Creative Industries in Communist Romania

1970 - 1989

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Introduction and purpose

A buzz word of the 21st century, *creativity* is associated with individuals, products, jobs, industries or places as being perceived as *creative* is a most desirable outcome in today's democratic, free and self-expressive society. For some regions around the globe, external pressure and maybe social trends inhibited the creative factor on an individual scale, but in other countries producing or using original and unusual ideas was, and in a few cases still is, illegal.

In order for creativity to be born, survive and develop at a national level, it needs certain social and political conditions which not only permit its growth but also encourages it and nurtures it. Democracy and liberal values have always been perceived as the best opportunity for individuals to express themselves freely in different forms. However, history has proved that the lack of these principles could either mean that creativity as a whole is eliminated or that it simply develops away from public's and authority's eyes.

In my research I will focus on the case of Romania and its capital, Bucharest, an Easter European country which was under the Communist regime until the 1990s. After 40 years of a powerful system which not only restricted and censored creativity but pushed it towards a single goal and into a unique theme, Romania went through 20 more years of revitalisation and accommodation to the new status and climate (including the one of EU state from 2007). Today, Romania is desperately trying to adapt to the Western standards of life and economy by becoming more self-aware and self-expressive.

For the past 20 years I heard about the social and cultural scenes of Romania and especially of Bucharest, my home town, in the Communist era. Most of the stories have become urban myths and have even been turned into award winning movie scripts. With this research report I will look into how some of the "creative industries" listed by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport in 2001 were being perceived in the Communist regime in Romania. The main question I will answer is:

Considering the strict regime, how have creativity and the creative industries emerged and developed in Romania pre-1989?

After analysing previous works on creativity, the creative environment and the creative industries, I will continue with my own research and results: an interview based analysis of the creative fields before the 1990. I will address 4 people of different backgrounds and over 50 years old meaning they were old enough when the regime ended so they were able to understand and evaluate the situation objectively. Also, I will refer to policies and documents of the time to ensure the validity of the answers.

About creativity

Defining creativity proved to be a very elaborated and complicated process over the years as for most academics and theoreticians it is generally viewed as "quite a mystical affair" (Florida, 2002:30) although today "it is one of the most used and abused terms" (Negus and Pickering, 2004:1). Hartley (2005:118) simply defines it as "having a new idea", one that is personal, original, meaningful and useful, while Florida (2002:5) views it as "an ability to create meaningful new forms". It seems that the novelty of the artefact is not all that matters as regardless of the perspective it is analysed from, (psychology, sociology, urbanism or management) creativity must be "innovation with a purpose" Bilton (2007).

Pope (2005) also analyses the concept by looking at it through various fields and paradigms. He sums all his findings in a very unique definition, one which claims that creativity is an "extra/ordinary, original and fitting, full-filling, in(ter)ventive, co-operative, un/conscious, fe<>male, re…creation" (Pope, 2005: 52). He thus includes within it all the parallels and confusions around the term such as its miraculous nature, the variable level of novelty, the different number of minds which can be involved in it, its rationale and gender. Once again, he only stressed the impossibility of giving an exact definition for this abstract term which can be influenced by such a wide variety of factors.

The origin of creativity is still a mystery as it is either perceived as a quality people are born with or a skill that can be trained and developed across time. Ideas on creativity as a process were born more that two thousand years ago when philosophers were trying to spread the view that creation "ad nihilo" (from nothing) would have been impossible even for God himself (Boden, 1990:2). However, it was only in the mid-twentieth century that "creativity" became a problematic concept in the public sphere as the rise of capitalism turned it into one of its most "prized commodities" (Pope, 2005:19). One thing is for sure: the meanings of creativity, of being creative and of the creatives have changed significantly with each stage of the development of the Western societies and their values as at the highest level, "creativity should involve great acts by great individuals" (Kong and O'Conner, 2009:34). Those individuals are *the creatives*.

