

# Platform Upgrade and Intercultural Social Center

## Advocacy document/Status 2020

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### 1. Introduction

This document has been created by the Platform Upgrade to present advocacy efforts done by the Platform itself and its member organizations in the past four years, and to outline both external and internal circumstances in which the platform operates today. Besides the current circumstances and the assessment of the past period, the document also states the Platform's advocacy demands addressed at decision makers on local and national level and they are inferred from the Platform's experiences since its foundation until the present day. In that respect, this document draws on the policy document "Towards Sustainable Infrastructure for Zagreb Socio-Cultural Centres" from 2016. This document has been created within the framework of the project "Korak dalje – prema uključivoj kulturi", co-financed by the European Social Fund.

The following abbreviations are used in the document:

SCC – socio-cultural center

ISC – Intercultural social center

Platform Upgrade was created in 2015 as a response to the issue of inadequate spatial infrastructure for activities of youth organizations, organizations of independent culture and civil society organizations in Zagreb. The initiative for its establishment came from Alliance Operation City which had already had experience with co-governing Pogon – Zagreb center for independent culture and youth, a public institution co-founded by the Alliance and the City of Zagreb based on the model of civil-public partnership. This experience was one of the key motivations to take a step further in the innovation of the model of participative governance and to leave the niche of independent culture and youth in order to make a more comprehensive



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approach to community needs. The Platform initially comprised Alliance Operation City, WHW, Attack, Badco., Taste of Home, Zelena mreža aktivističkih grupa and Center for Peace Studies. During 5 years of Platform's activity, other organizations, initiatives and individuals have joined the Platform because they became aware of the significance of program and advocacy networking for the establishment of the intercultural social center as an integral model that responds to the needs of a wider civil society and local community. The organizations currently included in the operations of the Platform Upgrade are: Alliance Operation City (as the coordinator), Center for Peace Studies, WHW, Attack, BadCo, Multimedijalni Institut, Kurziv, Udruga bivših učenika SPUD-a, Kontejner, Kulturtreger, Udruženje za razvoj kulture "URK", Slobodne veze, udruga za suvremene umjetnicke prakse, Zelena mreža aktivističkih grupa and Friends of the Earth Croatia.

The Platform was based on two key needs mapped at the time of its establishment: the lack of spatial resources for activities of civil society organizations and the transformed city image which demanded different approach to thinking and acting in the local community. Even though one of the mapped needs (lack of spatial resources) had been a long standing and persistent issue at the time of the establishment of the Platform, the novelty of the approach lied in connecting this need with the detected transformation of the city of Zagreb which continuously recorded the increase in the number of inhabitants due to migrations<sup>1</sup> thus becoming a city permanently or temporarily inhabited by an increasing number of people of diverse cultural backgrounds. Nominally, cultural diversity is understood as positive characteristic of urban

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<sup>1</sup> According to the data from the document New demographic movements in the city of Zagreb after the census 2011 until 2017 published by the City of Zagreb: "the number of inhabitants of the city of Zagreb increased by 1,6%. Since the census in 2011 until mid 2017 the number of inhabitants in the city of Zagreb increased in absolute numbers by 12 312 inhabitants. This is due to somewhat more positive demographic trends in the recent years resulting primarily from the positive balance of total migrations or a higher number of those who moved to the city than the number of those who moved out of the city in internal migrations...Natural increase in the city of Zagreb is a bit higher than the Croatian average which reflects young age structure of its inhabitants resulting from immigration...The population of the city of Zagreb, like in majority of other European metropolises, is not increased primarily due to the natural increase but mainly due to immigration flows i.e. new immigrants..

