

A Post-Balkan Symbolic Infrastructure

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Let the Balkans develop on multiple levels in geographic space and historical time: what you get is Europe.

Conceive a culture in the Balkans, wait for two thousand and five hundred years for it to grow in all possible directions and aspects: what you get is Europe.

Europe is a post-Balkans phenomenon – as an archetype and utopia.

Post-Balkans: Balkans after Balkans; troubled Balkans resolved; European Balkans regenerated.

Symbolic: The dominant vision and narrative of the world and times defines the dominant experience of the world and times.

Infrastructure: Arts and culture are a semantic and performative infrastructure of integrated, radiant and viable public domains and societies.

What we need is a post-Balkans symbolic infrastructure?

What is this... what you mean... sounds promising, but not clear enough, like a

magic formula or password... explain, please... give us some examples – this is the usual response whenever I use the phrase “post-Balkan symbolic infrastructure”.

One illustrative example. The Bulgarian documentary *Whose is this song?* (Adela Peeva, 2003) is a typical post-Balkans product, which proves that even music represents an infrastructural symbolic resource of this region. The Balkanites in the film – Turks, Greeks, Albanians, Serbs, Bosniaks, Macedonians, Bulgarians – express their certainty that the melody in question belongs to them, that it originated in their region, from their people, that it could not have originated anywhere else, that it is authentic and inseparable from their identity and heritage. Finally, it turns out that the melody is one and the same everywhere, beautiful, belonging to everybody and nobody in particular.

Whose is this song? European. Balkan. What is European and Balkan at the same time, we call Post-Balkan.

Post-Balkan

Balkans after Balkans, the way it was presented in the dominant representations, from the outside and from the inside. European Balkans is Post-Balkan Ethos and Nomos: Pax Post-Balkanica.

The previous matrix, Ethnos and Chaos of the Balkans, has been exhausted, the effects are poor and painful, leaving us weary, believing that we could do better.

The Balkans has represented disintegration and loss of bonds and resources of mutual trust and belonging both within the region and between the region and Europe. The post-Balkans restitutes these bonds and resources.

The Balkans was marked and scarred by resentment, frustration, prejudice, intolerance. The Balkans suffered from self-pity, bitterness, hopelessness, fear, worries, sadness, anger, vulnerability... The Balkans was impoverished in all kinds of capacities and competencies, in economy, culture, technology or morals... In the Balkans, all levels of responsibility, public and individual, have been corrupted.

All these layers and aspects of historical experience, community and the public in the Balkan region have created a symbolic infrastructure incapable of creation, recreation and dissemination of social and semantic capital required for sustainable development and vital axiological certainty, orientation, basic civil solidarity and trust.

The Balkans has failed. The Balkans remains in a stalemate position, in a deadlock. The post-Balkans emerges.

With the growing danger also grows the potential for change and salvation. The post-Balkans overcomes the insufficient and regressive legacy of the Balkans. Earning and creating instead of spending and destroying irrationally, stealing from our children and grandchildren. The mind and imagination and consciousness instead of instincts. Fair treatment for all instead of unfair or even brutal treatment of minority groups and individuals.

Characteristics of the Balkans were: intolerance and bias instead of openness and fairness, zealotry instead of sensibleness, hypocrisy instead of congruity and consistency, prejudice and arbitrariness instead of knowledge and ability, self-pity instead of self-confidence. The post-Balkans turns all of these upside down and creates a promising and stable environment where once was uncertainty, distrust and confrontation.

The Balkan axiological matrix has produced demagoguery, populism, corruption, denial of reality, lowering of the level of cultural needs, intellectual and moral standards. The post-Balkan axiological matrix, on the other hand, introduces the concept of development as a prerequisite of survival, and not as a possible consequence of survival. This approach introduces personal responsibility instead of servility and obedience.

The Balkans was an identity – from the inside and from the outside – and that was the essential problem. Identity versus Otherness. The Balkans paid the highest price just to prove that there is no such thing as identity. Identity of persons – of peoples or states – is not a

fact, but a function of the dominant social and symbolic order.

Identity is not a fact – but a context, value option, a metaphor, a reductive narrative and reductive emotion – not a fact, but an idea to be followed or to be ignored... Obsessively fixated upon reductive identity concepts, the Balkans wasted its great resources and powers – ending up in implosion, sinking into a chaotic and vulgar spectacle, into destructive denial of reality and time.

The Balkans was ethnic-centered and ethnic-based. The post-Balkans is ethnic-centred and ethnic-based. One letter makes all the difference. The difference makes culture.

