

Visual Seminar Визуален семинар

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September – December
2003

Визуален семинар се осъществява в рамките на *relations* – проект, инициран от Федералната Културна Фондация, Германия

Visual Seminar takes place in the framework of *relations* – a project initiated by the Federal Cultural Foundation, Germany

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We asked four candidates for Mayor in Sofia these questions

Do you have a favorite place in Sofia that you would defend against any change whatsoever? Which place you would definitely want to change? What in Sofia you would photograph in good memory?

Do you think that the visual environment in Sofia is aggressive? What is visual aggression and is it necessary to define and impose some norms and restrictions on that?

Is there a way to regulate the advertisements that are showering us from all sides? How to protect those people who consider advertisements to be offensive, degrading, and unacceptable?

Sofia as a sight

Discussion pp. 11–9

How to make esthetic decisions in the municipal policies? Who, in your view is to make those- experts, politicians, people? Do you have in mind some experts who could accept to work with esthetic and visual issues? Who and how should appoint these?

Who and how should decide what is the cultural heritage in the city? And what is not? What do you think of the legacy of Communism in the city environment?

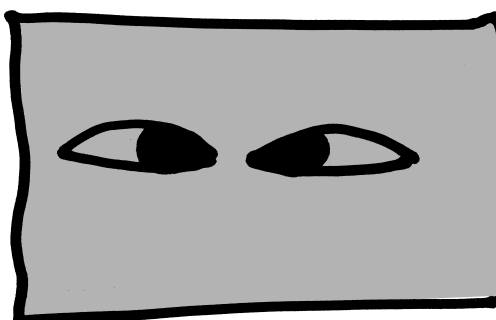
Is there a legal procedure according to which citizens could protest against certain monuments? Who is selecting the monuments that are to be erected in the city?

What should be the attitude of the municipality of Sofia towards the cultural policies?

Is it possible and necessary to control the right of taste? How and by whom so that the democratic principles are upheld?

What kind of principles of visual policies will you uphold? Could you describe some of these?

Български текст: стр. 1- 6



sees

so, so...

cock-eyed vision

does not see

The Visual Seminar is dedicated to:

- The right to taste
- The care for the life's visual environment
- The transparent decision making of aesthetic matters
- The preservation of the "typical for Sofia" aspects in the atmosphere of the city
- The respect for the cultural heritage
- The care for the emblems and the sign that represent our city
- The literacy in urban reading

The idea for "Do You see Sofia?" the second public debate of the Visual Seminar, was to use the pre-elections moment in order to ask the candidates for the Mayor office of Sofia questions concerning the visual environment of the city. We consciously tried to avoid the word "aesthetic" and insisted that their answers and participation should stay outside of the political interpretation. On purpose we did not address the invited participants with questions that might profile them as representatives of certain political platforms. In spite of all complexities, we tried to stay within the theme of the visual space while it ricocheted on a number of political issues. For the first time the mayoral candidates were put in a situation where they had to express their own personal views on certain issues.

One of our motives was the fact that all local elections campaigns usually start with the statement "I want to leave a beautiful city after me", even more so that there are already the "Beautiful Bulgaria" and "Beautiful Sofia" programs. That's why we decided to try and understand what exactly do the mayoral candidates mean when they say "beautiful".

The goal was to offer to them the singularly relevant theme of the city's vision, which although a matter of concern for all inhabitants of the city, is expressed in different ways and on different levels. While some people react to this theme on the level of "I like that" or "I dislike this", others are in a position to offer alternatives, solutions, defined viewpoints.

There was another parallel objective that we maybe came to acknowledge a bit too late. That's the presentation of the artistic community in the city that at this point does not acknowledge itself as such.

I think what's also important is the logic of interaction with the audience we tried to establish. And the audience was quite diverse. Initially we counted on attracting a younger audience of students, people from the artistic circles, architects and urban studies experts. However, the pre-elections situations stimulated all sorts of people to attend.

For the public debate itself we organized a kind of a visual game (after the idea of Irina Genova, a member of the Advisory Board of the Visual Seminar). We were confronting the participating mayoral candidates in the debate with images from the capital city and we expected their reaction and opinion about what would they say is a purely visual irregularity in the city? Our questions were grouped in the following manner - national cultural heritage and the modern architecture; the market oriented advertisement, the image of the woman there as well as the image of dreams; art in public space and the right to have a taste; the possibility to have visual policy in urban space and so on. As it turned out, the logic of visual perception of each participant was quite different in many ways, political as well as personal. Our wish was to shape the public debate as a dialogue where the process of "questioning" the politicians would go alongside the questioning of our own positions - to what extend do we understand the logic of decision making in the city context and further, where could we be really useful. It turned out that there exist many aspects and areas worth working on.

Iara Boubnova, Visual Seminar

Resident fellows program

Project „Visual Seminar“ calls for applications

The Institute of Contemporary Art-Sofia and the Centre for Advanced Study Sofia are announcing a competition for two Fellowships with the VISUAL SEMINAR project for the period April-September 2004. The selected fellows receive a **stipend of 500 Euro per month. The fellowship is for six months.** The Fellows are residing in Sofia and are required to complete a project relevant to the objectives of the VISUAL SEMINAR.

