

VLADIMIR RUKAVINA – MASTER OF FESTIVITY SOCIAL CHANGE AND CULTURAL POLICY FROM ABOVE

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Vladimir Rukavina is one of the most important and steadfast figures of the post-socialist transition in Maribor. The Festival Lent, which he and his team have been organizing annually for more than twenty years, is the biggest open-air festival in Slovenia and among fifty most distinguished events in Europe. The festival is an excellent case to analyse social dynamics in post-socialist transition of the city of Maribor. Author discusses how far society and history have influenced individual choices and attitude of Vladimir Rukavina, and how far has he been able to change the paradigm of social imagination.

Keywords: festival, ritual, person, sponsorship, politics, mass media, Slovenia

Vladimir Rukavina sodi med najpomembnejše in najbolj etabrirane posameznike, ki so zaznamovali posocialistično tranzicijo v Mariboru. Festival Lent, ki ga s sodelavci vsako leto prireja že več kot dve desetletji, je največji festival na prostem v Sloveniji in sodi med petdeset najbolj uglednih tovrstnih prireditev v Evropi. Dogodek predstavlja tudi odličen primer za analizo družbene dinamike v času posocialistične tranzicije. Avtor v prispevku razpravlja, v kolikšni meri sta družba in zgodovina vplivali na prirediteljeve odločitve in stališča ter v kolikšni meri je sam uspel preoblikovati paradigmo družbenega imaginarija.

Ključne besede: festival, ritual, posameznik, sponzorstva, politika, množični mediji, Slovenija

INTRODUCTION

It is historically and epistemologically logical for the social sciences and humanities to describe individuals through their relations with natural and social environments, cultures, or networks: “methodological collectivism” continues to be a central basis of anthropology (Rapport 2002: 455). An individual’s value and position in society is diverse and multi-sited. First, this is through his or her physical surroundings, or observable worlds. Second, an individual is “embedded” cognitively and emotionally (in language, knowledge, customs, ideology, emotions, and group belonging). Larger stratified and mass media additionally alienate the circulation of information. A person has a physical map and a cognitive map, which are inseparable and may include “close” or “distant,” and “social” and “natural” points, structures, and relations (Gell 2001). The dynamics between an individual and his or her surroundings change over social and personal time and space. Individualism, as it is perceived today, is a historically (and spatially) conditioned interpretation of the individual role in (urban, capitalist) society (Leach 1970 [1954]; Carrithers, Collins, & Lukes 1985; Douglas 1986; Rapport 2002).

This article tests the possibilities of describing the interrelation between an individual, the social arena, and history. One can only understand social processes by describing people’s movement, behavior, and opinions, especially of those that have importantly influenced processes of interest. The same is valid for so-called social structures or institutions (as

human organizations or codes). On the other hand, one can only describe an individual by monitoring his or her behavior in the social context. This context may be present in the form of various social institutions, the landscape or architecture (place), or duration and tradition (time). An individual is born into the social context. From this perspective, there are no big or small individuals in ethnography because all are “representatives,” “members,” and “creators” of various social entities. By emphasizing only distinguished individuals, anthropology is actually following the path of old historiography: recall why and how the new French historical school of Fernand Braudel (the *Annales* School) tried to avoid exactly such a reduction of history and society—and, strangely enough, introduced elements of ethnology, history from below, long-term social-history, and so on. Methodological individualism has a long academic history, but contemporary interest in influential persons in (western and eastern) anthropology should, in my opinion, also be explained through dominant political economy and the ideology of the self.

It was quite a challenge to write about my hometown contemporary and distant colleague. The main question was how to position myself as an observer, describer, and interpreter. The interviews for this research unintentionally overlapped with the rising political, mass media, and public evaluation of Rukavina’s work and especially the forthcoming 2015 Lent Festival, which already suffered from public budget cuts and program reductions (Cehnar & Bezjak 2015). This certainly contributed to the currency of my work in the eyes of my informants. However, the media and political exposure of Vladimir Rukavina, and other peoples’ personal statements on his time, work, and character, led me to decide not to disclose another five informants, his colleagues, and friends. I wish to build a case on the post-communist transition of “Maribor’s identity” without focusing only on contemporary political and media issues and with minimal damage to the people that have trustingly shared their thoughts for my pleasure. I wish to present ambiguous attitudes that Rukavina has created in this small central European town and the socio-historical mechanisms involved. What has made this particular individual exceptional in this particular urban community?

