

KOOPERATIVA —  
REGIONAL PLATFORM FOR CULTURE

# FORUM — 10 YEARS OF KOOPERATIVA

From resilience towards sustainability:  
building cultural ecosystems through  
regional cooperation

KOOPERATIVA

14 — 16 12 2022



KOOPERATIVA —  
REGIONAL PLATFORM FOR CULTURE

**FROM RESILIENCE TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY:  
BUILDING CULTURAL ECOSYSTEMS  
THROUGH REGIONAL COOPERATION**

**FORUM — 10 YEARS OF KOOPERATIVA**

14 — 16 / 12 / 2022

The Forum marking Kooperativa's tenth anniversary was held on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> December 2022, at the Europe House in Zagreb. Artists, cultural workers, as well as policy and decision-makers from various fields gathered at the Forum to reflect on the past, present and future of cultural cooperation in Southeast Europe (SEE) (and beyond). Through lectures, panel discussions, groups work and plenary sessions, the Forum discussed topics such as institutional frameworks for regional cultural cooperation; building cooperation from the bottom-up; possibilities of international support for regional cooperation, while the following key problems were identified:

- 1 — Actors on the independent scene are only nominally recognized as important in the systems of culture and cultural cooperation – there is a lack of structural support that would allow real stability and development.
- 2 — Structural problems with financing affect not only the independent sector, but also the entire cultural system. Even when the budgets allocated for culture are stable (which is not often the case), the resources available for exchanges and cooperation keep decreasing, which makes the functioning of the institutional and non-institutional sectors increasingly difficult.
- 3 — The effect of European cultural policies is problematic because it often does not take into account local, national and regional specificities. Top-down models have shown to be reactive – instead of having a developing impact on the sector and responding to its needs.
- 4 — Project financing – as the only model available to the greatest number and the most active among the actors in cultural production and cooperation – perpetuates their precarious position and creates a large administrative burden on the actors. As a result, and attempting to achieve a minimum of stability, the actors focus on acquiring expertise in project management, instead of improving the skills in their primary professions.
- 5 — Despite recognising in principle that local and regional actors are vital for the maintenance and development of the sector, models that would enable these actors to assume an active role in influencing the development of the sector and making decisions related to the distribution of funds and the focus of cultural policies are lacking. The recognition of those segments of the cultural sector that, like Kooperativa, function as a group of actors, as well as a structure for their networking and cooperation, is particularly lacking.

Based on the debates that took place within all formats of this Forum, the following key conclusions regarding the abovementioned problems were emphasized:

- 1 — The debate addressed the future of cooperation by introducing the idea of “different Europes”, which implies that Europe cannot be viewed as a homogeneous whole, but rather, that we should bear in mind the diversity of opportunities and needs, and consider the financing of cultural cooperation accordingly. Furthermore, the need to adopt cultural policies based on a bottom-up participatory model was highlighted, which requires a change of the existing policies, whereby specific needs of different regions should be taken into account, as well as the fact that cultural cooperation comes naturally and organically in SEE and should be encouraged further.
- 2 — The independent scene is a veritable laboratory of new models of association, management and cooperation that reimagine the concept of public good. The importance of experimentation, development of new management models, as well as allowing a space for failure must be recognized as necessary prerequisites for building a better and more accessible cultural system.
- 3 — Grassroots and bottom-up alliances are the only guarantee of the organizations’ stability, as well as of the strengthening of their capacities for advocacy activities. In that sense, it is important to recognize the vital role that formal and informal networks play in the cultural system.
- 4 — It is necessary to reassess the rigid project logic and develop new, more inclusive, models of distribution of public and grant funds for culture and art.
- 5 — In 2023, Kooperativa will review the existing model of the regional cooperation fund, taking into account the inputs from the Forum and the sector’s need for a less bureaucratized model of financing art and culture that would not be guided by project logic. After ten years of dedicated work on establishing the fund in partnership with local and national authorities, Kooperativa will remain dedicated to this goal, while at the same time including new allies – gatekeepers – in its efforts, in cooperation with whom Kooperativa will promote regional cooperation as a strategic interest of the countries of SEE.