In order to reshape and upgrade the dominant intellectual, moral and cultural standards – in the region and in the rest of Europe – we need a post-Balkans symbolic infrastructure to be deployed as a part of the public and personal attitudes, opinions, behavior, communication, dissemination processes, decision-making procedures. This transfiguration cannot originate from the sphere of politics or economy, or a strict visa regime – but from culture. Namely, from art and knowledge, imagination and memory, qualities and principles beyond the limitations and coordinates of the Balkans.

The post-Balkans: troubled Balkans resolved, deciphered, accepted, involved. How? By means of transformation of the dominant cultural patterns and an upgrade of the social and symbolic infrastructure. Because it is the culture that provides the principles that determine the constitution of society and the conditions of life.

In general terms: the post-Balkans represents a cultural pattern that is functional in control of the consequences of different beliefs and attitudes, just the opposite from the Balkans cultural pattern of direct control of the beliefs and attitudes themselves. The Balkans and Balkanites simply payed no attention to the consequences.

Symbolic

The dominant image and narrative of the world and time define the dominant experience of the world and time. Social and symbolic framework and context define the actual hierarchy of values, beliefs and attitudes, positions – individual and collective, private and public.

“La imagination es libre, el hombre no.”
(Luis Bunuel).

Our rights are derived from the notion of who we are, what we should be and what we should do. And our responsibility is derived from the notion of who we are, what we should be and what we should do.

The collective and individual imaginary is essential for establishment of the internal order of a community, because there is no order without an image – visions, representations, narratives – of that order. The image is constitutive, created by imagination. Therefore, the imagination is the ultimate and elementary source of legitimation and effectiveness of all things public. The imaginary provides the formative principles and prerequisites concerning the conditions and way of life, principles and prerequisites pertaining to constitution of society.

The only possible reality of our humanity is constituted by the symbolic. The art is therefore as constitutive as the constitution itself. How is that? Let us respond with another question: is there a belief without an image of that belief?

The art constitutes by means of representation, determining the manner in which all things human appear.

The image of order is not visible at all times, but has to be invoked, consciously or unconsciously, through the process of selection, evaluation, action. It is politically unconscious (Fredric Jameson): it determines how we feel, how we choose and make decisions, how we see and understand the past, present and future. This is the way to constitute the domain of possibility, freedom, meaning and primary value categories, this means that art, imagination and an innovative, critical and nonstandard attitude towards the world are the key factors of our experience.

The image of order is determinative and overarching, though it may seem as a mere consequence, a result. Therefore, it is infrastructural, though generically it belongs to the symbolic level. Without it, nothing can function properly or function at all, in any other domain. Fictional by origin and factual by function, it provides infrastructural framework for the production of meaning, for the production of all types of values. Without this infrastructural support and base, the world and life inevitably succumb to the production of meaninglessness, chaos, destruction, redundancy...

Life can be reduced to a representation of life. Life of the post-Balkans can be

reduced to a representation of the post-Balkans, to a gradual process of multi-threaded upgrade of taste, ethics and mind.

All the problems in the Balkans have been the problems of culture, the problems immanent to the cultural matrix of irresponsibility, incompetence, servitude, inconsistency, self-oblivion.

Why is an upgrade in taste, ethics and mind required? Because low standards of mind open the space for low standards of ethics and taste; low standards of ethics open the space for low standards of mind and taste; low standards of taste open the space for low standards of ethics and mind.

How can we achieve this? Acting from within art, culture, the imaginary, from within knowledge and the value criteria that render the Balkans European and Europe Balkan. From kinship, and not from opposition.

The living and inherited cultural capital both contribute to reinvention, regeneration and reintegration of the Balkans into Europe and Europe into Balkans. Permanent strongholds and resources do exist, cultural history is on our side, as well as the current political situation and environment in the Balkans at the beginning of the 21st century.

The post-Balkans means primarily that the Balkans is not the other of Europe, and that Europe is not the other of the Balkans. We are connected by a "solidarity inherent to the citizens who share the same public space and the common imaginarium" (Pierre Birnbaum).

This common imaginary is possible because it is possible to place more trust in Euclid's geometry, Newton's laws, Kant's categorical imperative, Joyce's Ulysses, than in ethnic and nationalist myths.

This common imaginary is possible because after the split in the fifth century the glorious Romans lived both in the Apenine and the Balkan Peninsula. The Hellenes and Romans were the first Europeans and the first Balkanites. Europe has history and a horizon of meaning both in the west and the east, in Rome and in Constantinople. More than twenty Roman and all Byzantine emperors were born in the Balkans, as well as several sultans and grand veziers.