Eligibility:

- Artists, designers, architects, expert in urbanism, photographers, media experts and experts in visual culture, researchers, critics and theoreticians of art and visual culture, as well as applicants from other

artistic and cultural fields whose project idea is related to the announced theme of the VISUAL SEMINAR.

- Good knowledge of spoken and written English (certificate of English language proficiency is suggested).
- A PhD degree is an advantage for the applicants from the field of theory.
- Applicants should have proven record of professional achievement and experience, as well as a long term interest in the thematic objectives of the VISUAL SEMINAR;
- The working languages of the VISUAL SEMINAR are Bulgarian and English (submitting a certificate of that is suggested).

The application consists of:

- Individual project/research idea proposed in written form (1000–1500 words in Bulgarian and English) and/or a visual presentation of the project idea. The project idea should be related to the thematic objectives and problematic of the collective project VISUAL SEMINAR.
- Curriculum Vitae (CV)
- Portfolio with documentation of professional achievement – list of publications, files of previous visual projects, participation in exhibitions, as well as other documentation that is to recommend the applicant.
- Declaration that the applicant is not supported by another fellowship during the same period.
- Certificate of scientific degree (when available).

Deadline for application – March 1st, 2004
Announcement of results – March 20th, 2004

The Advisory Board is announcing the following thematic agenda for this session:

Cliché as identity

The main marker for belonging to a certain cultural community is the ability to recognize and reproduce the common clichés. The verbal clichés seem to be more obvious and thus we have a greater critical distance to them. What is thought the role of the visual cliché in the construction of various identities such as national, gender, religious, etc.? What is the relationship between the visual cliché and the discursive one? Does one depend directly on the other or is there a different kind of dynamics between them?

The use (or the abuse) of the cliché in the artistic practices is becoming more important. Is an artistic statement possible at all without relaying somehow on the cliché? The process is ambiguous: on one side, irony is undermining the cliché and disturbs its trust value; on the other, it may actually be recalling and re-confirming it.

Not every one is able to identify the visual clichés. The local knowledge about them constitutes a clear border between the locals and the foreign. We are here the ones who can recognize certain clichés regardless whether we worship or ironize those. The knowledge of global clichés is just a case of that: not everyone can identify them; although universal, these are after all distinguishing one slim layer of the enlightened ones over the rest.

Expected results:

The selected fellows are expected to work on their artistic or research project for 6 months after which they are presenting the results of their work for approval to the Advisory Board. The results are presented in the form of: a/ publishable research paper; b/ visual project ready for public presentation; c/ other product the format of which has already been confirmed by the Advisory Board within the initial debate on the project ideas.

The complete text is published on www.cas.bg.
For more information: **Maria Vassileva, Project Coordinator, Visual Seminar, Tel. : +359 98 419 003, E-mail: mariaart@vmail.bol.bg**

Principle participants and discussion leaders:
Nadezhda Mihaylova (mayoral candidate), Stoyan Alexandrov (mayoral candidate), Lyuben Dilov, Jr. (mayoral candidate and incumbent municipal councillor), Stefan Sofianski (mayoral candidate, former and current mayor of Sofia)
Alexander Kiossev – moderator
Iaroslava Boubnova, Luchezar Boyadjiev, Ivaylo Ditchev, Irina Genova, Milla Mineva, Miglena Nikolchina, Diana Popova, Kiril Prashkov, Nedko Solakov (discussion leaders).

Alexander Kiossev:

I suspect that a lot of people would consider the debate about Sofia as a vision to be too luxurious. Sofia has a lot more serious problems while we are dealing with aesthetic sights. I should stress right away that the Visual Seminar has a different stand on the matter. And our stand is that the visual environment is a living environment. Which means that it interferes all the time with our lives in a variety of ways that are visible and invisible, acknowledged and unacknowledged. Buildings, facades, streets, public spaces, and beautiful or questionable urban arrangements surround us. Furthermore, the vision of the city does not involve architecture, urbanistic considerations and cultural heritage alone. Part of it is undoubtedly the advertisement that is bombarding the city with its images everywhere. The city vision also involves all those things that people are doing, the so-called cultural and/or urban practices. Thus, when we are saying, "the visual environment is a living environment" we actually have in mind something very complex. In other words, to use a higher level of theoretical jargon, these are at the same time urban, social, political and anthropological problems that are however projected onto one single point. And that's the point of Sofia as a vision. Here lays the strange combination of the educational and democratic tasks of the Visual Seminar. The combination is encapsulated in the word "literacy", visual literacy in reading the city. I must quickly forestall here another possible objection. It's about taste and as we all know, there are various tastes. Tastes deviate, tastes are the space of individual preferences and freedom. What kind of public debate there could be on the issue of the taste? These are spaces where no one should interfere. The Visual Seminar is once again in disagreement on this issue. If the concepts of "taste" and "freedom" are linked then certain democratic consequences follow. It is well known ever since the times of John Stuart Mill that freedom is freedom indeed only when it does not infringe upon somebody else's freedom. That imposes some kind of a negotiating process between the various tastes, some kind of a democratic agreement so that the end result is, if not necessarily beautiful, then at least tolerable for all citizens. Freedom, including the freedom of taste and the freedom of the aesthetic and visual choice, is freedom indeed only when it does not infringe in any way on the freedom of the other people, as well as their tastes and aesthetic choices. In this sense, if I feel that my aesthetic freedom is being infringed upon, that somebody has invaded my private visual space in a very aggressive way, I should be able to defend myself. How could I do that? That is a problem, which has not been codified at all. There are no laws that would regulate the visual environment and such laws are hard to imagine. As a result, the visual environment here is like the Wild West: anybody could do anything and the rule of the strongest governs. The strongest however, is not the one who can read the city grammar but rather the one who is unscrupulously "pasting" signs all over this city.

