



ÖGfE Policy Brief 16 2022



By Sarina Bakić
Vienna, 22 October 2022
ISSN 2305-2635

Cultural Policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Recognising Culture as an Integration Tool

Policy Recommendations

1. Creating cultural policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina as the key element for a sustainable society, especially linking it with education, economic and social policies.
2. Ensuring the full engagement of cultural professionals, civil society, media, youth organisations and scientific community in the realisation of a new cultural policy.
3. Strengthening cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, citizens' participation resulting in the unification of society.

Abstract

Every cultural policy that is led by democratic principles implies, creates and implements cultural actions, which aim to provide the fulfilment of cultural needs and aspirations for as many citizens as possible. The state, as the main carrier of such cultural policy, brings out certain legal regulations, establishes institutions, presents various planning methods and cultural engineering that do not only make cultural contents accessible to the citizens, but influence citizens' opinions and the actions of every individual. In this context, it is important to under-

line the importance of cultural policy regarding integration processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina's society. The main methods for establishing and developing cultural policy should become the tool for strong relations between citizens and state nurturing various integrative traits. Therefore, this Policy Brief critically evaluates the present discourse of current cultural policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina and tries to recommend a better conception of cultural policy and cooperation as a medium for the integration of society in general.



Cultural policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Recognising culture as an integration tool

Introduction

When speaking about cultural policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina¹ it is essential to look at the current situation in the country in general and especially in the context of a long-time political crisis.

The culture of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been considered and described by diversity, merging and openness. Throughout its history, Bosnia and Herzegovina was a living space for Muslims, Orthodox, Catholics, Jews, Roma people and many other communities. They all have lived mutually, sharing their traditions and values among each other, acknowledging and respecting each other. This is why Bosnia and Herzegovina is still known as the 'diamond of Europe' due to its multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity. But today, the lives of all cultural identities in this country are influenced by the past 'captured in the chains' of the Dayton Agreement². This strongly impacts culture, although this topic is avoided in the public sphere to the most possible extent.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is still lacking a general concept or strategy for culture as well as a clear definition of cultural policy. This obscurity, therefore, disregards culture as a creative impulse and process in the modernisation and integration of society but emphasised its role as a 'keeper' and exclusive promoter of national identities and politics. Additionally, cultural institutions vital for the state have been deliberately and systematically destroyed by a lack of judicial support and destructive political influence on culture and cultural institutions such as museums, libraries, archives and theatres.

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The nationalistic political and cultural parable that divisions and clashes within society are natural and impossible to prevail over has always been proved to be inaccurate and wrong by the authentic Bosnia and Herzegovina's cultural patterns throughout its entire history such are multiculturalism, plurality of religions, values and traditions embraced by mutual understanding and respect. It is important to un-

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- 1 Bosnia and Herzegovina gained its independence in March 1992 according to a citizens' referendum and applied for UN membership in May 1992. The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina started in April 1992 and lasted until September 1995, when a peace agreement was concluded in Dayton USA. Eventhough the war ended, Bosnia and Herzegovina is still facing crisis reflected in the destruction of the institutional system, slowdown of economic, industrial, social developments followed by ethnonational animosities and mistrust.
 - 2 Dayton Peace Agreement is the peace agreement reached at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio, United States, in November 1995, and formally signed in Paris on 14 December 1995. This agreement put an end to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the other hand, it created a specific structure of the state and very ineffective and awkward political structures.



derline that these cultural patterns are kept and taken care of by those cultural institutions. These institutions prove continuity and permanence of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, (still) existing as a testimony of a multicultural and open society.

The role of culture to foster dialogue among different cultural identities and reconciliation within the entire country is absolutely not acknowledged and not valued at all.

Already mentioned today's years-long crisis trend in Bosnia and Herzegovina also involves a disturbing absence of a long-range, integrational and comprehensive development programme, which has not been offered in all these years of political pluralism which we are experiencing. Neither the new/old rulers nor the opposition have yet recognised the emancipation value of culture as a symbolic investment that creates values and essence of society together with its resistance to ideological, political or any other instrumentalisation and manipulation. The role of culture to foster dialogue among different cultural identities and reconciliation within the entire country is absolutely not acknowledged and not valued at all.