The creatives at work – climate for creativity

Toynbee (cited in Taylor, 1972:1) declares that any society has a moral duty to ensure that the individual's potential ability is given free play and that if, on the contrary, society sets itself to neutralise outstanding ability, it will bring upon itself a retribution for which it will have only itself to blame.

Charles Landry (2000:107) defines *the creatives* as "people who think resourcefully, openly and flexibly, who are willing to take intellectual risks, to think problems afresh and to be reflexive." Bearing in mind his definition and the ideas on creativity, it is time

to analyse the environment in which they are born, they exist and they flourish, in order to understand what the pre-requisites are for each society which aims to encourage its members and develop in the modern economy.

It is assumed that human beings are, under normal conditions of growth, creative (Taylor, 1972:31). However, as creativity is a function not only of imagination but also of knowledge and evaluation, a climate of trust, openness, self-determination and collaboration is needed in order for the creatives to function at their best potential. Considering the previous characteristics, Gibbs (in Taylor 1972:23) gives an example of conditions which tend to depress creativity and they include:

- Latent fear and distrust
- Restricted flow of communication
- Attempted imposition of motivation (such as stereotypy, apathy, routine or resistance)
- Attempted control of behaviour

It can be surely observed that all of the above are somehow attributes of closed societies, often led by rigid and totalitarian regimes. At certain moments, "the state may exert a decisive influence in the struggles to define aesthetic meaning, attributing explicitly ideological and political anchors to any form of art" and incorporating the aesthetic into "patterns of propaganda and domination" (Negus and Pickering, 2004:86). The most

common examples used are the Communist countries, the Nazis and more recent the Taliban regime where facts and research proved that people are not allowed to do anything that might interact with the enforced ideologies and so the production and interpretation of creative work was considered a huge threat. People were often punished for their art and all creativity approved was integrated into one theme and one subject only: praise for the party and its ruler. But does this mean that in countries in which the ruling political party determined and strictly monitored each step of their citizens creativity died?

Wallace and Howard explain in *"Creative people at work"* (1989:280) that what creative work requires most is inner freedom. However, history proved that this doesn't always coincide with the freedom of expression and this form does not always favour creativity as many ideas "often proceeded successfully under oppressive outward conditions" and generally in opposition to them. Also, Simonton (cited in Pfenninger and Shubik, 2001:213) in his studies of external factors which influence creativity discovered that political fragmentation and civil disturbance actually have a major positive impact on an adult's productivity and expression, however, instability had the opposite effect. Still, creativity associated with counter-dependent rebellion is quite impossible to organise due to extreme censorship measures and thus be used in helpful ways in the development of society.

The creative industries

Before proceeding to the findings of the current research, one more concept needs to be defined, the peculiar association between "creativity" and "industry": the creative industries. The definition emerged in Australia in the 1990s and it was gradually developed and encouraged in the UK under Tony Blair (Hartley, 2005:118). The creative industries are defined by the British Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) as: "...those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent which have a potential for job and wealth creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property" (DCMS, 2001).

John Hartley explains that the idea of the *creative industries* seeks "to describe the conceptual and practical convergence of the creative arts (as individual talent) with Cultural Industries (mass scale) in the context of New Media technologies. He claims that the mix is a case of democratising culture in the context of commerce and monetizing ideas in a consumer culture. Taking things further, in August 2000 Business Review introduced the concept of the creative economy. Therefore, nowadays, "people who own ideas have become more powerful than those who work machines and in some cases even more powerful than those who own machines." (Howkins, 2002)

No study on creativity and creative industries can be complete without mentioning one of the most controversial and criticised theorists of our time, Richard Florida. He

emphasises that human creativity has become the ultimate economic resource (Florida, 2002) and that those who are paid for doing creative work (he includes here scientists, engineers, artists, musicians, designers and knowledge-based professionals) form the Creative Class. His studies analyse the connections between them and the places they work in by determining how to develop the best environment which would nurture and encourage the new class.

