

Maschine brennt / Up in Smoke

Statement on the current culture-political situation in Linz from the Freie Szene, the independent art scene of Linz

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What does culture need?

To foster culture, in which art and culture can be made, received, lived, stimulated and stimulating, certain conditions must be met. These conditions include time – free from the compulsions of production, to exchange, to reflect, to let ideas evolve – and space, where people can come together, try things out, implement ideas and continue to develop these ideas and themselves. The Capital of Culture year would be an opportunity to explore possibilities for creating these conditions, but this opportunity is rapidly dwindling now. Those responsible for Linz09 show little interest in structural solutions, and political decision-makers are insufficiently aware of their responsibilities in this context.

MOOD

Linz is moving quickly in the direction of the Capital of Culture year 2009. Yet the expected positive mood of anticipation is hardly to be found among the political decision-makers, even less among those who work in art and culture in Linz. Linz09 is losing ground, the mood has tipped. Especially in the field of independent art and cultural work, scepticism and even rejection are becoming increasingly more evident.

FREIE SZENE

The Cultural Development Plan of the city of Linz, the draft paper of the Cultural Guidelines of the Federal Province of Upper Austria, and particularly the bid proposal for the European Capital of Culture all emphasize the importance of the Freie Szene, the independent art scene of Linz. Yet this emphasis is not to be found in the current development of the program for Linz09, nor within the framework of cultural policy priorities. Instead, the Freie Szene is sweepingly discredited as lacking internationality and quality. The response from the Linz09 direction through the media is targeted disparagement and ignorance. Inciting heated emotions with purposely provocative messages, such as racist comparisons with simple “natives” who don’t understand how a camera works, for example, may well yield the publicity that Linz09 apparently seeks, but “friction” by itself does not effect changes. Nor does a vibrant cultural life consist solely of finished “products”, whether in the form of tangible art works and events, or as “projects” that are presented in a manageable process of application, budgeting, carrying out,

evaluating. Major gaps in the programming of Linz09 are manifested in a disregard for the critical, self-critical, innovative, experimental, tried and proven potential of the local scene. There is no reaction to this from the political side. The management of Linz09 judges the Freie Szene primarily according to neoliberal, quantifiable, marketable criteria. This negates the continual foundational work that the Freie Szene has been doing for years under precarious working conditions. Aiming for (re-) utilizable products and events to promote tourism overlooks the processual character of independent, autonomous cultural work. Independent cultural work provides society with reflection and continually sets accents to further develop this reflection. The Linz09 management's neoliberal fixation on products contradicts the concerns and the self-understanding of the Freie Szene. The role and the great importance of the Freie Szene cannot be defined in this context with simple city image marketing. With ongoing cultural and artistic work over the past decades, the Freie Szene has provided important impulses for the city of Linz that go far beyond merely superficial representation and image effects. Without this valuable qualitative work from the Linz cultural scene, the city's bid for Linz as European Capital of Culture would certainly have lost much of its force.

For these reasons, not least of all, the importance of the Freie Szene was also anchored in the Cultural Development Plan (CDP) of the City of Linz accordingly:

"The city of Linz sees itself as a city of culture for everyone with a cultural-political emphasis on technology, new media, open spaces, and the alternative scene." (CDP, p. 7)

"As a cultural city Linz is committed to the material safeguarding of culture and the arts by means of an appropriate increase in the culture budget in the light of prevailing conditions." (CDP, p. 15)

"In order to motivate the large pool of artistic talent from the independent scene to remain in Linz, the funding of this sector must be increasingly effective, long-term and consistent." (CDP, p. 8)

"The City of Linz sees the creation of space and effective open structures in the art and culture scene as an important target of its funding policy." (CDP, p. 12)

"Provision of „risk capital“ for innovative art and culture projects (making experimentation and creative development possible)." (CDP, p. 12)

"To complement existing funding authorities the City of Linz proposes that it should set up a fund jointly with the province of U.A. to promote artistic projects of specially innovative or experimental value." (CDP, p. 13)

"Expansion of the Artist- and Scientist-in-Residence Programmes." (CDP, p. 13)

"Providing well thought-out and lasting support for the central cultural focus on technology, new media, open space, culture for everyone and the alternative scene." (CDP, p. 7)