[https://www.zagreb.hr/UserDocImages/Demografija/Novija%20demografska%20kretanja%20u%20Gradu%20Zagrebu%20\(nakon%20popisa\)%202011.-2017.%20godine.pdf](https://www.zagreb.hr/UserDocImages/Demografija/Novija%20demografska%20kretanja%20u%20Gradu%20Zagrebu%20(nakon%20popisa)%202011.-2017.%20godine.pdf)



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communities, particularly capitals whether it refers to workers (or employers) from other countries, existing or new minorities, refugees – all these groups should represent a potential for the development of cultural pluralism of Croatian society. On the other hand, we also witness completely opposite trends – closing off, xenophobia and racism. Opening spaces such as the intercultural social center and giving them relevance would promote intercultural social practices which could contribute to the development of an open pluralistic society and to Zagreb as an open city by means of wide array of programs and diverse partnership activities.

Thus, Platform Upgrade, initially gathered around Alliance Operation City, connected (and still connects) organizations active in fields as diverse as independent culture, sustainable living, intercultural issues and integrations. Since its creation, the main goal of the Platform has been the establishment of the intercultural social center as a new type of hybrid institution which responds to the needs of wider city development, civil society and local community, while the focal point through which the Platform achieves its goal is the campaign “Zagreb – open city?”. The campaign has been running since 2016 with changing intensity.

In the last 4 years, the Platform has implemented numerous public activities (artistic, cultural, educational and discursive) with the aim to increase the awareness of the need for the establishment of the intercultural social center, but also with the aim to increase awareness of the significance of the topics tackled by the members of the Platform Upgrade, such as: culture and arts, environmental issues, interculturality and integrations. At the same time, the Platform’s efforts on establishing the new type of socio-cultural center are closely connected to the reflection on the model of civil-public partnership which could respond to such an array of needs. In that respect Platform Upgrade is now one of the focal points in which significant questions converge: the question of governance of public infrastructure and upgrading the existing models of civil-public partnerships, the questions of comprehensive creation of practices of cultural and social pluralism, the response to the community needs for strengthening such practices and opening the perspective of intercultural society.

## 2. Context of Platform Upgrade

The context of the Platform’s operation, particularly its external factors, has influenced not only the operation itself but also the achievement of its goals. It is important to mention that the context in which the Platform operates is specific since it is the subject to wider social and



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cultural influences and transformations than the ones affecting organizations active in one field only. Therefore, circumstances and policies that affect the Platform include cultural policies and strategies, environmental policies, youth policies, integration policies, policies relating to governance of spaces and public goods, policies and strategies relating to social entrepreneurship, and finally strategies relating to civil society in Croatia. This complexity is most prominently reflected in the fact that besides common challenges posed to advocating for the intercultural social center each platform member also brings its specific challenges in dealing with its own topics and obstacles for achieving goals. This resulted in some platform members being forced to focus more on the challenges in their individual fields and some to close down completely.

The statement that such context and conditions in which the Platform operates and works towards its goals is challenging is an understatement. The Platform itself in the five years of its existence has seen periods of intensive activity and support and periods of meagre resources and capacities for “survival”. Great influence on such turbulences has had the institutional framework within which the Platform Upgrade operates and which includes all abovementioned strategies and public policies. Systemic changes within the institutional framework are always slow and demand series of changes and adjustments, while the subjects operating within this framework cannot make significant progress without adequate institutional solutions. The Platform Upgrade is one of those subjects whose inventions and goals step out of the possibilities offered by the system. However, we shouldn't forget that some innovations in the system are always possible, which can be perceived as anomalies, that “push” the system to adjust and that what used to be perceived as anomaly be adopted as a part of a better functioning system. Of course, this refers to innovations that have proved to be best practices such as Pogon – Zagreb Center for Independent Culture and Youth that was the only such case in Croatia and South Eastern Europe at the moment of its establishment (co-founded by the City of Zagreb and Alliance Operation City as the model of civil-public partnership. The Platform Upgrade follows this case in reflecting on the governance model. The difference is that the governance model for the intercultural social center demands additional thinking, testing and innovations in the system.