Here we get to another problem. Good, we do agree that the visual space is in some way private and collective space that needs to be defended against anarchy. However, how do we do that? Some aesthetic juries that were around in the times of socialism cannot do it. It's obvious that the notion about the aesthetic dictatorship of some group of educated few is quite unthinkable these days. Thus, we are talking here about an extremely sensitive debate. A debate that should involve many people indeed and it should find the language; the means and the institutional procedures that would make it possible to handle the visual environment in some way. The goal of this discussion is the triggering of a wide public debate that does not end here but is just starting. We do hope that by involving influential Bulgarian political figures we are also involving the media, as well as attracting the interest of a wide audience.

Stoyan Alexandrov:

- The Vitosha Mountain is my favorite place. I prefer to spend part of my free time there for tourism and hiking. I live next to the South Park so I can sometimes take my kids there. I lived in the Izgrev district before so then I was using the neighboring forest.

- There is nothing that hurts my sense of dignity and makes me feel like a second-hand person as much as the filthiness, which have in Sofia. I do not know of any filthier capital city in Europe than Sofia.

- It's not by coincidence that in my program I plan to have a much wider discussion with the people about a variety of issues and to introduce the system of the referendum. That's because I would like to make everything possible in order to block projects that are violating the environment, as well as the aesthetic environment, from being realized.

- What should be done is to initiate a change in the Restitution Legislature and the Territorial Management Legislature. Because there is a gross injustice where restitution is concerned. Injustice to the state if you wish. Nowhere in the world there is a one-to-one exchange in this field.

- I do not know well the people in this sphere but that's why one has to work in a team. When I go to the bank I am looking for a team of bankers, which means that when I will be a mayor I will find myself a team of artists, architects, urban specialists, economists, etc. Because a mayor is dealing with a wide variety of issues and problems, so he needs people who are experts. For instance, now I come to the conclusion that Sofia needs to have not only an Executive Architect but an Executive Artist as well.

- The Sofia Municipality does not have an advertisement strategy. However, there are a lot of benefits to gain from this field and not only in order to create a more aesthetic look of advertisement. Benefits are there for the city as well. The municipality could save money for lighting for instance, if certain demands are pressed on the companies that advertise on this street. Why couldn't our Vitosha Boulevard turn into a second Ginza for instance, the way it is in Japan? So that it is more beautiful at night than during the day. If you go to Japan you will see that there is nothing special about the Ginza in daytime. At night however, it's an unbelievable attraction and a great pleasure to take a walk, precisely because of the advertisements...

- Indeed, as far as advertisements are concerned there is a total chaos.

Second Public Discussion

Do You See Sofia?

October 14, 2003, Goethe-Institut Sofia



There should be somebody who can offer consultation to the municipal council in order to introduce certain rules: for advertisement, for aestheticizing, for the outer look of the licenses for new bars, restaurants, etc. Even our faces (as mayoral candidates) are now pasted whenever and wherever. That's not very appealing to me either. If you ask me there should not be election posters at all.

- Unfortunately, the municipality is collecting peanuts from the sales of advertisement spots. There are others who are ripping off the benefits around the municipality. It's a public "secret" whom do these billboards belong to, what are the rates and where does the money go.

- If there are no rules now, why shouldn't we introduce them now? When I am talking about the referendum, as a form of administration I mean why shouldn't be there a survey about these problems? When the majority of the Sofia inhabitants voice out their opinion then the municipality will have to take that into account.

- In any event the municipality is obliged to initiate the exploration of such rules. Naturally, the municipality staff could not do that. We should work with people who are dealing with such issues, people like you. Although, it would be very interesting for me to see how you, the aestheticians, will reach consensus as to the working out of rules... But if you can indeed suggest a consensual solution in this respect I am convinced that the Municipal Council will have no objections to pass it. I am inclined to think that many of the advertising companies will abide by these rules. And if they do not and if there are harsher sanctions, then they will have to.

- In principle I am against the demolition of any cultural monuments regardless of when and how they have been created. I always give this example – the monument of Nikolai II in Saint Petersburg was not demolished even in the hardest times and regimes. That's because it has high architectural value...

- I have also noticed that the gasoline and natural gas stations are expanding tremendously. I would not say that these are all that harmful to the



Kiril Prashkov, Stoyan Alexandrov, Ivaylo Ditchev and Alexander Kiossev / Кирил Прашков, Стоян Александров, Ивайло Дичев и Александър Кьосев

ecology or the health of the people for instance, because in many countries around the world there are gas stations in the ground floors of buildings. The problem is that large part of these huge gas stations with fast-food places and shops were constructed on green ground. So huge amounts of green ground was destroyed in the city while one of its main problems is the catastrophic reduction of green ground.