In addition to many newspaper advertisement and reports, I was able to find only a few research texts (bachelor’s theses and essays). Interest in the Lent Festival came from various faculties and departments (geography, economics, tourism, and design). Vladimir Rukavina never appeared in these works, whereas he was permanently on display in the mass media. The majority of bachelor’s theses deal with the tourism potential of the festival: its history, public recognition, and critique (Breznik 2011; Makovecki 2012; Čirić 2014; Falež 2014; Dragšič 2015). Cizl (2011) wrote an interesting bachelor’s thesis on the overall logo of the Lent Festival. Vlasta Stavbar (2002) wrote an article on the history of the Slovenian Cultural Center (*Narodni dom*), and Alenka Klemenčič (2011) graduated with an insider analysis of the logistics of the international Lent Festival. Secondary school research projects, another source of reference, follow the same historical path of the festival as “an important European cultural event.” Students were also interested in the festival’s setting: the north

bank of the Drava River known as Lent (Marzidovšek 1990; Kralj 2003; Kešpert 2006). Sociology, anthropology, and psychology are absent, except for occasional critical essays on the general condition of the city's cultural production and the role of the Slovenian Cultural Center and its Lent Festival (e.g., Antončič 2012, 2013). Ethnography could have been part of the insider story by Klemenčič (2011; logistics as "human organization") but, due to her program, the managerial language of human "factors" and "resources" prevailed. The opinion surveys by Breznik (2011), Falež (2014), and Dragšič (2015) are probably the closest to "ethnography."

Information collected through interviews is of central importance here because I understand this research to be a primary anthropological contribution to further sociocultural analysis of Maribor, its cultural industry, leadership styles, and so on. The ethnomethodology of interviews consists of several facts: informants' descriptions are rhetorically organized as management of facts: discoveries of past and present events correspond to the speaker's situation and memory, and the interlocutor constructs the nature of an event or a person, combines a description and evocation, and offers judgements (Levinson 1983; Edwards 1997: 21, 114; Gross 2000).

"PRIMUS INTER PARES"

Rokavina was born in Maribor in 1958, when it was still part of Yugoslavia. He experienced his childhood and youth in the center of this industrial city, where he also received most of his education, up to a degree in law (from the University of Maribor) and a degree in economics (from the Maribor Faculty of Applied Business and Social Sciences).

Local patriotism and communitarianism are very important elements of Rukavina's character and narration. While performing his thirteen months of military service, Rukavina "escaped" from the barracks in Ljubljana 222 times, which is surely an impressive achievement for a 260-kilometer round trip by rail: yet, he just wanted to "touch Maribor," have a drink with his friends, and "resist the army." The interview is full of statements about preserving his personal freedom under the constraints of powerful institutions. Other informants expressed great admiration and respect toward him and his accomplishments.

His great-grandfather Martin Čretnik was the head of the Slovenian Cultural Center in Trieste when Italian fascists burned it down in 1920: this makes Rukavina a member of the third generation of Slovenian emigrants from the Littoral, who played important role in the making of twentieth-century Maribor (see Potočnik 2015). During the Second World War, Čretnik's daughter (Rukavina's grandmother) hid the well-known Partisan, officer, and people's hero Miloš Zidanšek. Her husband (Rukavina's grandfather) made shoes for soldiers in the Partisans' Pohorje Battalion in the same war. The statement "we were always leftist, even though we never officially joined the party" clearly indicates his family tradition and influences his personal stance in contemporary society.

Let me briefly outline some points from Rukavina's professional life. Starting at the end of 1970s, he was president of Maribor Student Cultural Art Association (for five years). Later he worked as the assistant music and events producer at the Federation of Cultural Organizations in Maribor. He organized the Festival of Folklore Groups of Yugoslavia in Maribor (1983). At the same time, he became the Secretary General of the Maribor Union of Cultural Organizations, and in 1989 president of the Folkart International Folklore Festival. In 1991/1992, he became the chief executive officer (CEO) of Maribor's Slovenian Cultural Center and president of the international Lent Festival. He was a member of the advisory board at the International Festivals and Events Association (IFEA Europe 1992–1994), a member of its executive committee from 1994 to 1998, and an ambassador since 2004), and a member of the board of directors at IFEA world (1996–1998; a member of its president's council in 1998). From 2006 to 2008, he participated in the Slovenian government's Strategic Council for Culture, Science, and Education. He was president of the European Capital of Culture – Maribor 2012 (2008–2010), and acting director of the Maribor 2012 Public Institute.

What do all of these experiences and jobs have in common? I can outline a strong interest in event management, international recognition, and commitment to Maribor.

Rukavina's oral history for my research started with his promising career in basketball, which he had to give up because of a conflict with the coach's son. Being simultaneously active in a folkdance group and holding the position of president in it, he used every opportunity to promote the group's artistic work and find financial support. His first major breakthrough was a tour of Malta in 1980, enabled by arrangements he made with its minister of culture during his basketball visit to the island. Later on, while on a tour of Belgium, he met a count, who offered him the opportunity to perform in Quebec. The Student Folkdance Group (*Foklorna skupina Študent*) became very successful, homogeneous, and motivated under the leadership of Rukavina and dance choreographer Vasja Samec. "Always, when I had a vision, they laughed at me. At the beginning, they did not take me seriously at all But I could also drink much more than others This is all rubbish, but it earns you respect."

