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Creating A New Europe Through Contemporary Art: Manifesta and Its Relation to Art, Society and Politics

Summary

Manifesta - European Biennial of Contemporary Art is a nomadic biennial that takes place every two years in a different city in Europe. It emerged as an idea in the early 1990s and made its first edition in Rotterdam in 1996. Held in 11 countries and 13 cities with the participation of nearly 40 curators and curatorial collectives and over 1000 artists so far, it has become one of the most important art organizations of the post-Cold War Europe. This dissertation focuses on Manifesta's political, economic, urban and artistic relationships with its host cities and regions as well as the changes that occur in its own goals, discourse and organization over time. What were the conditions that led to the inauguration of Manifesta and what goals did Manifesta set out in the beginning? Where did these goals evolve over time? How can we theoretically handle the complex set of relationships that Manifesta has established with different actors in each edition? Answering these questions, it argues that Manifesta is one of the new institutions of neoliberal governance in the field of art in the post-Cold War era. By investigating each editions' complex set of relations in detail, it contributes to a better understanding of both Manifesta and the phenomenon of contemporary art biennials.

The theoretical and methodological approach of this thesis is shaped partly by how I grasp the biennial phenomenon, and partly by the nomadic and multilayered structure of Manifesta. I approach biennials as places for encountering different actors such as curators, participant and local artists, the organizing institution and its staff, city administrators, gallerists, art dealers, critics, sponsors, collaborative institutions and international and local audiences. Therefore, when tackling with a biennial, it is necessary to consider the preferences, expectations and benefits of these different actors. When it comes to a biennial like Manifesta where each edition takes place in a different location, one should evaluate the biennial's own structural and artistic perspective together with the historical, economic, urban, cultural and artistic conditions of the city or region that it locates. In this context, this dissertation evaluates each edition of the biennial within its own context, adopts theoretical approaches suitable for this context and compares editions to find common points.

The comparative analysis of the editions are crystallized under three sets that each corresponds roughly to a decade of Manifesta. Accordingly, I have divided the thesis into three analytical parts, each containing three chapters and a case study. Part I focuses on the period from 1991, when Manifesta emerged as an idea, to its third edition held in Ljubljana

in 2000. Part II begins with the fourth edition organized in Frankfurt in 2002 and closes with the ninth edition held in Genk in 2012. Part III separately evaluates the tenth (St. Petersburg - 2014), eleventh (Zurich - 2016) and twelfth (Palermo - 2018) editions of Manifesta.

Part I delves into the motivations, goals, perspectives and achievements as well as failures of Manifesta in its first decade. Manifesta was initiated to establish a network among artists of post-communist countries and their counterparts in the West, to make room for young artists and to discuss a new Europe in the wake of post-Cold War period. These goals politically contextualize Manifesta as to form and substance from the very beginning. Part I argues how Manifesta described "the East", which institutions it was supported by, and what were its artistic and curatorial strategies.

Chapter One discusses the notion of biennialization after examining the impact of globalization on art institutions and contemporary art historiography. It analyzes the characteristics of Manifesta (e.g. being nomadic, opening up space for young artists and being pan-European), and the position Manifesta occupies within the contemporary art biennials. It also questions how Manifesta defined the east of Europe and shows how it contributed to the construction of the Western art scene and art market in post-communist countries and to the re-Westernization of the artistic productions of them.

Chapter Two investigates the institutions and organizations that provided institutional, infrastructural, economic and discursive assistance for Manifesta to achieve its prime goals. It first highlights the similarities between Manifesta and the EU cultural policies and particularly the ECoC project. Also, the relationship of Manifesta with the EU funds is presented in this chapter. Chapter Two continues by analyzing the organic relationship between Manifesta and the Institute of New International Artists (InIVA) and Soros Centers for Contemporary Art (SCCAs). The last part of this chapter unveils the background of art sponsorships of the leading tobacco company Philip Morris, the main sponsor of Manifesta 1 and Manifesta 2.

Chapter Three focuses on the artistic and curatorial strategies of Manifesta's first decade. It comparatively analyzes the percentages of the local artists, artists from post-communist countries and the young artists as well as the average age of the participant artists. Moreover, this chapter focuses on some artistic interventions that subverted the discourse of Manifesta.

