

SHARED OR CONTESTED CULTURAL HERITAGE



Contents

About the project "Shared or contested heritage"	5
FOREWORD	7
Forum ZFD	7
INTERVIEWS	8
IN SEARCH OF COMMON 'ARCHAEOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE': AN INTRODUCTION	8
The past should remain in the past	12
"Sine ira et studio" - Without passion & beyond emotions	16
National narratives as part of ancestral memory of a given historical moment	20
Cultural heritage is an ongoing process	24
Cultural heritage belongs to Humanity	30
Reconnecting broken bridges through art & culture	35
All cultural heritage belongs to each of us	40
Presenting heritage in its integrality for today's society	44
Cultural heritage is the environment in which we develop	50
Cultural heritage as the best example of cultural dialogue and cooperation	54
Language is one of the most valuable cultural heritage sites	58
CONCLUSION: CULTURE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT TOOL IN THESE STRANGE TIMES	64
PANEL DISCUSSION:	67
THE POWER OF HERITAGE AND CULTURE	67

Contents

ARTICLES	82
COOPERATION ON THE TOPIC OF SHARED AND CONTESTED CULTURAL HERITAGE	82
Overcoming Legacies of the Past: Devising the best Model for the Western Balkans	83
The Danube River connects people and cultures	88
The Wendish folk costumes as an added value in a cross-border context	93
AFTERWORD	99
ALDA – European Association for Local Democracy	99
CONTACTS	101

Ivana Petrovska, Editor and Publisher
Galina Ivanovska, Proof-reader and Editor
Biljana Volchevska, Editor and Contributor
Ana Frangovska, Interviewer and Contributor

Interviewees:

Darija Andovska; Maria Tsantsanoglou; Kristijan Kovachev; Elizabeta Dimitrova; Alexandros Stamatou; Svetla Petrova; Vladimir Martinovski; Aemilia Papaphilippou; Tosho Spiridonov; Bojana Janeva Shemova; Sanja Ivanovska Velkoska

Articles:

Ana Krstinovska; Stanka Parac; Viktor Zakar

Contributors:

Antonella Valmorbida; Vladimir Martinovski; Sofia Grigoriadou; Kristijan Kovachev

Publishers:

ALDA – European Association for Local Democracy
Forum ZFD

This project is supported by ForumZFD



This publication was produced within the framework of the project “Shared or contested heritage”, implemented by ALDA Skopje and Forum ZFD. The content of the publication is the sole responsibility of the contributors and interviewees and does not always reflect the views and attitudes of ALDA and Forum ZFD.

Shared or contested cultural heritage, Skopje, ALDA – European Association for Local Democracy and Forum ZFD, 2020. 70 p.

About the project

“Shared or contested heritage”

The project “Shared or contested heritage” is designed to improve cross-border cooperation and exchange between cultural workers and heritage professionals from Greece, Bulgaria, and North Macedonia. The project is conceived to raise awareness among practitioners in the field of “Dealing with the Past”, history, and cultural memory studies about the abuse of historical facts and their influence on collective memory. The project raises awareness of the role of contested histories and shared cultural heritage for the EU integration processes among heritage practitioners and cultural workers.

Objectives

The objective of the project is to encourage open dialogue on peaceful and tolerant interpretation of cultural resources among heritage practitioners and cultural workers.

Project goals:

- To encourage open dialogue on peaceful and tolerant interpretation of cultural resources among heritage practitioners and cultural workers
 - To improve cross-border cooperation and exchange between cultural workers and heritage professionals of Greece, Bulgaria and North Macedonia
 - To raise the awareness of the role of contested histories and shared cultural heritage for the EU integration processes
-

Target groups:

- Cultural workers
 - Heritage managers
 - Curators and museum workers
-

Project outcomes:

- Raised awareness among practitioners in the field of Dealing with the Past, history and cultural memory studies about the misuse of historical facts and their influence on collective memory
-
- Raised awareness of the role of contested histories and shared cultural heritage for the EU integration processes.
-

The project was implemented in 2020 by ALDA – European Association for Local Democracy and Forum ZFD.