In 1991, right after the Slovenian war of independence, when Rukavina was already working at the Maribor Federation of Cultural Organizations, the municipal administration was planning to open a cultural production center, which would bring together cultural events and program scattered around various (non-professional) organizations in the town. Due to having dropped out of school, thirty-three-year-old Rukavina seemed inappropriate to head such an institution, and so he decided to stick to selling and assembling office furniture, which was quite a promising job in a time of a growing number of small enterprises. This was actually his third simultaneous (night-time) occupation at that time, in addition to the Federation of Cultural Organizations and Folkart (a yearly international folklore festival). Above all, his uncle and lawyer Nikolaj Gergurevič offered him a job in his office, on the condition that he graduated. Regardless of his great success in folkdance and experience

in event management (City Carnival, Folkart, etc.), he was close to completely quitting his career in culture and securing himself a living as a furniture salesman.

There is uncertainty about his engagement in the Slovenian Cultural Center. It appears that he graduated (from the Faculty of Law) somewhere between the announcement and actual reopening of Maribor's Slovenian Cultural Center in 1992—in any case, “just in time.” In his words, nobody else in town was interested in the position because they anticipated an enormous workload and expectations to fulfill. However, some people believe his graduation was late, but that he enjoyed distinctive support from some of the most influential members of the city council.

At the same time, he became involved in the International Festivals and Events Association (IFEA, established in 1956). He was immediately fascinated by the western, especially American, conceptualization of festivals as a business opportunity, and he decided to hold such an event back home. He later made a respectable career in this association and enrolled in a program at Purdue University in the United States to become a “certified festivals and events executive”¹ even before receiving his law degree.

Sometime in the 2000s, he proposed establishing a managerial council of public cultural institutions and several non-governmental organizations, intended to resolve structural and strategic problems of city culture. This network has never been homogeneous and regular because some local agents saw Rukavina as too influential. In any case, one of the most resounding achievements of the network was a major protest against announced cuts in the municipality's culture budget in December 2014, when Rukavina had an opening speech beneath the statue of First World War hero Rudolf Maister.

In 2005 and 2006, when his public recognition was peaking, the idea of the European Capital of Culture also became popular. Mayor Boris Sovič had made the first initiative for this a few years before. The entire process and involvement of various concepts and actors took some time. However, it was Rukavina that played a substantial role in the second phase, when, as a member of the national committee, he defended Maribor's candidacy, which was challenged by Ljubljana, Celje, and Piran. He used formal and informal methods to win the contest among the four Slovenian cities.

The first presentation of Maribor's nationally approved candidacy for the European Capital of Culture in Brussels in 2008 was poorly prepared by the team responsible for it. Rukavina intervened after an official invitation from the municipal administration, and on the second try he managed to persuade the international experts in Brussels. Again, he used a formal and informal approach (networking, socializing, and gifts). Due to Rukavina's involvement in the European Capital of Culture selection process (to the advantage of the Lent Festival), some other representatives of cultural institutions in the town started to identify him as a “cultural tycoon.”

¹ CFEE Graduates, <http://www.ifea.com/p/education/cfeecertification/cfeegraduates> (accessed March 4th, 2016).

Especially important for Rukavina's career was his rhetorical and writing fluency, and his confident and persuasive attitude. He can also communicate in five to six European languages. His communication skills and physical fitness have enabled him to convince his interlocutors or larger groups of people. He manages to seduce the audience through personal connections, memories, belonging, and favors. On the one hand, he needed and enjoyed a community (a group or crowd), but on the other hand he always felt different and exposed. During our interview, he regularly used analogies involving a herd and a shepherd, a band and a lonely wolf, a lion, *primus inter pares*, and so on. Rukavina's strong commitment to an idea has earned him a reputation as a visionary and "natural leader," but also as a very stubborn and unpleasant man in the case of major "unjustified" objections from friends and colleagues.

He lives in an apartment with his wife and adult daughter. At the age of 58, he starts his day at six o'clock in a gym. After work he is often present at various evening events in the city. He likes to spend his vacations in his trailer on a beach in Croatia or traveling to other continents.

THE SLOVENIAN CULTURAL CENTER AND LENT FESTIVAL

The plundered Slovenian Cultural Center was one of the results of the retreat by the Yugoslav People's Army in 1991. It was a sad picture because the building was erected at the end of the nineteenth century to become a center of the cultural, educational, and financial emancipation of the Slovenian population in the face of growing German pressure (Stavbar 2002).