The DCMS defines the following sectors as creative fields:

- · advertising
- · architecture
- · art and antiques
- · computer games
- · crafts
- · design
- · designer fashion
- · film and video
- · music
- · performing arts
- · publishing
- · software
- · TV and radio.

As the computer games and software industries were completely inexistent in Romania before the 1990, they will be completely eliminated from this research. According to the findings, some fields will be left out or just briefly mentioned due to the complexity of the issues and political implications regarding them and the limitation of this work. These

include architecture, crafts and design. The most relevant fields to the current research are advertising, art, film, music, publishing and TV.

Methodology review

The main method of qualitative research in this paper is the *oral history* (Hoyle, 2002:408) an interview based analysis of the past, although certain quantitative data gathered from primary sources will be inserted in order to sustain points of view. The project was initially designed as a guide approach - structured interview, having specific steps and themes to be followed, but depending on the interviewees' answers it had to adapt and transform. Although some general areas of information were collected from each subject, no predetermined questions were put together allowing the format to change to the "informal, conversational" type (Patton cited in Bertrand 2005:77). The questions focused on behaviour, opinions, feelings, knowledge and background information.

Face to face interviews have a wide variety of advantages such as the ability of the interviewer to notice and correct misunderstandings, to probe inadequate and vague responses, to go into more depth as verbal answers are richer and more complex (Bertrand, 2005:74), overall to improve the quality of the information (Hoyle et al, 2002:102). However, the process is never totally objective as in many cases the interviewer's expectations and personal characteristics can influence responses (Bertrand, 2005:74 and Hoyle et al., 2002:102). Also, in terms of choosing the subjects, non-

probability - "snowball" sampling will be used (subjects suggesting other possible interviewees), and as the results of this analysis are not meant to be generalised and applied to a wider population the limited number of interviewees will not be an obstacle (Bertrand, 2005:65).

"Oral history research examines what people have to say about their past and therefore it can lead to insights about universal human experiences as well as an appreciation of how human nature has changed." (Hoyle, 2002:408) However, when dealing with such sensitive issues as investigating political regimes and the lifestyle they imposed, genuine, objective information is almost impossible to achieve. An external researcher would hit the culture and values barrier and fail to fully understand issues specific to a society he isn't a part of; while the internal researcher would find it hard to judge facts and events objectively without considering the effects they had on his own life and evolution (Kvale, 2008:144). On the other hand, finding the right interviewees is crucial as many can never go over the negative feelings they hold for the regime and therefore all answers could lead in one single direction.

In this particular paper, the interviewer, myself, lived in Romania, its society, culture and evolution climate, for the past 21 years, constantly hearing stories about the things that happened before the 1990. This allows a more objective approach, but in the same time one with deeper understanding of values and life principles. I am also a professional translator so I am authorised to translate the interviewees' responses. The 4 interviewees

come from different social backgrounds and areas of Romania to ensure variability but having in common the fact that they studied at universities in Bucharest during the Communist regime and that they are now over 50 years old, meaning that they recall all aspects of life before the 1990 and can objectively compare them to the present.

My 4 subjects are Laurentiu, Florentina, Viorel and Mariana who will be referred to as L, F, V and M. They have all been informed about the project and gave their official consent. The place for each of the interviews was the interviewee's home, an environment in which he was comfortable and relaxed.

Creative industries in Romania between 1970 and 1989

Communism in Romania can be divided into two stages: 1945 - 1970s and then 1970s - 1989, a division created by Ceausescu's visit to Korea and China. "If Communism was strict before observing the incredible Asian models, after the 1970 visit, everything went out of control" (L). The research will focus mainly on the second period as it was the one the interviewees experienced.

1. Advertising

One of the key condition for advertising to exist in an economy is definitely free market, meaning competition between brands and the freedom of choice of the consumer. None

of those actually existed in Romania during the Communist regime, "at least not openly" (L). On the one hand, the products that could be found in stores were strictly "made in Romania" in a wish to "emphasise the great economy of the country and its power to supply its citizens with all they needed" (L). On the other, many Western brands which already achieved "mythical status" (V), such as the "Impulse" deodorant or the "Palmolive" soap and the "Ness" coffee were traded secretly on the black market. Those again didn't need any advertising (and they definitely couldn't legally have it) as "the word of mouth was so powerful" (M), it made them the most desirable objects.