The current position of cultural policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The present situation regarding cultural policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina mirrors the destruction of the common cultural sphere, because cultural policy is still not in the responsibility of the entire state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but in the hands of the entities and the cantons since the war's end in 1995. There is no Ministry of Culture that covers the entire state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Instead, the Ministry of Civil Affairs 'deals' with culture on a state level in particular cases. In the two entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina cultural policies are differently managed. The Republic of Srpska organises cultural activities centrally through the Ministry for Education and Culture while the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina regulates cultural policies decentralised within its ten cantons. The Federal Ministry for Culture and Sport supports activities on a cantonal level, but also has its own activities. This situation indicates that cultural policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina is strongly separated and distributed along ethnical and political boundaries. As mentioned earlier, cultural institutions that are relevant for the entire country (the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the National Library, the Historical Museum, the National Art Gallery, the Library for the Blind and Visually Disabled, the Film Archive, the Museum of Literature and Theatre) therefore are in a status of neglect in the context of financial support and legal regulations. State political actors do not support them, because doing so would imply acknowledging the existence of a common cultural and historical heritage, integration aspects of culture but the current state as well.

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On the other hand, integration represents the process of connecting and inclusion of individuals, groups and other parts of society towards functional articulated community based upon equality and respect of cultural diversities (Peters, 1993). The purpose of integration policy in the context of culture is to create circumstances under which people can collaborate in achieving common goals and developing a society where everyone feels safe, can expand their talents, work and learn, and create a social cohesion utterly needed in Bosnia and Herzegovina's society.



The current situation in cultural policy of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where innovative elements could be seen only in small parts of structure and its separable parts, enables possibilities for alternative solutions, which means fostering reintegration processes in the society and mostly important, including as many people as possible, especially young people to be part of this important public sphere, what is culture. Particularly in the segments of arts for reconciliation, artistic exchange, cultural activities tackling mutual understanding, meaning creating space for more serious multicultural dialogue. Furthermore, the authentic culture, culture that is independent from any ethnopolitical establishment could eliminate servility of citizens towards the system.

Moreover, the media news about cultural events are a substitution for culture, instead of citizens attending cultural events.

However, such an almost ideal situation is going to be very difficult to achieve, because of the reduction of culture on its ethnic dimension and deliberately hiding cultural emancipatory streams and potentials. In addition, it is important to underline the hegemony and domination of mass culture today in the context that culture has been media transmitted and marked mostly by giving to cultural events an image of spectacle. Moreover, the media news about cultural events are a substitution for culture, instead of citizens attending cultural events.

Main challenges and recommendations for more sustainable cultural policy

The prospects of cultural policy for promoting and creating integration processes are still not recognised in Bosnia and Herzegovina although it is for many years acknowledged in the countries in the European Union (EU). The European Commission specified priorities for 2019-2024 that are very much relevant for policy making in the area of culture at EU level³. This document could be a significant assistance tool for policy makers in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is especially related to the need of taking into account a specific scope of universal values while appreciating cultural diversity and the need to maintain pluralism of cultural initiatives in order to promote mutual cooperation and reconciliation as well as respect and understanding between different individuals and groups. Bosnia and Herzegovina's cultural policy should use culture to promote these aims. Additionally, an adequate cultural policy should be in line with basic EU cultural policy segments especially from the aspects of identity concepts, citizens' participation with the aim to create citizens belonging to the EU. Therefore, cultural policy is more than the sum of a government's activities with respect to the arts, traditions, languages, cultural heritage, religion, everyday life practices, values, symbols and cultural

3 Strategic Framework for the EU's cultural policy 2019-2024. Available at: <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/strategic-framework-for-the-eus-cultural-policy> (last accessed, 17.10.2022).



institutions⁴ but fostering intercultural dialogue, reconciliation and integration processes, accentuating citizens' key role in these activities. Intercultural dialogue as one of the key segments of integration processes emerges to be one of the underlying cultural and political challenges not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina but in the entire world, which is a major condition for peace and peaceful solutions. Dialogue between various cultures in Bosnia and Herzegovina should be a basic element of cultural policy and institutions that represented them. Responsible political actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina still do not comprehend that cultural activities and creativities are the core of societal progress and that cultural diversity represents a crucial component for development in general.

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Bearing in mind that cultural policy represents one of the main elements for sustainable development in the country, it is important to stress that culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina was never linked with policies in other social fields. Moreover, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Bosnia and Herzegovina's citizens experienced a 'digital gap' due to their social and economic circumstances but also due to the fact that issues of an efficacious involvement in the information society was never seriously taken into the consideration within the cultural policy at any level. Cultural policy at all levels should also incline towards improving social integration combating any kind of discriminations of citizens in the various parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina⁵. This implies closer cooperation with civil society as well as, education institutions, media and youth organisations. All relevant institutions in the entire country should implement joint activities fostering intercultural communication and interactions, integration of various parts of the society, in which the variety of cultural identities, behaviours and beliefs build a sincere peace and reconciliation culture.