Rukavina's program won support from the city council. In May 1992, he became the first CEO of newly reopened the Slovenian Cultural Center with a mandate to develop an institution for implementing cultural and educational projects at the highest possible level and promotional effects. Some close friends and members of the Student Folkdance Group joined him at the Slovenian Cultural Center, and together they became one of the most effective and creative production teams in the recent cultural history of Maribor, improving former informal and personal ties with business relations (cf. Dore 2009). With much physical and volunteer work, and some major material contributions from some Slovenian companies, they were soon able to reequip the Slovenian Cultural Center and revitalize the hundred-year-old building. Not everyone on the competing cultural scene was happy about this.

Already in November 1992, Rukavina presented a concept of cultural events for the following summer, known today as the Lent Festival, which ever since has been almost synonymous with him. The realization of the promised summer festival in 1993 and its continuous growth over the years have given Rukavina enormous cultural and social capital in the city and beyond. However, the advanced and improved international folkdance festival Folkart could easily become another minor event in the town, but social and personal

forces have contributed to a different outcome. This is where the study of festivals and personality as an anthropological subject seems appropriate (Simonič 2009; Kozorog 2013).

First, regarding the social context of the festival, at the beginning of the 1990s Maribor was “falling apart.” Due to the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the majority of production lines and large industries in the town had gone bankrupt and were being sold off piecemeal. Under state socialism, Maribor was the second-largest industrial center in Yugoslavia, with a huge inflow of unqualified workers and eventually strong technical knowledge, resulting in the founding of the University of Maribor in 1974. In the post-independence years, this army of workers was without any prospects, depressed, drugged, and forced to leave town. The (neo)liberal ideology of the “post-communist transition” contributed greatly to the feeling of alienation. In a few years (c. 1988–1993), the former industrial identity of the town lost its economic core and was maintained only in the form of the nostalgia of the (post)industrial inhabitants. Large-scale events such as the Lent Festival therefore shone much brighter when everything around seemed so dark. People needed relaxation and a feeling of belonging to an (important) community, and Rukavina delivered: “I fortunately realized that at the right moment, and I gave them what they needed. We (the Slovenian Cultural Center) gave this city something. If it had not been us, someone else would have had to invent it.”

Miha Kozorog (2013) showed how festivals (in the periphery) can be intended to fight socioeconomic power relations, how festivals can offer hope in times of crisis, and how festivals give the impression of social transition, even though behind the scenes the community involved might still be sliding “into the margins.” The utopia of world recognition for a brand is an important motivation for festivals. In addition, of course, the organizers wish to earn some money from the performances and services. In this sense, the Lent Festival was just one of many new festivals in Slovenia at that time, although a festival as a special cultural form was not completely new to the local society.

The Lent Festival symbolically and spatially connected the city to its past. Historically, the city emerged on the banks of the Drava River, and the old medieval defense wall ended there (Premzl 1967; Ratej 2010). Older generations can still recall the silhouettes of the old river (raft) port, which was destroyed in the 1970s due to urban modernization. With the Lent Festival, they felt like life was coming back to this part of town, even though there were many bars operating throughout the year. Nevertheless, large crowds and events truly only came with the festival.

The same riverbank, not more than a hundred meters downstream, was also the site of a popular yearly fair called Maribor Week (held from 1932 to 1971) with a popular amusement park (Lešnik & Gostenčnik 2011). The developing industrial city built new fair halls in 1957 to display and sell new machinery and household equipment. In 1965, the first-ever Slovenian pop music festival, called Happy Autumn (*Vesela Jesen*), was staged there; it was later renamed the Festival of Vernacular Songs (*Festival narečne popevke Vesela Jesen*; Tomažič 1997) and it moved to other city and regional venues. In the 1990s the fair

facilities were forgotten, dilapidated, and sold. In the 2000s, the Kolosej cinema multiplex was built on the property.

Second, at the personal level, another reason for the festival's success was Rukavina's grandiosity described above, in this case his conscious intention of producing a "mega event." He "knew" that making another average event would necessarily lead to marginalization. The basic concept of the greatest promotional event of the Slovenian Cultural Center was thus a varied high-quality cultural program, something for everyone, and simultaneously to create an illusion of the big city (because there is too much going on to see it all)—to create a multi-site urban festival, mostly open-air (to reduce "the fear of institutions"), with as many visitors as possible. Local visitors would be educated and entertained, and themselves become creators of the festival, Rukavina explained in the interview.

Instead of large-scale exchange of industrial products, Rukavina traded the (mass) performance of folklore, traditional and classical music, opera, ballet, rock, jazz, (street) theatre, sports, and so on, thereby offering occasional jobs and earnings to musicians and actors, inn owners, artisans, transporters, the mass media, and many others. The scope was sensational, never seen before in this part of Styria. Rukavina became a master of a cultural ritual in a repetitive event of mass proportions for the promotion of a specific set of performers and values (cf. Turner 1967; Lane 1981; Cazeneuve 1986 [1971]; Deflem 1991). From a sociological and anthropological point of view, his approach was somehow holistic because he was trying to pull together festivity and the participation of different layers of urban society. The concept was inclusive and democratic. With a yearly average of four hundred thousand visitors, a financial flow of up to two million euros, and around seven hundred temporary jobs (all variable), Rukavina was able to meet the social, cultural, educational, economic, and recreational needs of his hometown, as imagined, and prove himself in the urban, regional, national, and international community.

