

**EXPLORING SPACES OF POSSIBILITIES FOR ARTS, CULTURE, PUBLIC SPACE AND  
CIVIL SOCIETY  
- A PROJECT IN THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP REGION**

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The region the EU calls “Eastern Partnership” comprises Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The countries in the region of the Eastern Partnership, despite all differences, share a part of a common cultural space. They were all part of the Soviet Union, joint together under the same ideology whose traces are still present in the space, constituting recognizable elements of a post-socialist scenery, still influencing contemporary life on various levels.

The radical privatization processes and non transparent governance of the public goods in a majority of post socialist countries made the topic of public space extremely important. When more than a decade ago, artists and theorists started to deal with the influences of the fast spreading capitalism and to analyze the consequences it leaves in the urban (post-socialist) space, art has become one of the tools to point out, alarm and speak out about specific issues related to the ongoing societal change and its effect on public and semi public spaces. A large number of independent, non institutionalized cultural actors (civil society actors) positioned themselves on the line of defense of public interest, merging artistic and political, theoretical and empirical.

These are the starting points for the project SPACES, a three years project on Culture and Arts in public Spaces in the Eastern partnership region. Specifically, the project takes place in Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia and Georgia. Although the independent cultural scenes in these countries represent a vibrant part of contemporary cultural production, they survive on the edge, with very limited resources, often unrecognized by the local government. Local artistic communities are inadequately supported; art education systems do not follow the dynamics of changes in the art world. Cultural co-operation in the region and internationally faces many challenges and needs to receive appropriate support, especially as traditional views associate cultural and symbolic production with the representation of national identity. Today the strong potential of cultural production and co-operation in processes of community re-habilitation, economic development, and social change needs formal acknowledgement; SPACES has chosen to convert these challenges into concrete actions.

The key word in the project is capacity building for the independent cultural and artistic scene in the region– from developing a better standing in negotiations with

governmental agencies, to processes of self-learning, increasing contact with civil society audiences, and finding new spaces where art and culture can take place. The core question of the project: How can art and culture regain public space(s) for citizens, especially for young people? The SPACES team curates and carries out participatory art events in public spaces in the four countries. Processes of networking, social research and policy debates accompany the in situ events. Cultural maps for Kiev, Chisinau, Yerevan and Tbilisi, a stronger lobby for the independent scenes, a better understanding of the role culture and art can play with regard to public space in post communist spaces, new concepts for cultural governance in the region: these are some of the SPACES results. The three years project (2011-2014) is funded by the European Commission via the Eastern Partnership Culture Programme (<http://www.euroeastculture.eu/>).

A collective curatorial team creates art and culture events in public spaces in Tbilisi, Yerevan, Kiev and Chisinau during the three years. The first one takes place in a very special environment: in the forgotten underground passages in Tbilisi, Georgia...