FOREWORD

FORUM ZFD

[Forum ZFD](#) or "Forum Civil Peace Service" is an organisation whose main goal is to contribute to the creation and encouragement of the development of sustainable structures for promoting tolerance and peace. Forum ZFD was founded in 1996 and its main mission is to strive for "the realisation of the idea of civil peace service" in Germany. The organisation is supported by 38 organisations members and more than 150 individual members. Currently about 25 local and international employees work in our offices in Belgrade, Pristina, Skopje and in Sarajevo. Organised in regional working groups, we strive to increase the impact of work towards the peaceful transformation of conflicts across the whole region. At the same time, the situation and the specific contexts at the national level are also always taken into account.

The project "Shared or Contested Heritage" which was implemented in cooperation with ALDA Skopje, had as one of its main goals to open a discussion about the instrumentalization of heritage and its different and often opposing interpretations in different national contexts. It has been proven that heritage can be used to establish and strengthen hegemonic history, reactivate imagined histories, or serve different political agendas. Interpretation of the past and understanding of cultural heritage has been determined to be one of the central and most problematic aspects of the recent political disputes between North Macedonia and its neighbouring countries, Bulgaria and Greece.

With this project, our main interest was to look at how heritage as a symbolic potential of the past which can be in a material, immaterial or purely symbolic form used and understood by the heritage practitioners such as conservators, site managers, museum curators, tour guides, heritage entrepreneurs etc. I believe that with the different activities that were organised we managed to stimulate a dialogue between practitioners from the different countries which resulted in opening up possibilities for a more dynamic understanding of heritage, which is not a fixed way of understanding the past but rather dynamic and subject to interpretation, and as such always structured in the present.

The Macedonian-Greek dispute as well as the more recent Macedonian-Bulgarian historical dispute were often discussed in order to examine symbolic structures and cultural politics as mechanisms for establishing both hegemonic histories and identity politics. I believe that the project managed to open up some very important questions and encouraged a dialogue between heritage practitioners from different national contexts, thus opening up opportunities for a more fluid, inclusive and multi-perspective understanding of the past.

INTERVIEWS

IN SEARCH OF COMMON 'ARCHAEOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE': AN INTRODUCTION

Concept towards the project “Shared or contested heritage” written by: Ana Frangovska, art historian and curator.

“...It is only by respecting the past that we can be worthy of the future.”

(Winston Churchill, Speech at the Lord Mayor's Banquet in Guildhall, 9 November 1951)

The countries that make up the Balkan Peninsula today have a shared past; certainly, of religion (or rather religions), usually of empire, often of conflict, always of migration, and just as constantly of trade, tastes in food (and drink), as well as of folk practices. Different ancestors—Thracians, Scythians, Romans, Greeks, Illyrians, proto-Bulgarians, Vlachs, Slavs, and so on—all contributed to a mix of peoples and practices that, for all their differences, nevertheless present a recognisable cultural form. Not only a cultural form, but a grammatical substantive: “balkanisation” that is used in a negative context in historical references, to characterise fragmentation, disorder and complication.

Different empires—from the Macedonian, Byzantine, and Ottoman, through the Austro-Hungarian, and Soviet of the 20th century—sought to impose political unity on a geographic area of religious, cultural, linguistic, and ethno-national heterogeneity. The shattering of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires at the end of WWI awoke the consequent rise of nation-states; the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989; the breakup of Yugoslavia and consequent wars of 1992-1995; the wars in Kosovo and the recent ascent of North Macedonia to the status of a recognised national entity have all impacted the region which continues to focus, however exacerbated, on the contested rather than shared aspects of its past. So, for example, the ascension of North Macedonia to the European Union is currently dependent on the construction of a consensual historical narrative agreed upon by North Macedonia and its two EU neighbours Bulgaria and Greece. If we approach these issues in detail, then we will slip into a huge political debate where everything seems unsolvable and complicated, since every history depends on its own sources.

Therefore, the project “Shared or contested heritage” comes into a specific momentum where its objective is for the more relevant and important – the creation of a platform for multiple voices and shared narratives, where contested histories are confronted and cultural stories celebrated. To answer this challenge, 10 professionals from the three countries (North Macedonia, Greece and Bulgaria) mainly related with culture, heritage and history were interviewed in order to approach and exchange their perspectives in understanding, communicating and presenting shared cultural heritage.

The focus of this project is on shared heritage (and the histories it refers to) that could be considered contested. In other words, heritage¹ that can evoke different, sometimes difficult or competing views and emotions, depending on its approach. The challenge of dealing with such divergence lies in the attempt to simultaneously convey these different views and voices when presenting this heritage to the public. This is an essential task when dealing with heritage and histories that speak to different people in different ways.