With one single brand of soap, detergent or even stockings freely available, an advert promoting them would seem useless. However, as V remembers, each day, Romanians had a 10 minute slot of "publicity" on TV, just before the news hour. Any promotional effort was limited to this as billboards, posters or radio slots were available only to the Party and its leader. The case of this country is very similar to the one of its neighbour, Hungary, where even if the regime was not as strict as in other Communist countries, ads were practically banned after the early 1950s because of notions that "socialist economy needs no advertisements." "Ads during the communist era often merely listed products, stores, and telephone numbers." (Hiebert, 1994)

The clips were "plain and simple, made just to remind you that a certain product was out there, available to be bought and help you live a wonderful socialist life" (M). Obviously every sentence used was carefully designed following certain patterns and including

specific propaganda placements, such as showing happy families, smiling children, workers and mostly the ruler of them all, Nicolae Ceausescu (M).

In terms of creativity, "although potential creative ability can be stifled, stunted and stultified by the prevalence in society of adverse attitudes" (Taylor, 1972:1), "one can't say the TV adverts were completely lacking it" (F) as "creativity is not only about a continuos invention of the new, but also how to deal appropriately with the old" (Landry, 2000:7). They constantly tried to bring something new to the previous spots or approach the customer from a different direction, even if overall, they all had to stick to that specific theme and genre "which after a few years we could all recognise" (F). Also, there were no creative directors or executives or any other form of official name for the advertiser's job; the people who produced the adverts were employers of the national television, all very careful to stick to the standards and "not lose their jobs" (F).

2. **Music, Film and Publishing**

According to a recent report on the Communist effects on Romania put together by the Presidential Commission, once the Soviets took control of the country, they imposed their view that literature and culture must be used for one purpose only: the promotion of the party's mission and statement (CPADCR, 2006:489). James (1973:1) mentions 3 basic principles of Soviet aesthetics: *narodnost* (literally people-ness meaning the relationship between art and the masses), *klassovost* (class-ness meaning the proletarian

characteristics of art), and *partiinost* (party-ness, the identification of art and artist with the Communist party and Soviet union).

As none were present in Romanian culture before, the first step was to eliminate any previous products which could interfere with their efforts meaning over 8000 authors and titles were placed on the "forbidden list", officially published in 1945 (CPADCR). Also, a main body was put together to govern the arts: The Superior Council of Literature and Music, one that would approve anything that would be played or published in the country according to Communist laws which followed closely the ideas of the "4 great classics: Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin" (V and mentioned in CPADCR). However, it has to be mentioned that Marx, compared to the others, praised human creativity and considered that "art is the highest form of creative activity and free creative activity, the highest form of work" (Sayers, 2003:114). Actually, he considers that human creativity actually distinguishes humans from all the other living beings, making it a part of the human nature.

Once again a parallel between the official and the un-official has to be discussed. The "legal" music, films and books in Romania, "although indeed of different genres such as love stories, family dramas, crime and history" (F), had very obvious messages behind each page (James, 1973:56): the "praise for the New Man and the New Society" and the adoration of the leaders (as portrayed in "The king of Communism" - 2003 BBC

Documentary on Nicolae Ceausescu and "Memories of My Youth In Communist Romania" by Artist Claudia French).

On the other hand, the black market of culture functioned as a connection to the Occident's publications, tapes and videotapes. F claims that she bought them mostly from Arab university colleagues who could easily bring them inside the country and then watched or read them late at night in her room. Also, L and V told me about the numerous times they put on their cut jeans and ripped T-shirts and attended secret underground gatherings where young people would meet to listen to Western bands such as Pink Floyd or the Sex Pistols, "a sentence to jail in case they got caught" (V). These gatherings were very inspiring for many students and actually, "one of Romania's most famous rock bands was born in 1977 at the <<7 o'clock underground club>>" (L) although many musicians were desperate to leave the country due to interrogations after concerts (for example, the case of Phoenix, a very popular folk band).