The Case Study of Part I focuses on the *Manifesta in Our Backyard* project initiated by SCCA - Ljubljana, which aimed to evaluate the Ljubljana edition of Manifesta from a local perspective. It explores how local art scene of Ljubljana reacted to Manifesta's preference to not to cooperate with local art galleries and artists. By analyzing the articles appeared in the three editions of *PlatformaSCCA*, media organ of the project, it gives an opportunity to see how Manifesta's first decade discourse and goals were challenged by the local art scene figures.

Part II expands on the political and artistic approaches of Manifesta in its second decade. In this decade, Manifesta shifted its attention from the East-West axis to the North-South axis and concentrated more on the regions than cities. Moreover, it became alienated from its experimental / flexible / anti-institutional features and took a step towards institutionalization. Part II starts with Manifesta 4 (2002) in Frankfurt and comes to an end with the ninth edition held in Genk - Limburg (2012).

Chapter Four investigates the sources of Manifesta's trending interest in the regions rather than cities in its second decade. Critically examining the concepts of new regionalism and creative cities, it shows how Manifesta was hosted within the new regionalist policies of the regions and cities. This chapter illustrates the importance of Manifesta for regions and cities which try to make more space for creative industries through neoliberal urban regeneration policies.

Chapter Five concentrates on two concerns of Manifesta that came into prominence in its second decade: the urban and education. It exemplifies how Manifesta collaborated with architectural firms to renovate abandoned buildings and turned them into venues with the aim of leaving a permanent mark where it located. It further highlights the coherence of this tendency with host regions' and cities' neoliberal urban regeneration policies. The second part of Chapter Five discusses Manifesta's inclusion of the subject of education on the agenda. It shows how the potential of critically engaging with the learning processes and education practices appeared in the cancelled Manifesta 6 was missed and later transformed into art mediation programs.

Chapter Six argues the second decade of Manifesta from its artistic and curatorial strategies. It asserts that Manifesta's dependence on its host cities and regions paved the way for excluding the artworks and curatorial approaches that critically engage with its hosts. Moreover, similar to Chapter Three, it generates data on the profiles of participating artists and Manifesta's engagement with local art scenes. Reading the consensual relation between Manifesta and the host cities and regions over post-political critique and critically evaluating the data, it exposes how Manifesta's initial goals and structure has changed over time. The chapter comes to an end with illustrating exceptional artistic and curatorial interruptions that challenge with Manifesta's consensual perspective.

The Case Study of Part II focuses and expands on one of these interruptions: Artist Colonialist performance of Thierry Geoffroy, aka Colonel, realized in Manifesta 8 - Murcia. It investigates Geoffroy's questioning of Manifesta 8 within the framework of Geoffroy's artistic practices. It argues that Geoffroy's simultaneously performed subversive practices cracked the Manifesta's consensual practices and discourses.

Part III tackles with the tenth, eleventh and twelve editions of Manifesta. It argues that, in its third decade, Manifesta acted pragmatically in terms of its discourse. It shows how Manifesta picked up one of the discourses that it had produced within the last two decades

and adopted it to its new destination. Due to the lack of a common discursive and strategical practices that interconnect these three editions, it covers each edition in a separate chapter.

Chapter Seven investigates the dynamics behind the choice of organizing Manifesta in a former communist and a non-EU member country, Russia (Manifesta 10 – St. Petersburg), after fourteen years. After discussing the oligarchs' involvement in the Russian contemporary art scene, it discusses the call for boycott sparked due to the restrictive law against "homosexual propaganda" and the annexation of Crimea, and analyzes Manifesta's reactions against this call. It argues that Manifesta's attempt to absent itself from these discussions was itself a political stance. It illustrates this stance by looking closer to the artistic and curatorial strategies of Manifesta 10.

Chapter Eight elaborates on the relationship between Manifesta 11 and Zurich's urban policies towards creative industries. It further analyzes the theme of the biennial, "What people do for money?", in the light of current discussions on precarious work conditions. In addition, it generates data on the profile of the participant artists and unveils the effect of Art Basel on the curatorial and artistic strategies of Manifesta 11.

The last chapter of the dissertation, Chapter Nine, scrutinizes the Palermo case (Manifesta 12). It first mentions to the harmful effect of the Mafia activity on the urban and cultural life and to the city administrators' expectations from Manifesta. It then analyzes the data compiled from the fieldwork to better understand the opinions of the audiences about Manifesta 12.

The Case Study of Part III keeps analyzing the Manifesta 12 audiences' perception on Manifesta project as a whole. It shows that Manifesta's initial goals and discourses gained a place in society, despite the fact that it has abandoned some of these goals in the beginning of the 2000s.