Views about the approaches to shared and contested heritage will probably differ in every country. It is therefore not only interesting, but also important to bring together practices and knowledge from the three different countries (North Macedonia, Greece, Bulgaria). Through these interviews with the relevant professionals we will give insights into new, alternative ways of working together and sharing such experiences and knowledge. And it will enable a reciprocal exploration into new ways of understanding and of presenting heritage and related histories.

The politics of memory and oblivion are highly important socio-historical and cultural mechanisms. It is in the nature of every authority and ideology to impose its selected accounts and invigorate its own social discourse on selected past events in order to create a hegemonic version of the past. Omission, silence, ignorance, oblivion, deficiency, lack of traces or signs with their special coded languages form constitutive parts of these politics of memory/oblivion, they play significant role in the transmission process. However, contested representations of the past, we sometimes tend to forget (especially in the communities historically inclined to mental and cultural homogenisation), can be different and viewed from different angles and perspectives – but all are, nevertheless, in relation to power structures, identity strategies and institutional politics of memory/oblivion.

¹ Heritage is something that can be inherited from generation to generation. It can be a physical object or property (tangible heritage), or language, culture, songs, literature, folklore, customs, habits etc. (intangible heritage) and all that defines who and what we are.

The element of time, remembrance, individual stories and collective memories are perceived as important. By using different approaches through documentation, narration, questioning, archiving, they give a new concept towards contemporary documenting and usage of the archival information to point out a different type of acknowledgment of the memorisation and transmission of cultural memories.

The interviews are mainly focused on overlapping and collaborative perspectives of mutual cultural parts of the history (older or recent), depending on the core professional area of the interviewer (history, music, literature, archaeology, art history, contemporary art, journalism), that can be considered as “OURS” or “INTERNATIONAL” in order to celebrate the positive aspect of the ‘archaeology of knowledge’ (Foucault’s term).² Foucault’s term archaeology of knowledge, even it is not related to archaeology as such, is especially relevant in this context. Indeed, it is through the current points of view/discourses and usage of the democratic and humanistic aspects of the history, art history, protection and conservation of heritage that we shall create the future ‘archaeology of thoughts’ for the new generations to come through knowledge of an appreciation for the other and the different cultural values, as well as of respect for the basic human rights.

A shared history, no matter how contested, is something that binds us together and provides us with an avenue to understand and discuss our current situation and our hopes for the future. Debating that history, no matter how challenging it can be, is something we should be committed to doing in continuity.

To conclude again with Winston Churchill, but now through an aphorism: ‘The peoples of the Balkans produce more history than they can consume, and the weight of their past lies oppressively on their present.’

²In “The Archaeology of Knowledge”, Foucault conceptualised the term ‘archaeology of knowledge’ to metaphorically name the method of philosophical and theoretical research in specifically located historical periods. This was a reversal of the general homogenised and unique history of ideas into a history of discontinuous layered structuring of opinions and cognitions. Foucault’s ‘archaeology of knowledge’ does not seek to accurately and humanistically determine the thoughts, representations, and obsessions that are hidden or displayed in the discourses themselves, but to “reconstruct” the discourses as historical practices and states subject to certain rules. His archaeology does not deal with the observation and interpretation of continuous passages that ideally connect the discourses, but the motive is in determining the “certain” unrelated specifics of the discourses themselves. Therefore, for Foucault, archaeology is not an “expected” return to the mystery of the origin of the object, but a “systematic” description of a discourse-object. Foucault’s archaeology does not establish continuity between different areas (Renaissance, Classical or Modern Age), but observes them as homogeneous and closed discursive worlds which, in turn, are heterogeneous.

Interviewees:

North Macedonia

- Prof. **Darija Andovska**, contemporary composer and professor at the Music Academy in Skopje
- Prof. **Elizabeta Dimitrova** – art historian – specialist in the Byzantine Period
- Prof. **Vladimir Martinovski** – poet and literature professor
- **Bojana Janeva Shemova** – art curator in MOCA, Skopje
- **Sanja Ivanovska Velkoska** - PhD in archaeology, senior conservator in the National Center for conservations, Skopje

Greece

- **Maria Tsantsanoglou** – Acting General Director at MOMus, Thessaloniki, Greece
- **Alexandros Stamatiou** – photo reporter (from Athens, living on a relation Athens – Skopje)
- **Aemilia Papaphilippou** – visual artist

Bulgaria

- **Kristiyan Kovachev** – guest lecturer at the South-West University “Neofit Rilski”, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria
- **Svetla Petrova** - chief curator in the Archaeological Museum in Sandanski, Bulgaria
- **Tosho Spiridonov** - historian, anthropologist and archaeologist from Sophia, Bulgaria

The past should remain in the past

An interview with Bojana Janeva Shemova, art historian and curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje, Interviewed by Ana Frangovska, art historian and curator.