Bearing in mind that cultural policy represents one of the main elements for sustainable development in the country, it is important to stress that culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina was never linked with policies in other social fields.

Furthermore, it is necessary for culture to be 'brought closer' to rural and smaller towns in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In other words, it is possible to open an entry to the culture for every citizen, promoting and supporting broader access to culture for all population, preventing marginalisation and exclusion, firming all processes that support cultural democratisation and social integration.

4 According to the European Agenda for Culture, within the Action Plan and strategic objectives, culture has found a place in the transversal politics of EU. Three main objectives were set: to promote intercultural dialogue (2008), to promote culture as catalyst of creativity (from economy creativeness), and to promote culture as a central element of international relations (and with non-EU activities).

5 On a contrary for example, cultural and education policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina still encourage "two schools under one roof" and fostering discrimination of pupils' right to learn their language in the schools, in the areas of the country where they are minorities.



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All of the above indicates that an adequate cultural policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina would be the essential element to enable a sustainable development of the society, especially linking it with education, economic and social policies. It can reinforce citizens' participation within society, improve their already lost confidence, integrate various members of society and different communities, building the culture of peace not the culture of conflicts and distrust. Bearing in mind political and societal context today, this will take more time and changes in the society's political culture as well.

Conclusion

In conclusion, cultural policy⁶ cannot be any different than an entire political and social situation in the country. Bearing in mind the ongoing crisis in all areas of life, strong political influence on culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina together with an absolute neglect and disinterest of the political responsible for culture, the main question is actually who should make these changes and under whose responsibility culture and cultural policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina should really be. One of the answers should be to position culture more vividly and seriously in the educational systems throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, mitigation of problems could be achieved by transparent financial support and donations related to various cultural projects. EU funds are already providing assistance. Trainings on cultural management are in order to combat various obstacles. Because it is far more important to educate cultural workers how to acquire funds, how to use them and be transparent about it. The fact which should not be overlooked is that Bosnia and Herzegovina's society represents the society with utterly dysfunctional social and political organisations, state and cultural institutions. It is a society characterised by symptomatic influence of mass and populist culture and mass media. Cultural institutions are fighting strictly for their survival, middle class - the one that creates and consumes cultural goods - almost does not exist, funding for cultural, scientific and publishing activities are extremely inadequate and when they occur, their distribution is very questionable, dubious alongside 'shady' criteria. Today's cultural policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina simply does not exist. When speaking about relation between state and culture, it is only about attempts for solving existential issues of cultural institutions, with sporadic participation in the realisation of certain cultural events, and 'completely by the book' without planning in advance and long-term strategies, often due to the pressure of cultural/art professionals, citizens and media.

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When creating an adequate cultural policy all responsible government structures in Bosnia and Herzegovina should finally understand and accept the fact that culture is economic potential, the greatest integrative factor for the society and the leading genuine indicator of one society's progress.

6 Cultural policy represents an expression and an image of general society condition, and the model of cultural policy is shaped by the political strategies that are favored in every society (Lepenis, 2009).



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About the author

Sarina Bakić is professor and researcher at the Department of Sociology, University of Sarajevo's Faculty of Political Science. Her core scientific field is the sociology of culture, relations between art and politics, and various phenomena of mass culture.

Contact: sarina.bakic@fpn.unsa.ba

The Policy Brief is published in the framework of the [WB2EU](#) project. The project aims at the establishment of a network of renowned think-tanks, do-tanks, universities, higher education institutes and policy centres from the Western Balkans, neighbouring countries and EU member states that will be most decisive for the enlargement process and Europeanisation of the region in the upcoming years. The [WB2EU](#) project is co-funded by the European Commission under its Erasmus+ Jean Monnet programme. The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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ISSN 2305-2635

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Keywords

culture, cultural policy, integration processes, Bosnia and Hercegovina

Citation

Bakić, S. (2022). Cultural Policy in Bosnia and Hercegovina: Recognising Culture as an Integration Tool. Vienna. ÖGfE Policy Brief, 16'2022

Imprint

Austrian Society for European Politics (ÖGfE)
Rotenhausgasse 6/8-9
A-1090 Vienna, Austria

Secretary General: Paul Schmidt

Responsible: Susan Milford-Faber, Vedran Džihić

Tel: +43 1 533 4999

E-Mail: policybriefs@oegfe.at

Website: [ÖGfE Policy Briefs](#)

Project Website: [WB2EU](#)