

Biggest international project so far

By

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After celebrating its twentieth anniversary, the Multimedia Center Kibla, initiator and provider of publically accessible technologies, the internet, and contemporary art forms, continues with new stories.

Aleksandra Kostić: “In Slovenia, the Open Society Institute founded three organizations: Kibla, Pina and Ljudmila. All of us are still out there, and Kibla is by far the largest out of the three. “

In its jubilee year, as it celebrates twenty years of existence, the Multimedia Center Kibla successfully applied for the biggest, four-year international project so far – Risk Change, which is financially supported by the EU program Creative Europe. Out of 112 complete applications submitted, fifteen were selected; most of the applicants were opera houses, theaters, and symphony orchestras. Kibla is one of the few non-governmental coordinating institutions, and, apart from Greece, the only one coming from the Eastern part of Europe. As explained by Aleksandra Kostić, president of the Association for Culture and Education Kibla, and the cultural and artistic manager of the organization, on the 1st of June 2016 the new coordination project Risk Change 2016–2020 was launched, connecting ten partners from the field of contemporary art (including parties from Rijeka, Novi Sad, Marseille, Amsterdam, Leicester, Riga, Athens, and Malta), 25 European associated partners, six extra-continental partners, and seven of the largest events in this field: Transmediale (Berlin), Ars Electronica (Linz), Kinetica (London), Manifesta (travelling; 2016 Zurich, 2018 Palermo), the Venice Biennial, the Venice Biennial of Architecture, and Documenta (Kassel).

“The first partners’ meeting is scheduled for 6th July in Maribor. Each of the partners must conduct 60 interviews with persons who are, in some way, considered as migrants, the term including asylum seekers, but also members of existing multicultural communities, such as Bosnians, Russians, and other groups living in Maribor, which is becoming a genuine multicultural community.

One of the outputs of the project is a mobile application, which, however, will not only be intended for migrants, but will also serve as a sort of a platform-based contact point for the transnational partnership, the artists, experts and expert groups, curators, innovative researchers, and, last but not least, all of us guerrilla-type workers from the creative sector, who are in need of a common starting post. In the field of intermedia arts, there is currently no such thing in Europe. And this is one of the reasons why Risk Change was awarded extra points for innovation: a consideration of the possibilities that could be brought into the sphere of migrations through the vessel of contemporary art, is bold at least inasmuch as it will be able to motivate a broad range of international stakeholders in this field, as well as

public and other media, to accept the process of migrations as a natural, life-like, and unrestricted occurrence.

Issues of migration anticipated even before the wave of refugees

What is the central theme of the Risk Change project? "Art is always visionary, if not revolutionary; in the age of ICT it acts as a trigger of issues related to the impact of modern technologies on the development of society and on people in general. It is interesting that the theme of migrations was anticipated, and considered even before the first major tide of refugees. Tomo Križnar has been predicting for a decade that the boomerang will return from Africa to Europe. The project originally conceived in the period 2013–2014 was upgraded, and this year our application was successful. What is important is the zeitgeist; we communicate a lot with all our international partners. And it is just as important to regularly visit festivals of contemporary art across Europe. Europe is a story of mobility," says Kostić, "when the wave of migrations hit Europe, people almost forgot it was really one of the principles that Europe was founded on. How many people living here are third generation natives? Really very few, if we were to study our roots... Everything has always been moving. It is not Kibla's job to be dealing with leftist ideas, or day-to-day politics, but simply with creating a multicultural community, which we wish to integrate on a non-linguistic level."

Borut Pahor accepted the honorary patronage of the international project Risk Change 2016–2020, and will speak at the opening ceremony of the exhibition at Kibla Portal on the 7th October this year.

Everybody envies us, but...

What does this project mean for Kibla? "Three million euros is the estimated value of the entire project, from which fifty percent is the EU endowment, and the other half has to be provided on our own, via the proper national ministries of culture, employment offices, municipalities, and own funding (incomes). So, when you cut the number in two, you have 1.5 million left, for ten partners over four years. This means 125 thousand euros for Kibla on a yearly basis. Everybody envies us this success on the international scene, but it's really not that much money," says Kostić, and stresses that Kibla has to take care of all the employees and their salaries on its own. The labor cost is the highest. The funds for salaries are not provided by the state or municipality, like with public institutes, which permit full-time, permanent employments. She goes on to provide a telling comparison: "The Maribor Art Gallery (UGM) has at least fifteen full-time employees, and, considering the average gross salary is around 1.500 euros, this means 20.000 gross per year per person, which means further, that they are granted 300.000 each year just for salaries. The cultural center Narodni Dom has 38 full-time employees, all paid directly by the Municipality of Maribor, adding up to a minimum of 760 thousand euros gross per year just to cover the salaries, plus all the infrastructure costs, etc. plus program. This demonstrates how minuscule we are, even if we are among the biggest NGOs in Slovenia. Compared to a public institute, we are tiny. Kibla has nine full-time employees, plus eight independent self-employed in the cultural sector, for which the Ministry of Culture pays social security contributions, which

adds up to approximately 250 thousand euros per year. All this means that the new project Risk Change will not be enough, if we plan on keeping our other venue, Kibla Portal, and maintain an ambitious program, travel, etc. This tender was only the beginning of our story of survival. These value relations are important, because it needs to be clear that we don't have a magic wand for international tenders, and that the resentment some people feel, is out of place. Because it's actually very little money, and our public institutes are still kings compared to NGOs. Thank god we have the self-employed in culture status." Kibla really does get you your money's worth.