"Cultural heritage has an enormous role in defining self-identification as well as on the conception of a national narrative and in the creation of a sense of belonging. Maybe, it is finally time to rethink the possibilities of multilayered and open-minded views on history."

Author: Bojana Janeva Shemova, art historian and curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje



Bojana Janeva Shemova is an art historian and curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje. Her interests extend to the fields of individual identity of the artist and social interactions as building blocks of society. Mrs Shemova also works as an independent curator, realizing and organizing many manifestations and exhibitions locally and internationally. In 2009 she curated the Macedonian participation at the Venice Biennale with the art project “Fifty-fifty” by the artist Goce Nanevski. Since 2012 she is a co-founder of “Ars Acta-Institute for Arts and Culture”, Skopje. She first specialized in Byzantine art history, and then, in 2010, completed her Master’s degree on “Art and Cultural Heritage, Cultural Policy, Management and Education” at the University of Maastricht. Currently, her work is mostly focused on the field of contemporary art and contemporary culture. Her passion for cultural heritage is derived from her professional experience as well as its application through the touristic tours she offers in Skopje. For the purpose of this interview, Mrs Shemova will reflect on the topic “Common or disputed heritage”.

What is heritage, how does it work and what does it mean for people with different backgrounds?

Bojana: Heritage, and in particular cultural heritage has a broad scope of meanings and levels of importance to different social, cultural and ethnic groups; and it can have a different interpretation depending on a personal approach. It has an enormous role in

defining self-identification as well as on the conception of a national narrative, and in the creation of a sense of belonging, which has been very often used as a “tool” in political outwitting. The main mechanism of cultural heritage development is the social selection and the community’s way of passing it on from generation to generation.

Do you think that heritage institutions should be more inclusive or exclusive? Is it important to be clear about whose stories are being presented, by whom and for which purposes? Some practices point towards an inclusive approach through the restructuration of institutions and the fostering of supportive leadership. What do you think about this approach?

Bojana: Of course, there is notable world-wide reconsideration of the narratives and position stands that have been prevailing for quite some time. One of the most important examples is the re-conceptualisation of the MOMA New York collection by including more indigenous and black artists.

It seems as an important decision because everywhere in the world it is deemed as a starting position of the institutions’ cultural identity and political inclinations. I believe that there is a lot of work to be done in the field of restructuring the institutions towards more inclusive programs of underrepresented groups.

Do you engage in cross-border cooperation with professionals from Greece and Bulgaria and do you find any difficulties in its realisation?

Bojana: As a curator in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje, I will point out that in 2019 for the first time after a long hiatus; a collection from artists of the Thessaloniki Museum of Contemporary Art was finally presented in our museum. This event represented a great success since we had not seen works from Greek artists in a long time.

We do have heritage that can evoke different – sometimes difficult or competing – views and emotions, depending on the approach and viewpoint. The challenge of dealing with such divergence lies in the attempt to simultaneously convey these different views and voices when presenting this heritage to the public. Do you agree and do you think that this is an essential task when dealing with heritage and histories that speak to different people in different ways?

Bojana: It can be, but what is fundamental when dealing with cultural heritage is to take into consideration all of the aspects and stories behind it. Also, to be ready for controversial reactions, because one of the keycomponents of rethinking cultural heritage is that it takes time.

Can you think of an example of a case study of shared or contested heritage related to your particular field of interest (ethno-music, history, archaeology, contemporary art, art history etc.) and how would you approach its presentation?

Bojana: The contemporary art field is in its basis above and beyond the national agendas and historical connotations. My approach to these topics is firstly focused on the universal, human ideas, then on the national characteristics. This is why in the field of contemporary culture, very often there are examples of international manifestations that are celebrating universal qualities and values.

