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## Artist Residency Programs in Rural Areas in Serbia: New Organizational Models



39th Art Colony of Jalovik, Serbia. Image courtesy of artist Silvia Lorenz

### Overview

**Sanja Lazić**, researcher and co-founder of **DRITO** – a new residency program located in Rovinj, Croatia – has recently focused her attention on the issue of **art colonies in rural Serbian areas** and their great potential in areas of art production, creation of cultural content in rural areas, decentralization of culture and education.

## Research topics and results

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This research paper focuses on the issue of art colonies in the rural Serbian areas and their great potential in areas of art production, creation of cultural content in rural areas, decentralization of culture and education. Art colonies in Serbia have a long history and tradition which go back to more than one century; however, these concepts have stayed on the level they were initially established and somewhere along the way lost their initial purpose and failed to follow contemporary art trends. Consequently, art colonies have remained very traditional, still connected to Socialist times during which most of them flourished, keeping their original organizational models. Over time, artworks created at colonies reached numbers that are difficult to archive and save, creating a situation where art colonies lose their main purpose. At the same time, the concept of artist residencies became popular, especially in the west and, while the two terms have undoubted similarities in concept and idea, art colonies in Serbia failed to recognize these resemblances and try to adjust these programs to the exciting and interesting models of artist residencies who have taken the idea of art colonies and raised it to a higher level.

This paper explores the current situation of art colonies in rural areas of Serbia today, their internal structure, financial stability and organizational models, as well as their potential for sustainability, general stability, and the possibility to get closer to the current artist residency models.

## Motivation for research

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I had the opportunity from a young age to be surrounded by artists since there was an art colony near the place I grew up; I was absorbing every conversation and art reference, but also the everyday struggles of those artists which haven't really changed or improved since the time I was a kid. This issue has been going on in my head unconsciously for years, so, when I thought about the topic for my research, the idea reappeared and, due to the fact that the problems existing two decades ago have remained the same, it was reassuring to have the certainty that this was something I needed to pay attention to and explore from a cultural management perspective.

Serbia is one of the countries with the largest number of registered art colonies in the world, more than 200. However, they have outdated organizational models, a very traditional approach to programming and, in most cases, their staff is insufficiently educated in cultural management. Additionally, many of these art colonies were founded in rural areas, during Socialism, as a response to the cultural policy tendencies at the time of cultural decentralization. Among other problems are a lack of sustainability and dependence on local authorities and the State, which has a tendency to prioritize questionable organizations in its open calls, while financial support, if given, is rather symbolic.

At the same time, while there is a noticeable growth and an increase in the number of residency programs in Serbia, art colonies, which share the same concept as these programs, have been forgotten and left to fight this battle on their own, without the help of the State as its founder. My idea behind the paper, therefore, was to do a case study on several art colonies in rural Serbian areas, compare their organizational models to what we consider today to be artist residency programs and, by obtaining and focusing on their uniqueness and long tradition, try to provide solutions and recommendations on two levels (towards decision makers and organizers of colonies) in order for them to reach better sustainability and move towards current artist residency models.

## Contribution to the field

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One of the questions I raise in my paper is the actual connection and similarity between art colonies and artist residencies, the question of whether art colonies are predecessors of what we know today as artist residencies. Throughout this period of information gathering, I was very surprised to find out that not many people researched this topic. For me, it was a very interesting debate since it can tell us a lot about artist residencies today and their role in the cultural sphere. The concept and idea are almost the same – artists spend a period of time on a specific location, focused on their work. While art colonies have retained this model, artist residency programs have upgraded and reformed it, putting focus more than ever on its multidisciplinary nature. In the context of the contribution to the general knowledge of art residencies globally, I think that even though this paper focuses on one specific issue in the enormous field of cultural management and cultural policy in Serbia, it still adds to the wider discussion on several levels - as an understanding on the origins of residency programs and as a comparison between Serbian cultural policy tendencies and those of more developed countries, which can then be an indicator of a much greater state in culture not only in Serbia, but Balkans as well.

## Key learnings

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The research I conducted only proved to me that artist residencies today have a much bigger role than just as a platform for support to artistic production and mobility. In the case of Serbia, based on numerous interviews and focus group I did, these programs present a necessary space for the much needed discussion among artists, reflection, networking and art education. This proved to be especially true among young, emerging artists who are just coming out of art schools, with no idea about what steps to take in their professional careers, since there is no support from institutions, and the local art market is still weak. This inspired me to take action from my standpoint which resulted in co-founding organization DRITO, dedicated to providing conditions to actors in culture by focusing on creating seemingly unusual collaborations, connecting artistic with non-artistic fields, providing room for unexpected results to happen. The residency program we are currently working on will consist of all these questions and activities, and we hope that our involvement will help changing the state of art and culture and make at least a bit of improvement.

**Sanja Lazić** graduated from the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade, Serbia and holds two MA Degrees - Cultural Policy and Management from University of Arts in Belgrade, as well as one in Development of International Artistic and Cultural Projects from Université Lumière (Lyon II). She has been working in this field actively since 2010. Over the course of her career, Sanja participated in numerous festivals, cultural projects and cultural institutions, working on diverse positions from content management, project management and communications. Recently she co-founded the organization DRITO, focused on providing conditions to cultural actors in the Balkans.

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