

PRESS RELEASE

Kosovo cities yielding to the loss of collective memory

25 June 2014, Prizren

On the evening of the 24th of June, 2014, a discussion panel was held in Prizren in order to address the potentials of activism in regards to protecting cultural heritage sites across Kosovo. This particular forum was titled “Cultural Heritage and Activism,” and several individuals gave their take on the situation. Panel members included Vesel Hoxhaj from the Council on Cultural Heritage of Prizren, Rozafa Basha from EC Ma Ndryshe, architect Eliza Hoxha, and Hasan Hoti from the Regional Cultural Heritage Centre in Prizren. The panel was moderated by Fisnik Minci, a journalist from the “Koha Ditore” daily paper. Over the course of this forum, the panelists and participants deliberated on the need and ways of organizing the citizens to safeguard Kosovo’s cities from urban degradation.

The overarching conclusion of the discussion was that the level of civic activism has been too low in comparison to the rate of degradation cities now face, with a particular emphasis on the destruction of sites of significant cultural worth. Forum panelists and participants reflected on their experiences in civic organization by reconfirming various restrictions arising from political pressure and/or from economic interest groups. One of the disturbing trends noticed was that there has been an over-politicization of cultural heritage sites since 2004, as well as the perception of citizens being hazardous towards monuments. A considerable part of the panel was dedicated to the loss of the collective memory of Kosovar citizens, especially their inability to withstand the vicious and uncontrolled dynamics of urbanization. This type of vicious urbanization often appears in the form of illegal building projects and destruction of the old to accommodate business interests. The panelists coming from the state heritage institutions once again confirmed the issue of law enforcement and lack of institutional coordination for cultural heritage protection. Among other things, the discussion revealed that part of the responsibility for the degradation of cities goes also to urban planning and heritage professionals.

This discussion forum has produced several recommendations, which are listed as follows: the mobilization and increase of citizen-based pressure on the institutions for the protection of cities, enforcement of laws on cultural heritage through stricter punishment of the offenders, use of city’s public spaces for cultural activism, strengthening advocacy capacities for the promotion of local cultural policies, the establishment of a cultural heritage site administration

group, and the strengthening of professional ethics among professionals within the cultural heritage sector.

The discussion forum “Cultural heritage and Activism” is the second of five discussion forums that will be organized on a monthly basis in Prizren. These forums are part of the “Cultural and Urban Activism in Prizren” project, aimed at encouraging societal debate on the role of cultural activism in the city’s urban transformation. The project is essentially an initiative of cultural and artistic intervention intended to creatively tackle the challenges of urban development and of democratic reform in Prizren. In addition to the discussion forums, in the year 2014, the project begin research on the potentials of cultural and urban activism in Prizren, create artistic interventions in a public space, form virtual platforms for cultural blogging, and a regional conferences which will serve as a venue for exchange between cultural activists from Western Balkan countries.

Thank you.

With regards,

Hajrulla Çeku, Executive director

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