Dealing with cultural heritage means taking into consideration all aspects and stories behind a landmark and be ready for controversial reactions

What is the impact of Cultural Heritage on solving issues related with shared or contested history?

Bojana: Cultural heritage has enormous importance in the contested history among different countries. Especially in the countries that have overlapping history. One of the peculiar examples for me is the naming of the medieval King Marko, with different nouns Krale Marko by Macedonians, Krali Marko by the Bulgarians and Kraljevic Marko by the Serbians. We all believe that he was part of our history, which he was, because of the geo-political positions at that time.

How we choose to remember the past and how we choose to move forward are the critical issues of today. What does cultural heritage mean in different national and regional contexts? Who can claim it as theirs, and who decides how it is preserved, displayed, or restored? How to share cultural heritage?

Bojana: Nowadays, the importance of certain aspects of cultural heritage depends a great deal on the political agendas of the country. We are witnessing changes in narratives, overlapping with the changes of Governments. This is obvious especially in the young countries like ours, who are still in the formative period of their national pride and sense of belonging through the different parts of the oral and written heritage.

“What signifies the national narratives are that they do not include layers; they are one-sided, often chronological and has a sense of a fixed, static, historical truth, about them”, said Anderson in 1991. Do you agree with this citation and why?

Bojana: Sadly, I do agree that this has been the case in the past and still is today. Maybe, it is finally time to rethink the possibilities of multilayered and open-minded views on history.

When we discuss about shared or contested heritage the issue of time is essential, and in extreme cases of recent turmoil, the best method for reconciliation might not be to address the past as individually relatable; but rather that the past should hopefully remain in the past. Do you think that this can be implemented into our context?

Bojana: I completely agree that the past should remain in the past, especially now when the whole world is infected with globalization and interconnectedness among people. However, in our context I believe that this process will go slowly and with difficulty, considering the social, economic and political strong agendas of the different sides.

Do you think that the realm of words can influence the way the audience read the stories related to heritage (shared or contested)?

Bojana: I do. Not only the realm of words, but also the visual imagery has a strong impact on this process.

*The interview is conducted within the framework of the project “**Shared or contested heritage**”, implemented by ALDA Skopje and Forum ZFD. The aim of the project is to improve cross-border cooperation between North Macedonia, Greece and Bulgaria. The project raises awareness of the role of contested histories and shared cultural heritage for the EU integration processes among heritage practitioners and cultural workers. The content of the interview is the sole responsibility of the interviewee and does not always reflect the views and attitudes of ALDA and Forum ZFD.*

"Sine ira et studio" - Without passion & beyond emotions

An interview to Kristiyan Kovachev, historian, guest lecturer and PhD candidate from the South-West University "Neofit Rilski" in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria Interviewed by Ana Frangovska, art historian and curator.

"A good approach to shared heritage is to shift the focus - from the great national stories to the daily life of ordinary people - how they lived and thought the world around them."

Author: Kristiyan Kovachev, teacher and PhD from the University "Neofit Rilski" in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria"



Kristiyan Kovachev is a guest lecturer at the Southwestern University "Neofit Rilski" of Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria. He conducts seminars in Anthropology of the Middle Ages, Cultural Anthropology and Theory of Culture. He participated in the organisation and logistics of the conference "Culture, heritage and tourism for small towns" (2019) and was part of the team working on the project "Field archaeological excavations along the route of the Struma Motorway, lot 3.2 ..." conducted by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. He has a Master's degree in "Medieval Bulgaria: State, Society, Culture" from the Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski. As a historian whose PhD thesis is related with medieval Ohrid, he is a very relevant interlocutor in the framework of our project ["Shared or contested heritage"](#).

We do have heritage that can evoke different – sometimes difficult or competing – views and emotions, depending on the approach and viewpoint. The challenge of dealing with such divergence lies in the attempt to simultaneously convey these different views and voices when presenting this heritage to the public. Do you agree and do you think that this is an essential task when dealing with heritage and histories that speak to different people in different ways?

Kristiyan: Yes, I think so. I think that this is an essential task that could be solved scientifically – beyond the emotional – by presenting those “alternative stories” (outside the official national narrative) that complement definitions such as “shared history”, “common heritage”, and so on.

Do you engage in cross-border cooperation with professionals from North Macedonia and do you find any difficulties in its realisation?