Blocked by Ljubljana

"In September, large-scale tenders will be released by the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology and the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy (SVRK), and it is there that we would like to participate, as creative industries and smart specialization, in connection to several other organizations. The prototype of such an organization is the Delavski dom Trbovlje (DDT Cultural Center) with its spectacular program. They are connected to the educational and the economic sector, and they are a new media town, with a festival much like our own KIBLIX-MFRU; Pina Koper is another educational institution that exists since 1996, and is part of Soros' legacy. The Open Society Institute Slovenia founded Kibla, Pina, and Ljudmila. All three of us are still here, and Kibla is by far the largest. We wish to connect the key points of this common trail, of this platform for the development of creative industries and smart specialization. This new story could even be covered by its own non-profit management approach, which means that any profit or extra funding you generate, is transformed into a new job opening. We would also like to work with KSEVT (the Cultural Centre of European Space Technologies) from Vitanje. What a magnificent residency center they could have there, the infrastructure is fantastic. We are trying to approach this idea via the state: the Ministry of Culture, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, is preparing the Black-box project, i. e. a network of centers connecting art and science, which was in fact agreed upon by the ministries, and is part of the National Vocational Qualifications 2014–2017. It lists four such centers, Maribor, Ljubljana, Koper, and Vitanje, and later DDT Trbovlje. It is indeed the way that better meets the criteria of cohesion, which requires a ratio of around 63 percent for Eastern cohesion, and 37 for Western – which is the basic principle of the EU cohesion policy in Slovenia, although avid centralists in Ljubljana would like to work their way around it using various maneuvers. Ljubljana is blocking us, because it wants all the money to itself. It's a struggle. When the SVRK representative came to Trbovlje, he was surprised to see everything that was going on there, because he'd never heard of them before. Regional development and cohesion are not (only) about Ljubljana, these programs are in fact intended specifically for us. It is precisely regional development that Europe supports most strongly, because capitals are already where most of the money is centered."

The first European and international project in Kibla, Mediaterra, goes back to 2001, when they joined to work alongside partners from Athens. In fifteen years of work, they have executed fifteen projects in the framework of EU programs, in the field of culture alone. Not always as coordinators, but often as partners as well. It was the lifeline after Soros stopped investing in 2000. The tenders grew in complexity, and one had to be skilled

appropriately to win them, but especially it is always about finding the right partners. The combination of NGOs and government-funded bodies is important, preferably coming from both the eastern, and the western part of Europe.

How it all began

Kibla's story begins in the nineties – the golden years in Maribor for underground, the established arts, new media, and culture. Some of the organizations that appeared in those years were Narodni dom Maribor (1992), Pekarna (1995), Tomaž Pandur at the Slovene National Theater (1990–1996), Kibla (1996), ... "Kibla is part of a segment of fresh city stories, which enabled the implementation of publicly accessible technologies and the internet, parallel to the first Slovenian new media festival, the International Festival of Computer Arts (MFRU, 1995). Back then we believed that Slovenia was well off in terms of culture and technological development, and that everything was possible. We still do. Kibla set up one of the first Linux servers in Slovenia, at a time, when we searched for information using the AltaVista (1995–2003), before Google even existed (it was first released for public use in 2004)."

From 1996 onwards a focus has gradually been shaping with programs and festivals covering the multimedia, intermedia, interdisciplinary, visual, fine arts, musical, and AV scene, as well as performance, literature, IT Linux, social sciences and humanities; a broad range of contemporary art forms that intertwine: Cyber Kibla, KiBela Gallery, Days of Curiosity educational festival, IT Linux festival Kiblix, the literary Festival of Love, Maribor Electronic Destination (MED); as well as numerous projects since 2001, among them Mediaterra, Patent, Em ma, Robots and Avatars, Soft Control, Hallerstein, with hundreds of artists from the local, national, European, and global creative scene. A turning point was Kibla's winning proposal for the European Capital of Culture project (2006–2008), which later covered half of the allegedly underdeveloped Slovenia.

(translation Helena Fošnjar)

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A new urban venue – Portal

"During the European Capital of Culture in 2012, we established a new urban venue, Kibla Portal, a post-industrial space measuring over 2.000 sq. meters, where Kibla's largest interdisciplinary festival Kiblix, and others, continue to take place, as well as international exhibitions, conferences, and workshops. Of course, we also have a vision for the future. Kibla Portal, for example, is going to become over the following decade, a transdisciplinary artistic and research center for the promotion, development, production, and dissemination of intermedia arts with the aim of building new audiences, integrating young, unacclaimed creatives from virtually any field, and including the interested parties from university departments in related fields. Through this, Maribor (and indeed, Slovenia, as well as Europe – why limit ourselves) can gain a contemporary interdisciplinary creative and educational center, which will involve three areas of what could be called an intermedia approach to functioning: art, science, and technology in relation to idealization, research, and production, and aimed at previously identified target groups, from elementary schools to universities of the third age. It is therefore about covering this entire trail of activities, if we wish to become an equal partner to the Methuselchs from Ljubljana" concludes Aleksandra Kostić.