This was not only about inclusion and communal unity, but also about difference. Only those performers selected by Rukavina, by his team, and later by authorized producers could perform. Folk music and Estrada did not have a chance. There was another selective mechanism at work. The charm of the biggest open-air festival in Slovenia attracted would-be performers of every kind. The team of the Slovenian Cultural Center benefited from this. People potentially or already useful for the progress (i.e., expansion) of the festival were invited in a "VIP process," where, at least in the first decade, people were treated and served "like kings"; seated right next to the main stage and the best festival scenery. People needed prestige, hedonism, and (new class) solidarity—and Rukavina delivered. He actually followed examples from the Borštnik national theater festival (*Borštnikovo srečanje*), the international Golden Fox women's ski race (*Zlata Lisica*; both held yearly in Maribor), and the city's soccer club, but it was again the scope and quality of the VIPs that made the difference. The Lent Festival became one of Maribor's four major large-scale events. It occupied the domain of popular music, dance, and theatre, and it marked the beginning of the summer vacation.

EVENT SPONSORSHIP

The symbolic and material circulation of goods are never separate (i.e., Appadurai 1996; Mauss 1996 [1924]; Miller 2005). In capitalism, they also come together in branding, positioning, marketing, advertising, and events. Propaganda, according to Bernays (1928), is a series of allusive illustrations, combining the subconscious (wishing) and economy (fulfilment). One can hardly disconnect the material and the symbolic, nor the financial aspect of a man and a project from the social, political, and cultural meanings and institutions because they all shape society. They are interdependent and structural.

The American connection after 1990 opened the world to Vladimir Rukavina. Conferences in western Europe and later in the United States amazed him with theory and practice, and the attendance of Coca-Cola, Heineken, Delta Airlines, and other global companies gave new dimensions to event management. "I just absorbed their knowledge, and socialized a lot." The most important lesson from the Americans was that cultural events are not a subject of charity, but marketing strategy of sponsors. Sponsorship is business measured in numbers. This was of course new to a communitarian person from Slovenia, a country that had just rejected its socialist past in favor of a capitalist future. The "market society" was just an image for the majority at that time, but Rukavina already knew how it was done in the United States, the heart of liberal cultural policy. He was a messenger of a new paradigm in the management of culture. With enormous festival success back home, he could maintain connections to the American network and even hold some of the highest positions in its hierarchy. Trips to the United States were also intended to educate and motivate other colleagues and staff from the Slovenian Cultural Center.

Since 1993, industry in the city has been unable to support the social systems, and banks have slowly become a center of new power (i.e., decision-makers). In search of sponsors, Rukavina found support in the management of a bank (NKBM), which contributed an unprecedented amount of money over all the years, at least until the global financial crisis accelerated in 2008. The relation to a state-owned bank casts a fuzzy light on the promoted (American-school) concept of commercial sponsorship because politics has always had a major influence on money flows in that particular bank. It is hard to justify business's (measured) interest when politics was involved as the largest (public) shareholder, almost like in socialist times. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it is certainly revealing of how a modern festival worked. In any case, the bank support made some other cultural personalities in the town feel as though nothing much was left for them.

There were of course many other sponsors, but only lower on the symbolic hierarchy of the festival. The overall result: all printed and internet material, festival venues, stages, billboards, and other advertisements were filled with logos, and most of the festival events were offered to visitors free of charge. Signing a contract between the Slovenian Cultural Center and major sponsors almost became a yearly ritual in the mass media, although it was just another occasion for Rukavina to highlight sponsoring institutions and fulfill the

receiver's obligations from the contract he or she had signed. The mass media played along because they also became "sponsors": their reports and recordings became part of festival clips, an essential portfolio for future sponsors. The easiest way to pay for media coverage was to highlight the media itself (e.g., with stages named after periodicals: *Večerov oder* 'Večer Stage' and *Mladinin oder* 'Mladina Stage').

Together with Bruce E. Skinner, another graduate of Purdue University, Rukavina published the book *Event Sponsorship* (2003). They positioned their stance in the following historical line: 1 BC – AD 1600 (the Era of Patronage); 1631 (the Advent of Advertising); 1910–1970 (the Early Pioneers); 1970–1984 (the Era of Development); after 1983 (the Sponsorship Explosion); 1990s (the Era of Added Value); and 2000–present (the Technological Era). They explained the explosion of sponsorships due to "few government funding sources," emergence of the first sponsorship newsletter in 1983, the first full-time sponsorship salesperson, and the Los Angeles Summer Olympic Games (1984). Rukavina wrote about European examples, and Skinner was responsible for American perspectives. During that time, Rukavina received invitations from the IFEA network to manage some events in the United States and Europe but, due to his obligations in Maribor, he declined.