Despite all the censorship policies and the restrictions mentioned, all 4 of the interviewees claimed that some of the most valuable works of Romanian film, literature and music were produced in the Communist age, reinforcing Wallace and Gruber's statement (1989) that freedom of expression sometimes favours creativity. These were either published novels or approved films, so well produced that the freedom messages were camouflaged behind the official demands or illegal works which were passed from one reader to the other. L believes that creativity "reached some of its highest standards"

in that time with writers , filmmakers and musicians finding innovative ways of deceiving the system.

Also, many artists still created despite the impossibility of exhibiting their work and it existed "purely in the private world of the author" (Negus and Pickering, 2004:85). For example, Hungarian composer, Gyorgy Ligeti (cited in Negus and Pickering, 2004:86), stated that he wrote "simply for the sake of the music itself, from an inner need" as many of his works were produced for the "bottom drawer" as he couldn't even "dream of having them performed". He goes on explaining that "the West cannot imagine what it was like in the Soviet empire where art and culture were strictly regulated". Art had to be "healthy", "edifying" and "come from the people", in short "reflect the party directives".

3. Performing arts

The main productions within the performing arts of the Communist regime were the incredible spectacles put together for the Party, where "factory workers spent months rehearsing dance routines dressed as soldiers and gymnasts for huge shows at which thousands of citizens were lined up to form the words Nicolae Ceausescu with their bodies" (BBC, 2003). They closed down numerous theaters and venues in order to get all the attention towards the new scenes: huge stadiums.

F and M remember days from their childhood when they had to go to rehearsals for those shows. "Everything was so well organized and planned. We each had a colored spot on which we had to be at a certain moment and numbered cartons which we had to lift above our heads in order to create different images. The spectacle was absolutely amazing seen from above, from the official balcony". Again, through the combinations of movement, colors and music, the shows were definitely an expression of creativity, but in the end the reason they were put together for and the audience they had, make them another propaganda tool lacking originality and following the Korean and Chinese models.

4. TV

The only key aspect mentioned in the interviews regarding television is the restricted program. Although Romania had two official TV channels (TVR1 and TVR2), after 1970 they were only available for 2 hours a day, from 8 pm until 10pm. Out of these hours, one was occupied by the news and the latest achievements of Ceausescu and the Party and the other with different things according to the day of the week: "on weekends we always had cartoons like Bulgarian *Leca noci detza* or Romanian children's TV series". "One very funny and odd story was the banning of *Popey, the Sailor* as Olive looked a bit like Ceausescu's wife" (L). The lucky Romanians who lived close to the boarders could illegally get Bulgarian or Hungarian channels which were a delight for the entire family. Obviously, creativity can not be related to television in that era.

<u>Conclusion</u>

According to Negus and Pickering (2004), "creativity still involves working with recognisable codes, conventions and the expectations they generate". Therefore, creativity can still exist within a regulated system, although it has to function within the political rules and regulations. Also, its products could automatically be considered *creative products* and the people who create them could be called *creatives*.

Does this mean that we can consider that the creative industries did exist in Romania pre-1989 although according to Florida (2002:35) they can "only flourish in an environment stable enough to allow continuity of effort, yet diverse and broad-minded enough to nourish them in all subversive forms"?

The answers I got from the interviewees proved that the creative industries were indeed present in Communist Romania but they were allowed to develop to a certain extent. Some were obviously absent due to technological requirements, others were strictly monitored and others functioned on two different directions: the official and un-official. However, the lack of distribution channels of a public arena or outlet for the work "does not halt the creative process, but it does influence the form it takes" (Negus and Pickering, 2002:86), creativity at the individual level did not disappear, but on the contrary it developed new ways of expression.

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