### **The context of socio-cultural centers: closer to governance, further from spaces**



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One of the most prominent changes that exists today as opposed to the time when the Platform Upgrade was established is a greater attention that is being paid to civil-public partnership itself by public institutions relevant for cultural policy. Thus, Foundation Kultura nova has organized a series of public and educational activities (conferences and workshops) on the topic of participatory governance and conducted case studies of 7 socio-cultural centers in Croatia. These activities have resulted in two important publications that are now considered the basic literature for the topic of civil-public partnership in Croatia, namely: Radna bilježnica za društveno -kulturne centre, 2015 (Notebook for socio-cultural centers) and "Uradimo zajedno. Prakse i tendencije sudioničkoga upravljanja u kulturi u Republici Hrvatskoj.", 2018 (Let's do it together: Practices and tendencies of participatory governance in culture in the Republic of Croatia).

Further, the Ministry of Culture announced in 2018 a public call "Kultura u centru - potpora razvoju javno-civilnog partnerstva u kulturi" (Culture in the center – support for the development of public-civil partnership in culture), financed by European Social Fund and co-financed by the Ministry of Culture. This call is the first type of systemic support on the national level for participatory governance and it is the first institutional recognition of the values of common governance of public goods on the level that goes beyond local public policies. However, even though on one hand it was evident that there is good will to support the concept of civil-public partnership and participatory governance of public infrastructure as a proven good practice, on the other hand there is a continuous shrinking of actual spaces for activities. For example, spaces for independent culture (but also civil society, in general) have become very scarce. Independent cultural organizations which already govern spaces and organize their various activities in them (visual and performing, public and discursive, engaging the community, etc.) very often operate in inadequate spaces with unsolved ownership issues or leases which don't guarantee any security for keeping the space they invested in or is expired. Further, the mentioned organizations which govern those spaces are very few while a much greater number of independent cultural and civil society organizations have commercial leases whose high expenses force them to use ad-hoc solutions such as co-working and sharing costs. The public spaces governed by organizations are not maintained by the public owners so the organizations have to invest their meager funds for maintenance or, if there is a possibility, invest voluntary community work which uses such spaces. Therefore, even is there is a tendency to support initiatives which advocate for models of participatory governance of public



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infrastructure in collaborations with local governments, such tendency is not followed by public policies related to the governance of public infrastructure on local or national level. This is a clear indicator that there is still no basic understanding that the models of civil-public partnership, which have been developed in Croatia in the last ten years, are not followed by the development of public policies relating to the governance of public infrastructure or policies relating to providing spaces to be co-governed according to the good practices of participatory models.

Accordingly, scarcity and shrinking the space for action has led to the situation in which the spaces mapped already in 2016 as potential accommodation for the intercultural social center have been largely either commercialized or entered the processes of bringing them to the purposes not in compliance with the requirements of the intercultural social center. Therefore, the Platform currently faces the lack of concrete space to which it could direct its advocacy demands and/or in which it could test the model of the intercultural social center both on governance and program level.

This situation inevitably has repercussions on the governance model that is being developed by the Platform Upgrade, and on the context in which the Platform tries to conceive the governance model without having a concrete space, while that model should be used with some modifications in the space the Platform advocates for.

### 3. Step beyond – towards inclusive culture

Despite the lack of a concrete space for the intercultural social center, the Platform Upgrade has continued through 2019 and 2020 to connect actors, develop models, organize advocacy activities and develop program principles. By connecting organizations, initiatives and individuals it organizes and implements activities which could be the basis for such a center. In 2019 and 2020 in collaboration with its partners it has implemented a series of activities with the aim to raise awareness of the need for the intercultural social center, to strengthen the capacities of the organizations and their mutual collaboration.

