

Culture of engaged sociology

This book features a collection of ten texts written in various academic formats and literary styles over a period of five years. The book is organized as a catalogue of discussions using different written tools, ranging from traditional sociological tools such as case studies, to more unconventional forms such as essays or even a letter. Inspired by the desire to present to the public a diachronical experiment with the ability to perform an informed assessment of relevant locally embedded social events and processes in real time, it presents a personal testimony of professional action during a time of frustrating institutional silence about issues of social relevance. The motivation for experimenting was triggered by the fact that there was no institutional support for such an endeavour. Therefore, the book is a retrospective testimonial of professional ethics as well as a presentation of the media formats used to disseminate informed insight into a situation of mediopolitically inspired censorship. However, the coherence of different topics and written formats collected in the book is assured by the qualitative method of participant observation as a research tool.

The book opens with a case study that reflects the socially innovative process of establishing a new type of higher education collaboration between two old public universities starting from totally different educational backgrounds and traditions. Reflecting the process in the context of globalization, the case study offers a structured description and contextual interpretation of the principal actors as well as informed insight into the limits of transformative institutional processes which are not locally supported by a political will for reform. The case study cited, discussing the cooperative project between a North American and a Croatian universities, is followed by a text written in the form of a letter at the beginning of 2007.

This very personal script entitled „A Letter to My Friends“, concerning a nontransparent urban development project, was chosen as an instant reaction aimed at breaking the media silence surrounding it. The problem discussed in this letter can be defined as a democratic deficit coupled with a media blockade, leaving the internet as the only immediate channel for dissemination. On another level, the letter's aim was to serve as a catalyst to build public awareness about the need to participate in the decision making process related to urban planning.

Therefore, a text published few months later on the local civil society initiative site, which dealt with the social context of the public protests in the heart of Croatia's capital, Zagreb, comes as a sequel to this letter. This text, entitled „The Flower Square Affaire“, focused on deconstructing the intentional disqualification endeavours spread in the mainstream media about the reasons for the protests.

As the insight into the social dynamics of the protests in Zagreb deepened, it became possible to understand the other latent variables that underpinned various platforms of contestations in the local civil society. This insight led to publication of a text entitled „Europe, immediately!“. Published in 2008, it explained the need for embracing the integration process without delay. The text argued that the catatonic character of transitional institutions cannot be reformed, and therefore empowered to productively regulate social reality without an integration incentive.

The growing discontent with the abuse of cultural heritage and untransparent public-private partnerships provoked a number of civil society protests across the country and led to a text entitled „Devouring the space is a development crisis of the State“. The text, with highly critical remarks on territorial public policies and discussing a number of anomic social features connected to inappropriate governmental policies, delineated a deep institutional crisis in Croatia. Three months after the publication of that text, the Croatia's Prime Minister voluntarily stepped down from office, thus initiating the still continuing political crisis in the country.

In 2010 a web site published text analysing the biased and unfair reporting of mainstream media on the character of civil protests in Croatia's capital, addressing the problem of the role of the media in a democracy. Another letter, entitled „Lifestyle editor for a lifestyle investor“ and submitted to a mainstream newspaper, was censored because it challenged the position of an editor and his responsibility to honest reporting. The highly contested and nontransparently planned project on the mountain Srđ above the Old Town of Dubrovnik, led to the publication of a text entitled „Full beds above the empty Town“ in 2011, while the „barbaric intrusion“ of a huge shopping mall in the historic perimeter of the old town of Korčula led to another internet disseminated text in 2012.

By the end of 2012 it was possible to publish an academic article in a peer reviewed compendium thus allowing a professional sociologist to define a problem within a wide professional circle with similar understandings of the ongoing social processes. The participant observation undertaken during the mentioned five years' period ushers the need for more research and greater focus on written analyses in order to explain the transformative processes of land use and urbanization in post-transitional societies.