Kristiyan: Yes, I do. My doctoral thesis is related to medieval Ohrid and I am in constant communication with representatives of the University of Skopje, the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the Institute of National History in Skopje, various museums and the Macedonian Orthodox Church. I haven't encountered any difficulties in our collaboration.

Have you worked on collaborative projects dealing with shared memories and histories?

Kristiyan: Yes. In 2018 I participated in a project related to the study of the process of construction of the popular historical narrative in Bulgaria and North Macedonia.

Can you suggest some new and creative approaches for the presentation of facts relating to shared or contested heritage?

Kristiyan: Firstly, a good approach is to shift the focus – from the great national stories to the daily life of ordinary people – how they lived and thought the world around them. Currently, many researchers tend to focus not so much on the study of politics and wars (glorious victories and great kings) whereas on culture, placing the research focal point on “microhistory.”

Can you think of an example of a case study of shared or contested heritage related to your particular field of interest (ethno-music, history, archaeology, contemporary art, art history etc.) and how would you approach its presentation?

Kristiyan: Ohrid, which I am exploring, is a disputed area between Bulgarians, Macedonians, Serbs and Albanians. Serbian claims to Ohrid provoked Ivan Snegaroff to write “History of the Ohrid Archbishopric” in 1924. Today Ohrid is within the borders of the Republic of North Macedonia. However, Bulgarians (including some historians) insist that Ohrid is Bulgarian territory. In 2019, Albanian flags were placed on key historical sites in Ohrid. All this shows us that Ohrid is a disputed territory. At the same time, however, we can talk about Ohrid in a different way. The cultural heritage of Ohrid, which is a sacred place for Bulgarians and Macedonians, would benefit from a new

reading as a “shared Balkan” and “shared European” heritage, without distorting historical facts and without opposing the countries’ interests in their current borders. This would be possible by presenting the “alternative story” – the one that will not divide us as for example, the history of art and culture. However, this could happen by adapting the modern Western conceptions of nations as “imagined communities” (according to Benedict Anderson) and as a product of the 18th-19th centuries. Excluding nationalist discourse, medieval Ohrid can be seen as a place of contact between East and West, which is also depicted in its image system (frescoes, icons etc.).

How we choose to remember the past and how we choose to move forward are the critical issues of today. What does cultural heritage mean in different national and regional contexts? Who can claim it as theirs, and who decides how it is preserved, displayed, or restored? How to share cultural heritage?

Kristiyan: In a national context, cultural heritage is thought of as something to be proud of. This is a relic left from the past to commemorate the glorious history of ancestors. It is used by the national governments as a tool for the formation of national consciousness, especially among adolescents. In the textbooks they are described as “strongholds of Bulgarian spirit” or “fortresses of Macedonianism”. Excursions are often made there with the task of consolidating the official national narrative in the students. In a supranational context, cultural heritage can unite the communities. In this regard, the attempt of the Council of Europe to develop Cultural Routes is indicative. They act as channels for intercultural dialogue and promote a better knowledge and understanding of European shared cultural heritage.

“Reviewing cultural heritage, a good approach is to shift the focus: from the great national stories to the daily life of ordinary people”

Another method of challenging the national narrative, regarding shared or contested heritage, would be to go from the particular to the universal. Cornelius Holtorf writes: “(...) the new cultural heritage can transcend cultural particularism by promoting values and virtues derived from humanism and a commitment to global solidarity.” What do you think about this?

Kristiyan: Yes, I think so. A good opportunity in this direction is the development of global networks for shared cultural heritage, which will strengthen universal values.

When we discuss about shared or contested heritage the issue of time is essential, and in extreme cases of recent turmoil, the best method for reconciliation might not be to address the past as individually relatable; but rather that the past should hopefully remain in the past. Do you think that this can be implemented into our context?

Kristiyan: I think not. In my opinion, this will be the case as long as the political discourse dictates how to talk about the past. This will be the case until the past ceases to be used by politics to argue current policies.

What signifies the national narratives are that they do not include layers; they are one-sided, often chronological and has a sense of a fixed, static, historical truth, about them, said Anderson in 1991. Do you agree or not and why?

Kristiyan: I agree. In the national historical narrative, there is always a victorious country whose history is presented chronologically in its “rise” to a glorious empire. This historical truth is fixed in the memory of the collective. It cannot be disputed. Any different story (from the established narrative) is perceived as an attempt to falsify the story.