The following activities have been implemented:



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1. Research of organizational needs and resources, including three focus groups in February 2019
2. A series of cultural activities in different city locations:
  - African night: dance and gastronomy event, AKC Attack, March 2019
  - BadCo: Iskop, 2 dance performances, Pogon Jedinstvo, April 2019
  - Intercultural concert: Kazan and Monseiur Domani, Močvara, May 2019
  - Intercultural concert: Ifriqiyya Electricque, Močvara, May 2019
  - Public galleries: collective Krenimo, Tuškanac - Krešičeve livade, June 2019
  - Days of Dugave, park in Dugave, June 2019
    - Together for an open and inclusive society, panel discussion
    - Intercultural lunch
    - Living library
    - Workshops of the intercultural content production  
(African masks and dances, graffiti making, labels making)
  - Colorful stories: Ives Buljan Gladović, theatre performance for children, Booksa, June 2019
  - Situations: The City Performs: Alejandro Chellet, September 2019
  - Public galleries: Colors in the park Goran Pavić Sefo, Modul Osam, Anonimus, Panda, Score; September 2019
  - Literary event with Brazilian writer Vinicius Jatoba, Booksa, November 2019
  - Arabian night: dance and gastronomy event, AKC Attack, September 2019
  - Festa Balkanica: dance and gastronomy event, Zbor Xop and DJ Sero, AKC Attack, November 2019
  - Colorful stories: Ives Buljan Gladović, theatre performance for children, OŠ Gustav Krklec, Travno, November 2019
  - Literary event with Aminatta Forna, Booksa, November 2019
  - Situations: Prince Wale Soniyiki, November 2019
  - Public galleries: OHOHO zine, November 2019
  - LAB 6000: Moving faces – interactivity of materials, workshop, Vedran Relja and Goran Mahovlić; Kontejner, December 2019



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3. 2 workshops for the development of the model of the intercultural social center
4. Education on intercultural dialogue: basic knowledge and critical perspectives for the development of cultural dialogue; June/November 2019

#### 4. Organizational needs and the intercultural social center

Independent cultural organizations already in 2016 identified the need for extending the existing platform to organizations working on social development in a broad sense. This process was continued in 2019. In the process of extension there was a research of organizational needs and their possible contributions to the future intercultural social center. During 2019 we organized three focus groups which helped us to become familiar with the activities and plans of the included organizations. The focus groups also examined their resources and needs to which the functional intercultural social center could respond. The focus groups were conducted in February 2019. [8]

The focus groups and common discussions revealed that the included organizations have interests, experiences and certain resources and activities to share in the Intercultural social center.

The messages sent by the organizations in this process are:

- There is a potential for collaboration, knowledge exchange, extending the number of actors and communication circle
- The participants find it important to work with the social and political context
- It is important to develop concepts which offer a possibility of direct contact and communication, which directly engage people
- It is important to rely on long term work and the work of the Platform Upgrade

The participating organizations define their resources:



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- Implementing activities and programs for the intercultural social center
- Having organizational spaces for the preparation and implementation of individual activities
- Having equipment for the organization of activities
- Having knowledge and experiences in their field of work
- Having experience of previous collaborations among organizations from various fields

However, for the intercultural social center the key needs as defined by the participants are:

1. Space or spaces for activities
2. Defining the principles on which the intercultural social center will work (this process has begun and the current status is described in the earlier chapters),
3. The manner in which activities are coordinated – sharing information on activities and networking (the role of the Platform Upgrade)
4. Development of new common activities

## 5. The framework for the program development of the intercultural social center

### a. Principles on which the intercultural social center works resulting from the process so far [11]

It has already been stressed that the work of the intercultural social center contributes to the development of a culturally plural society, promotes intercultural and social dialogue based on equality and inclusivity. The principles of governance of the intercultural social center are based on the values of participatory governance and the concept of civil-public partnership as mentioned in previous chapters.

The research of organizational needs pointed to the need for recognizing and defining common principles on which activities are based. The principles of programming were discussed in workshops on intercultural dialogue and in meetings on planning the model of the intercultural social center during 2019 and 2020.



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On the level of principles: program activities of the intercultural social center are governed horizontally and equally while respecting the values of the included organizations. Activities should be inclusive, open, joint (between the intercultural social center and the organizers, between organizers and users), with clearly communicated content [13] and accessible to those who want to take part in them.