Back home, Rukavina put almost all of his personal effort into searching for sponsors. He was so successful that festival incomes exceeded festival costs. He was therefore able to cover all production expenses of the Lent Festival and hold additional cultural events in the Slovenian Cultural Center throughout the year, which were not covered by the founding municipality or the state. In 2005/06, the team of the Slovenian Cultural Center was "untouchable." The culture of sponsorship had triumphed.

The economic and financial crisis in 2008 and Rukavina's struggle to save the scope and structure of the festival by any means shattered his public image and the festival's appeal. He became more openly dependent on the public budget. The festival program was enormous, and financial shifts provoked a great deal of resentment by other actors in the public sphere. Again, they felt like Rukavina was occupying too much public physical and symbolic space—and too much of the budget.

RITUAL, POLITICS, AND MASS MEDIA

Vladimir Rukavina became "the first full-time sponsorship salesperson" in culture, at least in Maribor. Perhaps only Tone Vogrinec has achieved similar fame in the local community with the development of the skiing industry and marketing (Mencinger 2012: 236–237).

Politics has been involved in Rukavina's work ever since the reopening of the Slovenian Cultural Center, and later through the Control Council, which approves executive plans and strategies. Politicians of various affiliations have sat on that council. Some of them have proved to be crucial for the development of the Slovenian Cultural Center by lobbying in the city council, state administration, and government.

As the festival and Rukavina became commonplace in public consciousness, every new (or potential) mayor had to recognize his role in the town. Being in favor of the Lent Festival meant being for progress and a good life, which could influence the outcome of elections or at least the behavior of local politicians. Various parties encouraged him to run for mayor. Even at the national level, Rukavina attracted political attention and was invited by two prime ministers—Janez Drnovšek (2000) and Borut Pahor (2008)—to join the cabinet as minister of culture. “They just couldn’t understand that I was not interested in politics.”

Collaboration with Mayor Franc Kangler (2006–2013) did not work well. Kangler had to resign due to public protests in the winter of 2012/13, leaving Rukavina and some other locals involved in various scandals and even trials: from the Old Radio Building trial (Klipšteter 2015) and possible speculations with property investment near the Pohorje tourist resort to complaints about disproportionate influence on the program for European Capitol of Culture 2012 and insufficient transparency of the city budget policy. “Political fraternities” and banks became major offenders of post-communist transition in public opinion. The VIP treatment also became part of a problem, not a solution.

Večer, the major regional newspaper, was still very well off at the beginning of the 1990s. Without competition from other print or internet media, it could quite easily shape public opinion. Right from the start of the reopened Slovenian Cultural Center and launching of the Lent Festival, *Večer* has been the most important disseminator of the festival program, its positive image, and Vladimir Rukavina as a central figure. Special festival themes were added to the newspaper, and groups of journalists wrote reports on the multitude of events and held interviews with “stars” or local visitors. Even though there was no common editorial opinion on the quality and quantity of the festival, some important journalists made the festival a matter of local patriotism, or a sign of a bright future. A couple of journalists even became associate members of the Slovenian Cultural Center team, taking care of the festival’s promotional activities. Eventually, national radio and television and other commercial stations provided technical facilities and studios for the festival venues and coverage. They all came together to contribute to the greatest event of all, and everyone got a piece of the action in return (recordings, pictures, fees, free drinks, memorable occasions, educational experiences, and so on).

However, in 2000, *Večer* was no longer the dominant source of information in the town and region, and journalists sold their shares to NKBM. The following years of ownership and editorial stresses resulted in further shrinking the range and profile of the newspaper (Zvonar Predan 2012). New technologies, mentioned in the last epoch of Skinner’s and Rukavina’s sponsorship periodization, were a necessary step for the festival organizers.² To summarize, over a decade and half, the festival and Rukavina lost the basic support of two major regional economic and ideological pillars previously connected to political

² Cf. *Festival Lent 22. 6. – 7. 7. 2012.: Avtorji*, <http://lent11.slovenija.net/splosno/avtorji> (accessed February 20th, 2016)

institutions: NKBM and *Večer*. Even if they never completely and officially withdrew their support, they certainly economized their involvement. This was a clear case of “structural adjustment,” and local patriotism had very little to do with it.

To understand Rukavina in this network of state and private interest, it is necessary to remember that he was already an active member of the University of Maribor’s Student Organization, which has been one major source of bachelor’s degrees in political science since 1991. He has surely proven himself with his vision and work, but maintaining old and local networks has been an inevitable condition for his success.