Do you think that being more polyvocal, engaging, diverse, (self-)reflective and participatory may solve some of the obstacles on the way of presenting cultural heritage (shared or contested)?

Kristiyan: I hope so. However, solving these problems must become a cause. And the whole group, in this case the “historical guild”, must be involved in this cause. And its task is not easy – to talk about the past as it is, without additional embellishments influenced by current politics and nationalism. “Sine ira et studio”!

*The interview is conducted within the framework of the project “**Shared or contested heritage**”, implemented by ALDA Skopje and Forum ZFD. The aim of the project is to improve cross-border cooperation between North Macedonia, Greece and Bulgaria. The project raises awareness of the role of contested histories and shared cultural heritage for the EU integration processes among heritage practitioners and cultural workers. The content of the interview is the sole responsibility of the interviewee and does not always reflect the views and attitudes of ALDA and Forum ZFD.*

National narratives as part of ancestral memory of a given historical moment

An interview to Svetla Petrova, chief curator in the Archaeological Museum in Sandanski, (Bulgaria), interviewed by Ana Frangovska, art historian and curator.

"A person's origin should not be relevant to the concept of heritage - it should be defined as national/ancestral memory."

Author: Svetla Petrova, chief curator in the Archaeological Museum in Sandanski, Bulgaria



Svetla Petrova is a PhD in archaeology and chief curator in the Archaeological Museum in Sandanski, Bulgaria. Her principal subjects are archaeology and world history, a specialist in ancient, late antique and early Byzantine Archaeology. She works on the organisation of exhibitions, scientific conferences, protection of cultural heritage, archaeological studies, excavations, as well as museum funds. Mrs Petrova used to be a member of the department of classical archaeology and a deputy head of the National Archaeological Institute and Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, as well as inspector at the National Institute of Cultural Monuments. She has a competence in development and realisation of projects related to the ancient, late ancient and early Byzantine architecture and urban planning, early Christian Archaeology and basilica construction. She maintains excellent cooperation with Greece as well as with North Macedonia. Her professionalism and positive experience in cross-border cooperation makes her a very relevant speaker on the questions related to 'shared or contested heritage'.

What is heritage, how does it work and what does it mean for people with different backgrounds?

Svetla: Inheritance is what our ancestors left us with – material goods, historical memory, archaeological artefacts. When we speak about historical and archaeological heritage, it represents the ancestral memory of the people from a particular country or territory, shown through the artefacts. In any case, a person's origin should not be relevant to the concept of heritage – it should be defined as national/ancestral memory.

Do you think that heritage institutions should be more inclusive or exclusive? Is it important to be clear about whose stories are being presented, by whom and for which purposes? Some practices point towards an inclusive approach through the restructuration of institutions and the fostering of supportive leadership. What do you think about this approach?

Svetla: Archaeological and historical past are above all cultural, therefore the institutions dealing with Bulgarian national heritage – museums and institutes, ministry of culture; universities and the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences act also as foundations. They are all committed to preserving the national cultural heritage. When the institutions operate efficiently, there is no need for them to be restructured, and it shouldn't be a question of leadership therein, but only consideration of historical and archaeological data and facts.

Do you engage in cross-border cooperation with professionals from North Macedonia and do you find any difficulties in its realisation?

Svetla: Of course, I have cross-border cooperation with colleagues from North Macedonia in the field of archaeology – the ancient and early Byzantine eras. I have no problems and difficulties with the communication and realisation of our projects.

We do have heritage that can evoke different – sometimes difficult or competing – views and emotions, depending on the approach and viewpoint. The challenge of dealing with such divergence lies in the attempt to simultaneously convey different views and voices when presenting this heritage to the public. Do you agree and do you think that this is an essential task when dealing with heritage and histories that speak to different people in different ways?

Svetla: There may be some discrepancies. Stories are intertwined in the Balkans, but I don't think that should disturb us. Historical facts are clear and should not be interpreted for one cause or another.

“A person's origin should not be relevant to the concept of heritage - it should be defined as national/ancestral memory”

Can you think of an example of a case study of shared or contested heritage related to your particular field of interest (ethno-music, history, archaeology, contemporary art, art history etc.) and how would you approach its presentation?

Svetla: So far, I have no case of controversial results in my scientific field – Roman and early Christian/early Byzantine archaeology.

In a context of uncertainties and dystopias, what is the role of cultural heritage?