Program principles and the work of the intercultural center should reflect the wanted social and cultural pluralism, promote solidarity and equality. Governance-programming structure of the intercultural social center should allow for proposing and participating in programming, development of new activities and governance.

The operational framework and procedures should be clear and the information on them accessible to individuals, initiatives and organizations so they can have a clear image of the whole intercultural social center and the ways in which they can contribute to its operation. The coordination of programs and activities, inclusion of individuals and groups, sharing information, collaboration and complementarity of programs of the intercultural social center result from these principles.

## **b. Program profile of ISC**

The intercultural social center through its activities contributes to social dialogue and integration understood as a two-way process in which people live together while respecting dignity of each individual, common good, plurality and diversity, non-violence and solidarity, as well as the capacity to participate in social, cultural, economic and political life. Integration strategies have to cover all social areas and include social, political and cultural aspects. [1]

ISC accepts intercultural dialogue – as an open and dignified exchange of opinions and actions between individuals, groups of diverse ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage with common understanding and respect and understands this is present on all levels – within one society, among different societies, between Europe and the rest of the world [2]

As the goals of intercultural dialogue ISC accepts:



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- creating inclusive society in which individuals and groups are not marginalized or excommunicated
- promoting the principles of democratic culture, will for dialogue, will to let others express their opinions, capacity to solve conflicts in peaceful manner and to recognize the grounded arguments of others
- promoting the respect of human rights and democracy
- strengthening democratic stability and fight against prejudices and stereotypes in public life and political discourse

Intercultural social center is a socio-cultural center which:

1. On the social level opens up intercultural dialogue among individuals and groups both within cultures and the society in Croatia and between members of different cultures and societies
2. In its own operations ISC is an example of intercultural dialogue
3. ISC is a resource for the development of cultural and social programs which promote cultural pluralism, intercultural exchange, solidarity and transformation of inequalities in the society
4. ISC offers to the wider public cultural and socially engaged programs which promote social and cultural pluralism, intercultural exchange, social solidarity and transformation of inequalities in the society

The innovative programming of ISC lies in the fact that its operation surpasses so far highlighted normative and political dimension of intercultural dialogue and showcases “more efficient implementations of intercultural dialogue in practice”, the need which was clearly identified in public policies. [3]

### c. Social orientation of intercultural dialogue

*Programs of intercultural education can be: **contributinal**–oriented toward content, such as informing and learning on other cultures, **additional**–such as additional language learning or learning about culture or socially directed (action oriented and transformational). The goal of*



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*socially oriented programs of intercultural education is to **promote intercultural understanding and social justice as well as to prevent racism, prejudices and discrimination, by adopting the principles of human rights, equality and pluralism. Socially oriented programs pay attention to understanding social problems and the role of social actions in solving them while they develop participants' skills of critical thinking, participation in decision-making, team work and social engagement.** [4]*

*ISC's programs are characterized by **being socially oriented**,ISC's activities represent a direct intercultural practice.*

As opposed to contributonal or additional activities which include content on other cultures only on the level of familiarization with the content or additional information but not on the level of transformation of the monocultural structure, [5] by the typology of its approach, programs and activities of ISC are oriented toward developing transformational and action programs and processes. As such, ISC on the level of values circumvents the conservative approach of "teaching the other", surpasses the liberal approach which teaches only "about" intercultural sensitivity and tolerance or multicultural competences. These approaches are not enough for creating equality and egalitarianism. Therefore, ISC should nurture critical approach which includes socio-political context [6]. Such choice of the approach surpasses cultural initiative in its narrow sense and becomes the terrain for work on social equality – expands cultural determinations to socio-political contextualization of cultural practices and behavioural patterns as well as identifies influences of power and oppression of social groups.[7]

ISC activities do not stop at the celebration of cultural diversity, development of intercultural sensitivity, tolerance and minority education, but open the space for:

- Understanding and achieving social justice,
- Structural understanding of inequality and oppression of individuals and groups,
- Promoting solidarity and intersectionality, personal and collective capacitating and social transformation –
- Encouraging all included to question personal biases and privileges
- Opening the road to solidarity and transformation.



