

## Self-organization

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Complex and over-institutionalized as it might be, the European art world(s) can still prove to be quite uniform and lacking possibilities – especially when it comes to young people, old people, women, people of color, people with non-conformist/dissident views, people with physical or mental difficulties, people without citizenship etc. (Lately, even white middle-aged men complain about negative discrimination.) The issue is much larger than just being about access or representation: the agents that ensure or deny it are perceived by many as operating in a system still stuck in the colonialist, white-supremacist, capitalist ideals and practices of Western modernity, despite all the progressive, emancipatory content they purport. As one looks towards the Eastern part of the continent, the above-mentioned complexity is waning: budgets shrink, institutions vegetate, the market is weak, ideological control rises; however, governmental encroachment of free-market processes, the disappearance of institutional autonomy in the field of culture and the accompanying nationalist, xenophobic *spiel* do not offer an alternative to the wrongs of the “Western” system. And while this “model” emaciates contemporary culture, it also presents hostility towards any alternatives to its own workings.

In the resulting environment of decreasing confidence in art institutions, both in the East and the West, institutional critique sometimes takes a proactive or projective form, that of self-organization, which is the main subject of this year’s Autumn School of Curating. Of course, self-organization is older than institutions themselves: substantially bottom-up, it constitutes the gathering of a certain number of individuals around a set of common interests and goals that they decided to act upon. Thus, it makes an absence in the art establishment explicit: an absence of possibilities, discourses, practices, forms, values. More often than not, the *how* is as important as the *what*, if not more so: self-organized initiatives typically operate in flat hierarchies and experiment with commonist, non-extractionist models, challenging traditional capitalist organizational and economic structures. To self-organize is to create a common, open space of expression, exchange and production that is self-regulated and self-governed. They present not only art, but also an operative model that reflects the ideas and values the founding group consensually or, at any given moment, antagonistically stands for. Even though these groups or platforms are commonly perceived as being created and maintained in opposition to standard institutional policies and practices (as they indeed mostly are), challenging the *status quo*, one should also understand the complex net of interdependencies that exist between institutions, the market and self-organized initiatives and recognize the potential of long-term strategic alliances formed by the latter group. It is also necessary to speak about the dangerous tenuity of the line between freedom and self-empowerment that participation in such structures promises, on the one hand, and self-exploitation and precarity that serving them demands, on the other.