In other words, the issue is:

SUSTAINABILITY

“Sustainability specifically means an investment on the part of cultural policies and society in structures for culture, in education for people who do cultural work, in cultural and art education, and in know-how, so that the public is encouraged to engage with it.” (Klemens Pilsl, KAPU, 28 Nov. 2007)

A substantial number of those active in art and culture in Linz have meanwhile abandoned hope that Linz09 will take a sustainable direction. Of course, some traces of Linz09 will still be visible in 2010 – the construction sites and buildings. It seems as though the political decision-makers regard the year 2009 as a singular year out of time, with no before and no after. This seems to be the only explanation for the way sustainability is apparently to be established with buildings: cultural policies are measured in Linz in cubic meters of cement. In this way, the political decision-makers are fulfilling a large portion of the new buildings anchored in the Cultural Development Plan. Apart from there being no clear utilization and financing concepts for the creative use of the cultural sarcophagi after 2009, another pillar of the Cultural Development Plan, the Freie Szene, is thus not acknowledged as fundamental or worthy of support.

Linz09 could be regarded as a structurally sustainable urban development project.

However, the developments of the past year have missed the framework that was set by political decision-makers and defined in both the bid for Capital of Culture and the Cultural Development Plan. The direction of Linz09 and cultural political developments have failed to take this framework into account. This disrespects not only those active locally in art and culture, but also the Linz City Council itself, since the Cultural Development Plan was unanimously ratified there.

There is currently no indication that the Capital of Culture year will be used by the political decision-makers of Linz to secure the precarious situation of local artists and cultural producers, much less to improve it. This has already been wholly unsuccessful in the preparations for the Capital of Culture year. It cannot yet be predicted, what the year 2010 will be like. Based on misguided developments, however, it is evident that the situation of the scene in Linz will be lastingly damaged by the Capital of Culture year, rather than strengthened by it.

RESPONSIBILITY

Whereas political decision-makers were unwilling to anticipate the director's decisions before Martin Heller was appointed director of Linz09, now it is said that there should be no “political intervention” in the director's decisions. This signals political indecisiveness that has appears ominous to the artists and cultural producers of Linz. When the director of Linz09 repeatedly stresses that he is only responsible for the year 2009, the result is a vacuum in responsibility for the years before and afterward. The Freie Szene is conscious of its political responsibility, but a serious discussion requires a partner that is also “responsive”. What is at stake is no less than the viable future development and

securement of existing and future artistic and cultural potentials in this city. This calls for political responsibility.

DEMANDS

The basis for serious work is present in the motivated and talented people with creative and good ideas. What is missing are the means required to implement these ideas. These include:

- securing the budget for the Freie Szene in the years 2010ff
- financing structures instead of supporting projects
- doubling the budget for the funding program “LINZimPULS”
- doubling the budget for the funding program “LinzEXPOrt”
- creating a new funding program “LinzIMPORT”
- evaluating the projects submitted to Linz09 according to parity criteria

Linz, April 2008

Addressed to:

Mayor Dr. Franz Dobusch

Vice-Mayor City Councilor Dr. Erich Watzl

City Senate and City Council of the City of Linz

Office Linz Culture

Governor Dr. Josef Pühringer

Department of Culture of the Federal Province of Upper Austria

Linz 2009 – Kulturhauptstadt Europas OrganisationsGmbH.

For the information of:

Cultural Advisory Board of the City of Linz

Cultural Advisory Board of the Federal Province of Upper Austria

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Art Base M

Bühne04

Crossing Europe Filmfestival

Donauschule Linz

FIFTITU% – Network for Women in Art and Culture Upper Austria

IFEK – Institute for Expanded Art

KAPU

Kulturplattform OÖ – Cultural Platform Upper Austria

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KV Treibsand

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Linzer Frühling – Literatur und so
maiz – Autonomous Center of & for Migrant Women
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Theater Phönix
Time's Up
Transpublic
Wunderkinder KG

In addition to the initiatives named here and the numerous people active in them, this statement is also supported by many individuals active in art and culture in Linz. To name only a few, these are represented by: Franz Fend, Gerhard Dirmoser, Astrid Esslinger, Andi Wahl, Petar Radisavljevic, Rudolf Pointinger.