- I would just like to mention one thing in my conclusion. While discussing the issues related to the renovation of the concrete panel apartment blocks we came to the notion of giving the land under and around these blocks to the people living there as their property. That's the way to eliminate to a large extent the anonymity in property issues, which I think is the basis for the existing incompetence.

- I do wish indeed that this city had a different look, to provide a different set of sensations to somebody who lives here or just visits. My cherished wish, after winning the battle for the mayor's office, is to really find the

good experts who would give the best advises. Maybe there will be also some form of a referendum on certain issues. My task then would be to build up an organization that can realize the ideas that would be suggested to me. We will have to introduce some rules of the "game" that might not be liked by certain people but these will have to abide anyway. It's a different question then what would be the policies that could be applied in this respect. I have had very useful talks with the mayor of Kiev for instance. What he is doing is to demand some kind of a concrete commitment against the right to manage some municipal property by somebody else. I, as a mayor, give you this shop to use and manage but in return I want you to take full responsibility for the neatness, for the flowers and so on this stretch of the street between here and there, let's say. As soon as you are not sticking to the rules, you just loose the premises. Thus, street by street, district by district...

Nadezhda Mihaylova:

- Usually the favorite places people have are related to some concrete memories. There are in Sofia several buildings and places that have been for me the source of special emotions. I have lived on the corner of Solunska St. and Raiko Daskalov St., the so-called "Takev" Park where I have spent most of my childhood. I remember that there was this cafe there frequented by the intellectuals of the capital. It was called "The Hats" and a large part of old Sofia used to gather together there. For somebody born in a certain city there are many things that are part of one's memory. That's why if there is anything that has always pained me it is the fact that one can hardly say that consistent development is a typical characteristic of Sofia at the moment. I remember how popular the colonnades were. However, later on they were filled up, they were converted into shops, somebody put up glassed walls. Gradually the city environment became rather denser but in a way that is not always nice.

- For me personally, the fact that almost all pedestrian zones were taken away has turned into a big problem, or at least in that part of the city which is supposed to keep the romanticism of the old city.

- I am tempted to say why I started my campaign from a church. That's because I have always thought that at the basis of every change, reform or a deed related to change, there must be spirituality.

- It is obvious that there is not policy for the preservation of the monuments of culture. In practice, the antique parts are integrated into the city environment and the best way to preserve them is to incorporate them in the best possible architectural way. While the opposite, which is the mixture of styles, the eclecticism, the confrontation of the business and advertisement, or the combination of the business/advertisement with the old buildings that are anyways badly taken care of, provides the background for the chaos and the lack of a general idea. So, what the municipality should doubtlessly do is to protect the public interest, which is actually part of its functions as it is.

- There are two ways to achieve the above. The first one involves the application of the funds available from the EU and these are very substantial indeed. The EU has a very consistent policy for the preservation of the cultural heritage. There is money available in the EU funds but the municipality should put up an application while proposing the necessary concept for the preservation of this cultural heritage. The other way is of course, the partnership with the citizens' organizations and the NGO's. However, I want to stress that this is rather the superstructure, the upper level of what must be done by the municipality of Sofia. Any donation or activities on the part of the citizens' initiatives can only be an extra bonus. They cannot render useless the role of the municipality nor could they be used as an alibi for its passivity where it is very much needed. I also want to mention that, unfortunately, there is no strategy for the development of the city. If there were one, it would have been a lot easier to plan the various priorities, to

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incorporate these within the budget of the city. I had the opportunity to acquaint myself with one strategy that has been worked out with the support of the World Bank, a strategy for the development of Sofia, which I think has not even been translated into Bulgarian yet. I do not know why. This strategy has a bit different; or rather more optimized way of allocations from the municipality's budget. It provides for a special status for the monuments of culture and the preservation of the cultural heritage.

- Sofia must be the only capital city that has no museum for contemporary art... There was this idea to relocate the National Art Gallery in the building of the former Technical University, which was vacated for that purpose. However, the palace itself is a monument of the architectural heritage and I would doubt the purpose and the necessity to move the art gallery there in the first place. Maybe this already empty and anyway already targeted for such a purpose building would better be used to make a museum for contemporary art in Sofia. I am sure that this would only enrich the city.

- These stands that one can see in almost every part of the city, stands where all kinds of things are sold, from notebooks to underwear and socks, are a problem for the whole city and especially for the center. We must find a way to give a chance to the traders to do their small commerce, which feeds their families, and that's truly small business, while on the other side the municipality must commit to arranging the stands in ways that do not contradict the accepted rules for the development of a modern European city.

- The monuments are part of memory regardless of the positive or negative associations that are triggered. There are probably no neutral monuments in terms of our most recent history. However, no matter what they are I think they should be in good shape so that they do not turn into ugly and monstrous stains on the cityscape.

- The mausoleum is obviously not part of memory any longer but that location did not become an organic part of the new concept of the city. There is no capital in the world where the main square, the square with the most representative administrative buildings, is practically turned into a parking lot, or into a bear fest because these are the only ideas so far. I



Miglana Nikolchina, Nadezhda Mihaylova and Milla Mineva / Миглена Николчина, Надежда Михайлова и Мила Минева

can promise that I will organize a competition about the way this concrete location in this part of the city should be rearranged.

