

Ladyfest Timisoara: A Day of Expression, Education and Action for Men and Women

by Bori Kovacs and Ruxandra Costescu

The first Romanian edition of “Ladyfest” – an international feminist festival dedicated especially to the arts and to social activism – aimed to create a space designed for women and their creative work, a space to come together and talk, teach one another, and discuss; to get acquainted with what other women do and why they are determined to engage – even if sporadically – in grassroots movements and “field” work. We tried to address the lack of bands with women playing instruments in different music scenes, the lack of independent art exhibitions held by independent female artists, the lack of a diverse public space dedicated to women, especially in the arts and social activist realm, and last but not least the lack of communication and collaboration among feminist organizations and women active in their communities.

The festival meant three days of workshops, exhibitions, screenings and live concerts that attracted a diverse public. One of our conclusions was that in the Romanian public space, the notion of an event such as Ladyfest is completely exotic. The audience was divided into two big categories. First, there were people (mostly women, but also men) who came during the day to participate in workshops and to meet



Participants gather during one of the festival's many workshops.

other women active in feminist grassroots organizing. They were really our main target group, and they participated as organizers, artists and activists, sharing information about their own activities and planning future projects and activities together. They were few, but they found an extraordinarily welcoming place for their ideas and got involved at all levels, most volunteering lots of time and help towards ensuring that the festival ran smoothly. The other category was made up of those who came to the fest solely for the live music (most of them were men). They were little interested in the art and exhibitions, or the film screenings. Though we were glad that both men and women participated throughout the three days of the festival, we knew that the people who came especially to see the bands had little (or less) to do with a feminist perspective on society and the need for a female space where women could come together to express themselves and share ideas.



This mix of people makes us wonder how to find a balance between putting on an event with maximum exposure and participation - which has the potential to attract and inform a large number of people - and one focused on fostering discussions and connections within a smaller group of truly interested people. We believe that everyone in the community should be able to participate. But it is essential to have policies for the event that underline its characteristics and its basic mission.

The reactions and comments from participants were extremely positive. The most significant thing for everyone was that they felt a new impulse for projects and initiatives on gender issues, and that the fest gave them new ideas, new resources to work with. The complete review of the festival, which among other things includes the detailed program and a list of conclusions we drew for the next Ladyfest Romania (planned for 2007), can be read at: <http://romania.indymedia.org/en/2005/05/838.shtml>; all the important info can be found on the fest's site (soon to be rebuilt): <http://ladyfest-ro.pimienta.org>.