective use of human, spatial and financial resources.[51]

In addition, local centres do not have the capacities to develop a national network. The only kind of network that has been established is the city network of Zagreb's cultural centres which still has not been completed since not all centres are included in the network. While the cultural centres in Zagreb are city-owned and funded, cultural centres in other areas are left to fend for themselves. They lack systemic support, while – due to the poor financial state of local communities – some houses of culture are destined to shut down.

When first established, cultural centres were primarily orientated towards the working population, while today, this socio-economic group is the one who most seldomly visits cultural centres. The research conducted in 2011 at the cultural centres in Zagreb showed that the most regular visitors fall into two groups: the youngest age group in the survey (form 15 to 19 years of age) and the oldest one (senior citizens), while the working population (from 20 to 39 years of age) was the least represented group.[52] The lack of time, money and interest are often cited as possible reasons for the notable absence of these visitors.

However, the non-attendance of the working population might also be explained by the fact that there is no comprehensive cultural and art education programme being implemented at elementary schools or high-school which would – from an early age onwards – develop an interest, the need and habit to participate in cultural and art events.

As one possible solution, Tihomir Žiljak put forward the idea of conducting a programme evaluation which could potentially solve the efficiency and quality issues of the cultural centres' programmes. Žiljak notes that the properly conducted evaluation would eliminate programmes which do not achieve their intended objectives and improve the implementation of the remaining programmes. In his opinion, this would also improve the overall decision-making capacity and management of cultural institutions, leading to more astute decisions regarding current and future programmes. The evaluation should be carried out transparently

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[50]   Kauzlarić, Z., Gjanković, Z., (1968) *Unapređenje i razvoj kulturnih djelatnosti*, Zagreb: Radničko sveučilište "Moša Pijade", p. 42

[51]   Žiljak, T., Dragojević, S. ed. (2008) *Organizacijski razvoj i strateško planiranje u kulturi: Grad Zagreb*, Zagreb: Pučko otvoreno učilište Zagreb, p. 202

[52]   Perišić, Lj., Hromatko, I., Leutar, V., (2011) *Istraživački projekt: Scena centara za kulturu Grada Zagreba,* Zagreb: Centar za kulturu Trešnjevka, p.47

and comprehensively and based on the information extracted from the centres' reports, interviews, personal insights, users' opinions and the media.[53]

Cultural centres could play a crucial role in the development of local communities if the aforementioned issues are resolved.

A local community is a microcosms where spiritual partnerships are developed and intellectual support is provided amongst its inhabitants. Cultural centres uphold the tradition of citizens' gatherings and encourage their participation in various creative activities, thereby developing civic dialogue, putting aside age, ethnic and cultural differences and shaping the cultural identity of a local community. The citizens create a basis for joint action by discussing the issues concerning their neighbourhoods, their city, economic circumstances and interpersonal relationships. [54]The strengthening of local communities and the cultural centres' receptiveness to citizens' initiatives would ensure a better economic development and a higher quality of life.

The CEKATE director Ljiljana Perišić emphasized the possibility of connecting Croatian programmes with the EU Charter of the United Cities and Local Governments called the 'Agenda 21 for culture' which promotes culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development.[55]If Zagreb becomes involved in the Agenda 21, the citizens will be able to independently apply for EU funds at their city district councils. However, the question remains – what will happen with the cultural centres outside the capital?

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Sonja Švec Španjol
Andrea Vujnović

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[53]   Žiljak, T., (2003) *Osnaživanje gradskog susjedstva i lokalne zajednice kulturnim razvojem, Mogućnosti gradskih kulturnih centara,* Zagreb: Pučko otvoreno učilište, p.1113

[54]   Žiljak, T., (2003) *Osnaživanje gradskog susjedstva i lokalne zajednice kulturnim razvojem, Mogućnosti gradskih kulturnih centara,* Zagreb: Pučko otvoreno učilište, p.1115

[55]   Lazarin, B., (2014) *CEKATE animator kulture koji je odgojio generacije 'Teslaša' i 'Končarevaca' i još uspješno preživio devedesete*
http://www.forum.tm/vijesti/cekate-animator-kulture-koji-je-odgojio-generacije-teslasa-i-koncarevaca-i-jos-uspjesno (accessed on: 5 July, 2015)