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When developing its programs ISC uses solidarity, respect, transformation and collaborative operationalization. When planning and developing new programs ISC uses action research which monitors and evaluates implemented activities, and based on it ISC plans modifications and new cycles of activities.

## 6. FURTHER WORK OF THE PLATFORM UPGRADE

The Platform Upgrade will continue to advocate for the establishment of the intercultural social center in the coming period, develop participative governance models for such center and connect with actors from different fields of action.

Further work of the Platform Upgrade will include:

- A. Campaign “Zagreb – open city?”
- B. Development of common organizational resources such as space and equipment
- C. Exchange of knowledge and experiences in order to increase capacities of the included organizations
- D. Connecting to academic community in the field of interculturality and measuring impact of the intercultural social center.

## 7. ADVOCACY DEMANDS

In this document the Platform Upgrade states its advocacy demands directed at decision-makers on local and national level as well as to relevant institutions which contribute to the sustainability and development of civil society in Croatia. Advocacy demands of the Platform Upgrade include three levels: 1) institutional framework, 2) governing of public infrastructure and 3) programming. Advocacy demands are as follows:

1. Align public policies relating to governing public infrastructure with public policies relating to the support and development of participative governance models
2. Encourage partnerships with relevant public bodies on local and national level (Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Interior Affairs, Ministry of Social Policy and Youth, Government)



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Office for Cooperation with NGOs, National Foundation for Civil Society Development, Foundation Kultura nova, City of Zagreb) to promote and develop intercultural dialogue by passing relevant public policies and measures

4. Establish and equip one of the existing larger public spaces in the City of Zagreb as the intercultural social center in such a way as to be appropriate for specific spatial requirements for common activities of civil society organizations active in the field of intercultural dialogue
  5. Encourage ministries in charge of specific areas in which civil society organizations are active to promote intercultural dialogue through programs of support to civil society
  6. Encourage the National Foundation for Civil Society Development to support development of such activities either through the existing or new programs in order to capacitate organizations for intercultural dialogue
  7. Encourage Foundation Kultura nova to provide support activities which promote intercultural dialogue in the field of independent culture
  8. Develop common resources such as space and equipment and share knowledge in order to increase capacities of civil society organizations
  9. Include programs directed at the development of intercultural dialogue in future Operational programs of the European Social Fund
10. Introduce interculturality as one of priorities in the context of program lines for financing cultural activities, work market programs or educational activities (within the jurisdiction of ministries relevant for these fields).



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[1] Bijela knjiga o međukulturnom dijalogu (2011.): »Živimo zajedno jednaki u dostojanstvu«, Agencija za odgoj i obrazovanje

[2] ibid

[3] Poglia, Mauri-Brusa, Fumasoli, 2007.

[4] **contributonal approach** – implies inclusion of content on other cultures on the level of information;

**Additional approach** – implies adding to the existing curricula content, topics or concepts from other cultures but without changing the monocultural structure of the curricula;



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**Transformational approach** – implies the change of the structure of the existing curricula by encouraging students to develop critical thinking and multi-perspective approaches to thinking about cultural differences

**Action approach** – implies the development of students as active social subjects who express their own opinions about the state public policies relating to diversity ((Banks, 2002)

[6] Gorski, P. (2009), Intercultural education as social justice. *Intercultural Education*, 20 (2), 87-90.

[7] Lane, S.D., Reese, V.O. (2012) "Ah hah!" Moments: Personal Notes on Culture, Identity, and Pedagogy

[8] 3 focus groups were conducted in February 2019 in the framework of the project Korak dalje prema uključivoj kulturi, financed through the call of European Social Fund: Kultura u centru.



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