- I do not know what the law says but I think that in practice the municipality cannot stay out of participating in the cultural life at all. I mean there is no way it should not participate even on administrative terms alone. In my view the municipality should create the fertile ground for identifying ideas for how to celebrate various occasions.

- Just a few days ago I was in the Lyulin district of Sofia where the notorious issue about the spaces between the concrete panel apartment blocks was discussed. During the debate with the citizens there one very interesting idea came up. I committed myself to investigating the context and should there be the opportunity, to make it happen. The idea is to organize Councils of Mothers to whom the municipality would delegate the care for these in-between-the blocks spaces, for their neatness, for their arrangement. There is such practice outside of Bulgaria and of course, we are looking for the motivation here because after all the people who have children have a different outlook and sensitivity for such problems in comparison to those who for instance, do not have children or take care of house pets, dogs, etc.

- Risking the loss of some support I will tell you that the Mayor cannot either substitute for or compensate for the lack of urban habits that are obviously missing in many places. It has to do with culture as well. Some might even say with sanctions too. Probably that should be a priority for the state as a whole and I think the non-governmental sector could be a very good partner. The media as well so that a common background of shared civilization and public culture is achieved.

- I think there are no rules about advertisement around the world, although if we were to look for some kind of balance we will probably find precedents. The least that could be done is to allocate certain space parameters in Sofia for advertisement or to introduce some regulations about the way ads are put up. I think however, that this kind of aggression is very hard to handle by anybody, either the state or the municipality. The only thing we could try to do is to find ways to restrict ads or to place them at certain concrete locations, that is to say to have some rules and principles that the municipality would supervise and enforce sanctions if the rules are disregarded. In practice, it all has to do with having a clear system of control and sanctions for those who disregard the accepted rules.

- Unconditionally, neither the municipality, nor the politicians should approve or disapprove of certain architectural monuments or buildings that are being constructed at the moment. There are boards of experts for that; the stand of the experts is what matters most in this case.

- What I can also add is that there should be compatibility and integration between the architectural monuments. No matter what, the various styles of architecture should not be in confrontation to each other. Otherwise unacceptability of the cultural environment is bred and that makes people say that this or that thing is kitschy, or to think that nobody tried to consider the concrete cultural or architectural project in ways that make the city comfortable to live in for the people.

Lyuben Dilov, Jr:

- The nightlife of Sofia is the great advantage of the city inhabitants. That's the number one thing that is startling absolutely all my friends from abroad who visit here, the people, the faces, and the mood. They like nothing else here.

- Let me elaborate on my stand on the signs. So, these signs are the

reflection of one simple thing: they reflect the great crisis of identity, our attempts to catch up with ourselves, our inability to know who we are. Some time ago when we were discussing very seriously whether our political movement "Gergovden" should project a message especially for the gay people and for those who feel different in general the political analyst Ivan Krustev, who was lobbying in favor, told me that in fact there are not gay people in Bulgaria, that these are actually people who do not want to be Bulgarian but have no idea how this could be. So they have found this kind of way that, at least at first glance makes them non-Bulgarians. The problem is that even we ourselves do not quite know what exactly we do not want to be. Because if we know what we do not want to be maybe we will be able to figure out what we do want to be. I think the main thing, the thing I take part in this campaign with, is to somehow get across the message to those who can hear me and understand me that there is no way we can become what we want to be without ceasing to be what we are at the moment. That is to say to involve more people in the small districts where they can solve a problem so the problem is solved.

- I insist that the seven huge parking lots that are to be constructed in Sofia to be offered for an international competition. The architects should pay attention to the fact that we do need a new symbol of Sofia. Our souls are stretched between different times and places, thus it is quite logical that we live in such chaos. Of course, we can commit ourselves to pressure through the municipality to take care and put order in the chaos, to manage it within some framework, however I think that it would be too risky and dangerous.

- I personally think that the less restrictions there on the right of the individual to express him/herself, to voice out aesthetically, the more voices and words will be heard. Ultimately, democracy means the right of an informed choice above all. Any limitation of the informed choice is a threat to democracy.

- It is maybe possible to do something through dictatorship of the wise. Unfortunately, it has never happened. We did struggle a quite lot against that project to construct a business center at the former site of the municipal library. We struggled as much as we could; at the end we were too few. After all, in the municipal council there is a majority that is voting. And it does vote – end of story, that's the situation.

- I want to tell you something very simple. When it gets to be too complicated, then there are simple rules. The simple rules are about how people feel when they walk along the streets. There is some kind of proportion between the height of the person, the width of the street, and the height of the buildings that one is moving alongside of. Maybe the architects here would know how exactly this proportion has been measured but I have felt it with my skin. That's what makes some places very cozy and comfortable regardless of how beautiful or rich they are, while other places are very ugly in spite of how shiny or famous they are.

- Every that was happening in the last ten years was a clear indication of the transitory nature of each undertaking of ours, of each effort. I think that the political elite is in huge debt here. It was the elite that created this feeling. Acquiring ever more power in order to justify itself, the elite did not leave any power where it could happen naturally. That is to say, the elite did not delegate. It made all the time commitments to decisions and was generating super expectations. The failure of these was wiping it away later on only to be replaced by the next elite, and so on. I think the great magic of government is actually not to govern but to delegate downwards – to help flowers blossom but also to delegate responsibility. Together with my advisors I have tried to suggest wide delegation of the process of decision making, to introduce such rules everywhere, throughout the whole philosophy of the city, into the way it functions. We are constructing the framework; somebody else makes the decisions. The municipality should take care only of things it can do well, only things that are its business.