Personification of the festival with Vladimir Rukavina was similar to personification of Cankar Hall in Ljubljana with its manager Mitja Rotovnik, or the Ljubljana Festival with its manager Darko Brlek. They never work alone, of course, but they have become symbols of an event. In Rukavina’s words, personification of the Lent Festival was intentional and extremely important at the beginning of 1990s, when he was establishing long-term relations with sponsors. Later on, he regularly stated in the mass media that the festival is a result of Slovenian Cultural Center teamwork, not just himself.

EVENT, BRAND, AND TOURISM

Official statistics recorded an increase from 180,000 visitors per year in 1993 to 500,000 in 2014, with record numbers between 2010 and 2012. During the same time span, the number of festival venues increased from nineteen to almost sixty, and the number of festival events grew from one hundred to a maximum of 1,302. Around 350 journalists were present every year. The cost of the festival in 2014 was €1.25 million, when the municipality could manage to participate “only with €290,000” (Dragšič 2015: 16); this was still an enormous amount of money for small local (non-governmental) players, but it was obviously worth the public investment in “times of crisis.”

Official measurements in 2010 (Breznik 2011: 21) also revealed that the festival does not substantially increase the number of overnight stays in Maribor in June. The festival attracts short visits from the region and local service exchanges; it does not attract foreign tourists that would like to spend a few nights. The festival has not become part of a wider tourism package. Only a few important and new festival events have improved the Lent Festival in the sense of tangible and sustainable development and social inclusion. In brief, the festival is almost absent in strategies and the public appearance of other cultural and tourism institutions. One explanation for this situation is the weak responses of other city institutions (especially tourism), but, on the other hand, some informants mentioned exclusiveness and the absence of strategic thinking by the Slovenian Cultural Center team. To attract foreign tourists, one has to know a year in advance what needs to be promoted abroad.

One of the important innovations of the Festival was its holistic logo and advertisement. Other major events, such as the Golden Fox ski competition or Borštnik theater festival,

have also emphasized the overall public appearance of the event, but it was again the scope and quality of the Lent Festival's advertisement that made a difference. The creator of the basic design and yearly variations is Didi Šenekar, with the help of some other planners (e.g., Mitja Visočnik, etc.). They have received several awards from IFEA for their appealing program booklet, internet pages, postcard, and so on³ (Internet 3; Internet 4). The Golden Drum international advertising festival in Portorož also recognized the festival. Several years in a row, the festival has been listed among the fifty best European events by the independent Dutch organization Local Festivities (Breznik 2011: 27). Rukavina's team seemed to be very fortunate to have Šenekar's contribution. In contrast to public opinion and various awards, the student Nenad Cizl and his advisor proposed a redesign of the festival's communication materials because they "did not meet contemporary standards" (Cizl 2011). This can be left for others to decide.

Public perception of the festival was mostly positive, with some objections regarding food (high prices and low variety), noise (especially for residents of the Lent area), duration (too intensive, too short), pollution from fireworks, inadequate parking facilities, promotional efforts only within the town and region, and so on. People surveyed in 2010 also named several strengths of the festival: revitalization of the old town, socializing, tourism, cultural diversity, temporary employment, excellent promotion for sponsors, and so on. They saw opportunities in connection with the festival for other local producers, expansion of the festival throughout the summer, and developing urban tourism (RM plus 2010; Breznik 2011: 45, 60–61; Falež 2014; Dragšič 2015: 20, 25).

PERSON AND SOCIETY

Because I have constructed this entire study on the assumption that an individual is always socially conditioned, Rukavina's worldview and attitudes were explained in relation to his (family) history and personal experiences before and after 1992. Such an approach only leaves character and physical strength to an individual: his conscious or unconscious character, weak or strong manipulations of given social institutions and existing networks, and so on. However, considering this "inner human side," one could question whether human emotions and character also have social registers (Muršič 2004). His grandparents and their historical memory surely influenced his worldview.

Much less would have materialized had he relied only on immediate social imitation and innovation. This innovative individual intervened in existing power structures and social aspirations by importing a foreign cultural model: the culture of large-scale events and

³ ZDA: Nova nagrada za Festival Lent. *MMC RTV* (Sept. 20th, 2005), <http://www.rtvlo.si/kultura/glasba/zda-nova-nagrada-za-festival-lent/139312>; Festival Lent v ZDA znova dobil tri nagrade. *MMC RTV* (accessed October 10th, 2011), <http://www.rtvlo.si/kultura/drugo/festival-lent-v-zda-znova-dobil-tri-nagrade/268127> (accessed March 1st, 2016).

sponsorship, hometown celebration, and staging of local culture. His festival (as a production leader) gave the town a feeling of greatness and joy in times of economic depression in the 1990s. Later on, the project created increasingly greater envy and critiques, especially after the last financial crisis (2008). The context and perception of his work in the municipality changed over time. The shift of profits from industry to banks, which took place in the 1990s, served him well because he was familiar with American cultural trends. However, the further disintegration of the production base in the middle of the 2000s, like privatization of the bank NKBM and the newspaper *Večer*, shattered most important pillars of the project—and himself because the project was strongly personalized from the very beginning.

