

ACT4CITY Focus group, Skopje

CITY CREATIVE NETWORK (CCN)

**NAUTILUS KONSTRUKT: Sustainable Cultural Practices in Skopje**

Monday, 01.02.2016, 18 - 20h., MVO Center - MKC, Skopje

On Monday, 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, 2016 in Skopje the Focus Group was held as a part of the activities planned in the ACT4CITY project. It was organized by City Creative Network (CCN), Skopje on the theme: Sustainable Cultural Practices in Skopje. The discussion was held by *Erina Filipovska* (CCN) with the presence of our guest, *Predrag Cveticanin* from The Center for Empirical Cultural Studies of Southeastern Europe, expert consultant in the ACT4CITY project. Among the attending participants in this event were representatives from the leading independent nongovernmental organizations in Skopje: *Anita Ivkovic*, Contemporary Art Center (CAC); *Biljana Tanurovska-Kjulavkovski*, Lokomotiva (Centre for New Initiatives in Arts and Culture); *Ognjen Marina*, professor at the Faculty of Architecture, Skopje (Urban Cooks and Sinergy projects); *Oliver Musovik*, independent artist, Skopje (Grants and Digital Development at Balkans Arts & Culture Fund (BAC); *Gligor Dubrovski*, urban planner, Skopje; and *Iskra Filipova* and *Ilcho Ilievski*, students from the Faculty of Architecture, Skopje (AFS).

The main objective of the Focus Group was to present the project ACT4CITY and its regional context through the collaboration with the partners from Kotor, Belgrade, Dubrovnik and to start a debate about the topics and principals of sustainable urban development that this project promotes. In relation to this we introduce Nautilus Konstrukt as an international, collaborative and activist project of building an open stage as a new infrastructure in Skopje for promoting cultural sustainability in the city. The idea behind the Focus Group was to gather on one table, some of the Skopje's leading independent cultural actors, to encourage a discussion and reaction about Nautilus Konstrukt and to get answers to the previously prepared questionnaire about their activities and position in link with sustainability of Skopje and sustainable urban developments in general.

The main focus of the first part of the discussion was Nautilus Konstrukt. The idea of building a new open-air stage came as a reaction to the lack of public spaces initiatives in Skopje which gives citizens, independent artists, performers and musicians an opportunity to use Nautilus as their space for performance and public gathering. The opening event was a cultural exercise that activated the stage and invigorated this neglected site of the riverbank. The opening created links between the artists and succeeded to create a strong community with a mutual goal. Therefore, the main questions were raised concerning the future development of the stage and the possibility of its use as an independent and sustainable cultural practice in Skopje.

A discussion was started and some very good ideas were given from the participants concerning this problem. They suggested to advertise Nautilus Construct more using social media and to present it to all of the independent nongovernmental institutions and organizations for arts and cultures. A good way to do that is to prepare a presentation with technical information about the stage concerning its dimensions and the possible ways of exploitation. Some of the participants thought that some interventions could be done for expanding the stage, e.g. including mobile platform, in order to expand the possibilities of its use. They also argued that electricity is needed on the site as a technical necessity, but also as a way to advertise the stage by lighting up the structure during nights and make it more visible for all citizens. During the conversations a point was made that stage becomes a stage only if there is an annual or seasonal program offered to the public. For that

concern a serious coordination and organization is needed and can be done by opening a public call for its use where all interested performers, artists and citizens in general could apply. That way this group of people, that clearly need a space to express their work, could be the creators of all the activities at Nautilus Konstrukt. All the participants agreed that these kinds of debates are needed for exchanging ideas and experiences among the organizations that care for cultural activism and independent artistic expressions in the city of Skopje, and applauded CCN for organizing this one as a start of a long lasting collaboration in future.

The second part of the focus group was directly connected to the questionnaire about the sustainable practices in Skopje in general. The participants shared their involvement concerning their activities, their experience in collaborating with governmental institutions, the reactions they got from the citizens and gave ideas of how to promote the sustainability as an idea and practice in Skopje. All of them argued that there is lack of transparency in spending the funds for cultural events from the governmental institutions and the big gap that exists between them and the independent organizations is even growing further more. The principles of sustainability are practically nonexistent in all fields. The sustainable agenda concerning the public transport, biking through the city, the use of all green and public areas is neglected and rejected by the city institutions even though there are organizations that try to include its fundamentals in the city life by protesting and trying to produce awareness about the problems. Although a law for sustainable buildings exists, it is not delivered or used in practice and is mainly broken by the government in constructing their buildings through the city.

The participants gave an idea that a campaign concerning sustainability can be created as a tool, but influencing every sector separately. One can be created for generating awareness of the city institutions, another for the private companies and a separate one for the citizens. All the neglected areas and problems could be mapped and pointed out and open call could be announced for ideas on specific issues concerning the sustainability in the city in particular fields. That way the sustainable agenda could be introduced and reach all the sectors in the community.

All the participants were very inspired, gave excellent ideas and encouraged this debate as a way of introducing the nongovernmental institutions and organizations, their fields of practice and their experience between each other. They all agreed that this collaboration is a crucial part of implementing the sustainability in Skopje, and are happy to participate in any further activities.