- There is a lot to be done to bring out what's happening at the moment – the nightlife, the cultural life of Sofia. It is necessary to allocate a central ticket and information center. Then it could be cloned. I plan to make it obligatory for all companies that are advertising when they buy a billboard spot, especially in the center, to advertise cultural events for one week every month for free. This could be done easily using the dictate of the municipal council members.

- It is rather more interesting if we will be able to weave away the garbage and building taxation of large companies who support cultural events, let's say festivals of culture. That's something real which, if we are successful, we can manage.

- Whether I should declare an apartment block from socialist times a monument of culture or not, that's really none of my business. My business would be to provide an opportunity to the people who think they know what should or should not be a monument of culture to argue somewhere overnight until finally they reach an educated and informed agreement on that. In principle, I think that the city on the outside is indeed what its people are from the inside. In one word, what we see is connected to what happens in our heads and souls.

- My dream is to offer to the kids from the High School for Fine Arts to draw all over many of those disgusting side facades of the blocks in the outskirts of the city. Just to cover them with huge graffiti. I see this from a simple viewpoint – that's what the future Sofia dwellers are seeing most



Pavel Popov and Lyuben Dilov, Jr. / Павел Попов и Любен Дилов-син

often. When they go out of home they see across the other disgusting block. One should start fixing things with what one sees most often. Because if you create the sense of intolerance for the ugliness across the street, it is quite possible that later on that same young person will pressure to fix the building in the center as well, a building that is not his/her constant sight.

- Everyone who is running for whatever office, especially now when it is quite fashionable to talk about left or right, should have a private answer to several questions. The first one is: is property sacred or not? Private property – who is responsible for that? Do we provide an opportunity to the people to express themselves in the city, or are we saying, no, do not express yourselves through the city. The other option is to search for some complex balance whose limits we are arguing about all the time. That's one thing. It is just so very important what could be done and what not because at the end I am running for a mayor of Sofia, not for the office of a Chief Executive Aesthete. And I am the head of a list for councilors. I know that all of that could be summarized in one sentence that says "the art of the possible". That means to make the bureaucrats work better and to let people freely express themselves.

Stefan Sofianski:

- Actually, if I think of the good, the favorite place it must always be related to some pleasant time spent. I can tell you about the two favorite places of mine. Even if I go back in time, it's still the St. Sophia church. My family has a history with that and it's not only a family history. These are the places where every time we have had the need to share something with God or in some ritual, we have gone. My second favorite place is the sports complex of the Borisov Park where every Saturday and Sunday for maybe over 30 years now I go to do sports. I have indeed a very direct relationship to this one.

- A lot of things upset me. As for the antiques and lace market next to the Alexander Nevski Cathedral in particular, all over the world in the center of cities there is such a place. I see some flavor there. I walk through this place quite often and I can see how much time foreign visitors spend there. It's a different matter whether the place should be and could be made prettier a bit. For sure it can be but will it not lose something of its current flavor? I cannot answer this; I am not in a position to judge. I will tell you though what we have done for this place and you will see it next year. Twice we planted around a hundred Japanese morello trees and this



Stefan Sofianski and Alexander Kiossev / Стефан Софиански и Александър Кьосев

year in the spring the first ones were blossoming, maybe some of you have noticed.

- I think that a mayor has the right, if professionally well trained and motivated, to think in innovative ways. That is to introduce this kind of think into his vision of the city without breaking the rules and up to a point.

- I think experts should make the decisions. I cannot decide on visual matters because I am an economist. Here I will share the common notion that the time has come again to re-establish the office of "Chief Executive Artist" of Sofia.

- What is the function of the Municipality? It cannot take it upon itself to solve all problems. When a concept is built you are providing the framework and from there on it is very important to delegate properly the detailed working out and the realization of this concept between the competent people. In any event, these should be numerous.

- I will answer the question about the story of the symbol of Sofia right away, and of all the fountains too... Naturally, here the question is about artistic quality as well. It should not be below a certain acceptable level. It's also a question of initiative. Excluding this particular sculpture by Georgi Tchapanov which was financed by the Sofia Underground, all others, starting with the one on Slaveikov Square all the way to the last one we have just inaugurated, all these are sponsored by various companies. We have received the proposals and, without having to look for funding, after the experts have confirmed that the proposals fit into certain artistic standards, only then we have given the "green light" to put up these sculptures. Let's not start an initiative only when we do not like something. Let's start initiatives and suggest things that we like, even if we are not their authors. Then we can let the public and the proper administrative offices make the judgment whether the initiative fits into artistic standards or not.

- I personally like this sculpture. When I pass there it does something for me. I can quote my mail, that's my objective criteria. I get and read letters on a regular basis. It's really a question of perception. There is also the citizen initiative you always forget about. Each time you are forgetting that somebody has been thinking and creating, has been searching and proposing. What did you suggest to me about this particular place? You are citizen initiative in as much as to say "I do not like that".