His intervention in existing social inertia has been at least threefold. First, as a shift from industrial material (re)distribution to mass (re)distribution of services and events: social cohesion increased with the exchange of words, tunes, goods, and friendships (in this sense, the Lent Festival was close to a potlatch, consisting of social inclusion, redistribution/sponsorship, and concentrated and affordable festivity; cf. Boas 1897: 341–357). Edutainment—another American concept of scale production—became a central theme of exchange.

Second, Rukavina’s theoretical and practical mastery of sponsorship relations offered a public example of how to avoid “dependence” on the public budget and state-owned enterprises. Due to basic state ownership of his most important sponsors, it can be concluded that Rukavina really represents a middle or mixed (or transitional) model between the state and a privately supported model. Nonetheless, he achieved a great deal in this respect no matter whether one approves of his motives or not. In his school of thought and in the eyes of Maribor’s residents, he was a very successful person.

Third, the totality of the event in the sense of venues, scope, and overall logo was again enormous—maybe not in comparison to London, but still very impressive for a town of one hundred thousand inhabitants.

All three elements served as role-model strategies for many other creative people and local society in general, even though they were not in a position to master or copy the concept indefinitely. The theoretical background and intensity of Rukavina’s intervention certainly represent a paradigm shift in local self-perception, the meaning of teamwork, advertisement, financing, and so on. Rukavina represents an expansionary logic of contemporary popular culture, which must permanently surpass its limits to keep sponsors, visitors, and the mass media excited, but this sometimes lacks a message, concept, or meaning, which is an objection made to him by his cultural contemporaries in Maribor.

One should not fall into the trap of considering efforts as the only measure and condition of a person’s success, at least not in the strict sense. Networking and lobbying were always important parts of Rukavina’s calling. Prolonged nighttime hours, parties, and other personal ties (gifts, travels, crazy memories, and so on) with important business partners were commonplace for him. This was quite unknown and unusual for the majority of other cultural producers in Southern Styria.

Twenty-five consecutive years of Rukavina as the CEO of the Slovenian Cultural Center and the Lent Festival says a lot about his social skills and recognition. Five mayors, many city council members, and directors of cultural and other institutions have changed during this time. The CEOs of public institutions must be reelected every five years, and there has been no one (relevant) so far that would dare to challenge Rukavina and take over what he has represented since 1992.

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VLADIMIR RUKAVINA – MOJSTER PRAZNOVANJA DRUŽBENE SPREMEMBE IN KULTURNA POLITIKA Z VRHA

Vladimir Rukavina sodi med osrednje posameznike, ki so zaznamovali posocialistično tranzicijo v Mariboru. Festival Lent, ki ga s sodelavci vsako leto prireja že več kot dve desetletji, je največji tovrstni dogodek na prostem v Sloveniji in sodi med petdeset najbolj uglednih tovrstnih prireditvev v Evropi. Avtor v prispevku pojasni, kako se je oblikoval Rukavinov pogled na svet in kako je s svojimi dejanji, nazori in posegi uspel sooblikovati in preoblikovati lokalno skupnost. Kot pojasni je bil njegov poseg s festivalom v obstoječe družbene sfere tridelen. Prvič, zaznamoval je premik od industrijske (re)distribucije materiala in proizvodov k množični (re)distribuciji storitev in dogodkov. Socialna kohezivnost se je v mestu namreč povečala z izmenjavo besed, melodij, blaga in zvez, zaradi česar je Festival Lent dejansko podoben potlaču, saj vpliva na socialno inkluzivnost in redistribucijo s pomočjo sponzorstev, ki omogočajo zgoščeno in cenovno dostopno praznovanje. Poleg tega je pri izvedbi festivala pomemben element zabavnega učenje (angl. edutainment), ki je še en ameriški koncept, povezan s t.i. ekonomijo obsega. Drugič, Rukavina je s svojim teoretičnim in praktičnim obvladovanjem in ohranjanjem sponzorskih razmerij pokazal, kako se lahko tovrstne mestne prireditve izogone odvisnosti od javnih sredstev in financiranja s strani državnih podjetij. Zaradi državnega lastništva njegovih najpomembnejših sponzorjev pa lahko ugotovimo še, da Rukavina vzpostavlja mešani ali celo prehodni model med državnim in zasebnim sponzorstvom. Tretjič, celotna javna podoba dogodka, ki ga prireja Rukavina, v smislu prizorišč, obsega in celostne grafične podobe je impresivna, posebej za mesto s 100 tisoč prebivalci. Vsi elementi, ki jih je zasnoval in apliciral Rukavina, pomenijo strateški model za druge posameznike in lokalne skupnosti, čeprav ti navadno niso zmožni v celoti kopirati in obvladovati koncepta, ki ga je vzpostavil Festival Lent.

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