Infrastructure

We are talking about the infrastructure of production and reproduction of sense, meaning, order and certainty of values – the infrastructure of culture.

This infrastructure has various aspects. The economy of culture creates, distributes, consumes and recreates sense and meanings. The ecology of culture offers a balanced habitat of self-sustainable life and energy cycles of sense and meaning. The security of culture safeguards against peril from outside and within and maintains the stability of peace of sense and meaning. The politics of culture leads and makes strategic decision for the purpose of realization of sense and meaning.

This infrastructure consists of invisible mechanisms and strategic resources

that never cease to radiate sense and values, with a force that reaches and extends over the existing solid borders, obstacles and redundant noises of bodies, territories, identities, ideologies.

The production and reproduction of sense forges a vital and self-sustainable relationship between state and society, between individual and collective, between private and public, between decision and deed, between distinctiveness and equality, between morality and power, between justice and property, between inevitability and freedom.

For example: the dialogic and interoperable quality of different languages is an infrastructure; the telepathy of reading is an infrastructure; impartial yet irresistible poignancy of music is an infrastructure; 2.500 years of development of the system and critical apparatus of philosophy are an infrastructure; aestheticism and quality standards are an infrastructure; energy pulsing in the streets and squares of cities is an infrastructure; the wonder of lively metaphor in speech, writing, thought and gestures is an infrastructure; the persistence of unwritten rituals and customs is an infrastructure.

Economy, ecology, security and politics of sense in post-Balkans are not conceivable nor sustainable outside of the economy, ecology, security and politics of sense in Europe.

For instance, let us pay more attention to language. Language is the most fundamental of all human technologies, the most fundamental human infrastructure: the whole civilization testifies to the results of spontaneous application and

development of this subtle technology and infrastructure. Because language does not only transmit information one-way, but it sustains it, creates and exchanges it, helping even the spoken or the written word to effect real change. Language is a very subtle but effective interactive technology.

Language infrastructures in the region and domain of post-Balkans:

- The Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian language zone, which includes these countries: Bosni-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria;
- The Romanian language zone, which includes these countries: Romania, Moldova, Hungary, Serbia;
- The Hungarian language zone, which includes these countries: Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia;
- The Romani language zone, which includes all the countries in the region;
- The Albanian language zone, which includes these countries: Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Greece;
- The Greek language zone, which includes these countries: Greece, Cyprus;
- The Bulgarian language zone, which includes these countries: Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Macedonia;
- The Turkish language zone, which includes these countries: Turkey, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina;
- The Macedonian language zone, which includes these countries: Macedonia, Bulgaria, Albania, Serbia, Greece; and so on.

Just as the Balkans are, linguistically – such is the whole of Europe. Europe is covered by a cross-borders language infrastructure. Just as the Balkans are, symbolically – such is Europe.

Let the Balkans develop on multiple levels in geographic space and historical time: what you get is Europe.

In terms of anthropological paradigm shifts, chronology flows like this: Instincts, Myths, Religions, Ideologies, Laws, Responsibilities. The subsequent paradigm always reshapes and changes the previous one, exceeds its limitations, and shifts the dominant axiological pattern to the opposite end of the symbolic order. Unfortunately, in the historical realization the process can shift, either to go forward, or into reverse. A crisis requires a solution – which comes either in the shape of a progression or of a regression.

Today Europe enters the Age of Responsibility. Legality is no longer enough for a sustainable uncontested legitimacy, so the dimension of responsibility comes to the forefront. The Europe of rule of law and human rights cannot respond to challenges by regressing into the previous ideological paradigm, but only by moving to a more advanced paradigm of responsibility.

Finally, why arts and culture are so relevant – directly politically relevant – in times of paradigm changes, or in any times?

Politics is the function of the actual socio-symbolic order – as origin of ultimate justification and legitimation of power.

History deals with the consequences of socio-symbolic order, whilst art deals with the assumptions of socio-symbolic order. The assumptions are rooted in our imaginary.

What Europe needs is a symbolic infrastructure of the rule and culture of responsibility. Human rights have to be matched by human responsibilities.

This infrastructure consists of invisible mechanisms and strategic resources that never cease to radiate sense and value of responsibilities, with a force that reaches and extends over the existing solid borders, obstacles and redundant noises of bodies, territories, identities, ideologies.

We live and can only survive in the paradigm of responsibility: the habitat and the algorithm of post-Balkans, of Europe as a whole – as an archetype and utopia.