- We want to define two natural cultural centers. The first one is the Sofia Theater, the Small City Theater "Behind the Channel" and the "Sfumato" theater company. The other one is the space of the former mausoleum and the National Theater. As a long-term strategy I would like to concentrate the cultural life in the summer in this location. This atmosphere undoubtedly allows for non-pretentious bars where one can sit down. There is also this, I think, rather objective fact – the place is always full of people. What better than the National Theater being surrounded by people all the time? What better? It means the location has been interpreted in such a way that we do not run across but have made it into a natural

meeting point. For me, that's the criteria whether we have succeeded to give meaning to the place.

- I would photograph the Covered Market, the Central City Bathhouse especially now that the majolica has been restored and you will be able to see it in only one week. So, I would photograph the square there. I would photograph the Palace, an exceptionally beautiful building that was also restored somewhat, and the Parliament, The Tsar Liberator monument, the Alexander Nevski Cathedral, St. Sophia church. I would not want to photograph the Mladost and Lyulin housing projects.

- The truth is that there is no order in the advertisements. Here the fault is entirely ours. There is over saturation. In spite of the fact that for one and a half year now we do have a scheme with a limited number of billboards, with a prescribed procedure of installing and using them, unfortunately the scheme has not passed through the appropriate state offices in order to be implemented. As for the banners – that's only my fault, I can tell you right away, it's only my fault. At the moment I have no idea how to solve the problem.

- The dream of every mayor and maybe of every person is to see the city as he/she envisions it. Regretfully, that's impossible. I have always said this thing, because I do love the city, that I would like to contribute, if I can, to make the city so nice that one day it will look as beautiful as it looks now from far away, let's say from the Horse Shoe on top of Vitosha Mountain, or from the St. Petka Monastery, or from the road to Bankja, if you have been there, it's such a magnificent view to Sofia there. From far away all these problems seem to disappear and only the beauty is left to see. If we can manage to realize that some day, I think we would have all accomplished a lot.

В залата и по улиците / In the discussion hall and on the streets



Discussion:

Todor Boulev: I absolutely support the agenda of the Visual Seminar. I think the first stage of searching, of conclusions, of sharp criticism, of these meetings of images and revealing of problems that are present in the environment, this stage is practically over. For me the it is still an open question about how the Visual Seminar will manage to use the level of conclusion in order to come up with concrete proposals for the building up of a definitive policy as regards the visual environment. The involvement of a variety of experts should be the main aspect in the future course of action. Because for good or bad it is precisely those engineers, urban experts, architects, sociologists dealing with urban sociology, etc. are the kind of people that are constantly facing the problems of the city management. These problems are far too complicated to be exhausted in a pre-election meeting with one or a number of candidates for mayor. By the way, there was a time when they used to involve even poets as well artists in the urban research units. So that the poets could define the poetic spirit of the city and the unit would reflect on that in its propositions. It's good that there was such a time. The bad thing is that we have forgotten about it.

Alexander Kiossev: I think the problems of the visual environment should be decided in complex democratic configuration. There is the Office of the Mayor; there is the Municipality; there are the experts of both these. On the other, there are the various citizen organizations each one having a concrete field of expertise. Ideally between all these there should be a horizontal link so they can do things together. Thirdly, there are single citizens who are fed up indeed with some concrete visual problems. Whom should they complain to? And how do they translate their concrete and sometimes petty complaint into a more theoretical, political and effective language? I would say that for me the ideal situation to discuss the visual problems of the city is to configure the triangle between the Mayor's office and experts there, with the NGO's that are linked between themselves into, let's say a consortium of a sort or something more loose, and also single citizens who have their own concrete visual problems.

Antoaneta Tzoneva: I am the ombudsman of the Sofia Municipality. I fully agree that we have to find some mechanism to involve the citizens in the decision making process when the visual environment is concerned. The fact is that Sofia needs very clear regulations. Within my term in office I insisted that the municipal council should pass normative legislature in accordance with the current situation and the state law regarding precisely advertisement and the advertisement business. It did not happen in spite of the good will of the administration or of the municipal council. The political lobbies in the municipality did not have enough political will to manage this. In order to speed up the process of taking the decisions we think are best for us, I would suggest the following formula: when we see that there are no regulations but a vacuum which breeds what we have as visual environment, an environment that is quite disturbing with the aggressiveness and cynicism people detect daily, we must define a vision and we should describe it according to the formulas that the bureaucracy is used to deal with. Then we can start discussing. At the moment there is no such



Визуален рейтинг / Visual ratings

I. Стоян Александров / Stoyan Alexandrov

Гласували / Voted	61	
От тях:/ Of those:		
Вижда/ Sees	11	18%
Не вижда / Does not see	19	31%
Горе-долу / So, so...	25	40,98%
Кривогледа очи / Cock-eyed vision	6	9,8%

II. Надежда Михайлова / Nadezhda Mihaylova

Гласували / Voted	56	
От тях:/ Of those:		
Вижда/ Sees	45	80%
Не вижда / Does not see	1	1,78%
Горе-долу / So, so...	7	12,5%
Кривогледа очи / Cock-eyed vision	3	5,3%

III. Любен Дилов-син / Lyuben Dilov, Jr.

Гласували / Voted	47	
От тях:/ Of those:		
Вижда/ Sees	24	51%
Не вижда / Does not see	1	2%
Горе-долу / So, so...	13	27,65%
Кривогледа очи / Cock-eyed vision	9	19%

IV. Стефан Софянски / Stefan Sofianski

Гласували / Voted	36	
От тях:/ Of those:		
Вижда/ Sees	15	41,6%
Не вижда / Does not see	5	13,88%
Горе-долу / So, so...	4	11,11%
Кривогледа очи / Cock-eyed vision	12	33,33%

debate. The professional community is standing outside just pinpointing the problem. We must contribute in quality to the situation and suggest solutions. That's in order to get the administration to work. If in Sofia there would be five projects for a set of rules concerning the advertisement business, I bet you we would already have a functioning legislature and the environment would be different in the city. In one word, we have to move on to the level of pragmatics and technology of decision-making.

Iara Boubnova: I will gladly and impatiently interject here. One of the concrete ideas of the Visual Seminar was to suggest to the Sofia Municipality, as well as to the other communities in the country, the establishment and the motivation of a "visual ombudsman". Obviously we would like to have some type of articulated representation of the people's opinion and voice in front of the politicians. So, we are suggesting to the municipality of the capital city as the first in the country, to initiate the office of the municipal Visual Ombudsman and to define ways in which this official can collect information about the aesthetic and visual discontent, as well as about visual irregularities.

Ivaylo Ditchev: I am not sure you noticed that we did not "meet" with most of the mayoral candidates, if not with all of them. We were speaking different languages. In the hallway one of the participants mentioned that there so many wrongdoings are committed in the municipality that the one who brings up the issue of aesthetics he or she will be considered mad, as simple as that. Which means the actual situation is very far from what we are talking about. Secondly, the language these candidates are using, maybe the language of local administration in general, is extremely concrete. I am not sure whether this is the specific way things are managed locally, or whether as a rule that's the language of local administration. We

have been trying to bring up some more general principles and confront the candidates whereas in exchange we get talk about some concrete and isolated cases. That's the feeling I have. I am one of those opponents of Alexander Kiossev who would claim that the aesthetic of the city and the interface of a city in general, is not a democratic matter. On the contrary, what's happening in Sofia at the moment is indeed the result of the rule of a single mind. I for one think that a city cannot be managed in a democratic way. If we want to have a vision about the city, about some kind of wholeness and order, visual order in this case but also order in general, we should have a lot more strictness and there should be some kind of disciplining.

Luchezar Boyadjiev: I think that this kind of disciplining would be hard to achieve. However, I am convinced that the mayoral candidates took this discussion quite seriously and that's proof that the discussion has another function as well – to install in the minds of the politicians the idea that they are indeed responsible, that they should also feel accountable in front of the electorate about the visual aspects in the life of the city. On the other hand, I tend to think that such discussions and debates, this kind of somehow pressuring the mayors that is happening for the first time, will not lead to restrictive regulations. Rather, it will eventually lead to the simple realization that somebody who is putting up a billboard with a questionable female image on it, will feel reluctant to do so in the face of the public opinion.

Milla Mineva: I have the feeling there is no time. I honestly admit that I just have no time to wait until some people start feeling embarrassed. I am afraid that if I have to wait a bit longer I will start feeling embarrassed that I am not walking topless on the streets. That's why I think that it is very important indeed to introduce some tightening up of the rules and of the situation. What a debate like this one can do is to demonstrate that there is a problem with the city vision. However, that's been an obvious fact for 13 years and yet nothing is changed. I am asking why? Well, because some professional elites and guilds, some people who are dealing in whatever way with the visual environment have not been debating between themselves. I would suggest here that the next discussion is a truly a debate of the guilds where a lot of different people dealing with advertisement, art and so on in a variety of ways sit down and try to reach a consensus.

Yavor Gardev: In my view, something rather important should be mentioned here. I think that when we are talking like this about introducing rules and when we are trying to implement regulations in an environment that up until ten years ago or so actually ran away from its regulations, we must always keep in mind and never forget the fact that when taken into consideration the real social environment is such that those who want to have regulations will be in the minority... There is this aspect here that we do always start from the desire to be more European, more civilized and cultured, more regulated, let's put it this way. We are always operating in an environment where we are the unhappy minority of rationally trained people. In one word, the social environment wants something else, it wants it alone and it takes it by itself. That's why a partially fixed apartment block in the suburbs or the laundry hanging here or there is a kind of unmediated manifestation of life and thus, it is an authentic manifestation. We have to ask here the question whether we do have the right to impose our aesthetic snobbism on an environment that is no way demonstrating any particular wish to change? I think it's a bit shortsighted to expect the mayoral candidates, or any office of power, to start introducing regulations all of a sudden. Because in this way they would be compromising the very basis of the democratically elected position they are in. I am absolutely sure that it is senseless to demand from the candidates for mayor a strict visual policy because that would be inadequate to the natural political and social process. The slow and gradual process of normalization is actually something rather more charming compared to the swift implementation of rules. You must know that when an environment like ours is cut off from its true sources of life it becomes quite boring.

Alexander Kiossev: I hope that all of you will take part in the future discussions that the Visual Seminar plans to organize. Then we will have at least several different social groups represented including people of Sofia who will voice out their authentic opinion.