Svetla: I don't see any uncertainty or discrepancy from their usual places in the area where I work.

One of the challenges for researchers and practitioners in the field of cultural heritage is to develop more inclusive approaches to share heritage in order to transgress social and national boundaries. Any ideas on how this approach could be implemented into your particular field of interest?

Svetla: Since my field of work pertains to an era when modern social and national borders did not exist, I have no problems in the study of the historical and archaeological heritage of that period. I think historical facts should be interpreted correctly. For archaeology, no such problem exists.

What signifies the national narratives are that they do not include layers; they are one-sided, often chronological and has a sense of a fixed, static, historical truth, about them, said Anderson in 1991. Do you agree with this citation and why?

Svetla: I disagree, because national narratives are part of the ancestral memory of a given historical moment and there is no way, in my opinion, that they could be one-sided.

When we discuss about shared or contested heritage the issue of time is essential, and in extreme cases of recent turmoil, the best method for reconciliation might not be to address the past as individually relatable; but rather that the past should hopefully remain in the past. Do you think that this can be implemented into our context?

Svetla: The past always remains the past and cannot be interpreted as the present. In any event, as part of the cultural national heritage, it should have some impact. The past is marked by facts that, in our context, such as scientific activity, should not be distorted or adjusted to a particular situation. Cultural heritage, as a generic memory of a people, also determines its history. In the field of Roman and early Byzantine history and archaeology, I do not believe that adjustment or distortion of cultural heritage and identity can be applied, so far at least, it has never been the case.

Do you think that the realm of words can influence the way the audience read the stories related to heritage (shared or contested)?

Svetla: Words always influence if, of course, they are used accurately, clearly and correctly. Therefore, inordinate speaking in the field of cultural heritage, respectively, ancestral memory can lead to distortion and gross historical errors.

The interview is conducted within the framework of the project “Shared or contested heritage”, implemented by ALDA Skopje and Forum ZFD. The aim of the project is to improve cross-border cooperation between North Macedonia, Greece and Bulgaria. The project raises awareness of the role of contested histories and shared cultural heritage for the EU integration processes among heritage practitioners and cultural workers. The content of the interview is the sole responsibility of the interviewee and does not always reflect the views and attitudes of ALDA and Forum ZFD.

Cultural heritage is an ongoing process

An interview to Aemilia Papaphilippou, visual artist from Athens, Greece, by Ana Frangovska, art historian and curator.

"Let us not be willing to erase memory, because it is only through dealing with the past that we can possibly evolve into something better in the future."

Aemilia Papaphilippou, visual artist from Athens, Greece



Aemilia Papaphilippou is a contemporary Greek artist. Departing from the survey of her chess continuum, Papaphilippou focuses on the notion of the ubiquitous and perpetual motion via the historical, socio-cultural and anthropological realms. Through her works we can have the affirmative answer to the question: can contemporary art play a pivotal role in the understanding of our past through our present and future hypostasis? In her artworks she explores the interconnection of realities. One of her essential works is a major intervention set at the public site of the Ancient Agora of Athens, right at the foot of the Parthenon. Following, I will present her elaborated points of view on the topic of Shared or Contested Heritage.

We do have heritage that can evoke different – sometimes difficult or competing – views and emotions, depending on the approach and viewpoint. The challenge of dealing with such divergence lies in the attempt to simultaneously convey these different views and voices when presenting this heritage to the public. Do you agree and do you think that this is an essential task when dealing with heritage and histories that speak to different people in different ways?

Aemilia: The claim and opening sentence of this questionnaire “we do have heritage”, in the plural, suggests that this “heritage” (whatever is meant by that) is a cultural, or actual, property that is shared. Furthermore, it is implied that having different readings of this “heritage”, testifies to the fact that it is indeed shared, and it is only a matter of

viewpoints. This however is a slippery road to fallacy; having different opinions upon the subject of “heritage” doesn’t necessarily testify to a shared cultural understanding, nor, of course, to a cultural property that belongs to all the parties involved. One only needs to think of Indonesia and Netherlands for example; many others exist in the history of colonialism. Or Cowboys and Indians to put it lightly. Intertwining pasts do not necessarily lead to a common future- far from it!

What does heritage mean to you as an individual and as a citizen of your country and the world?

Aemilia: Being Greek, and to continue from where I left off in the previous paragraph, I understand Culture as an ongoing process, which is exactly that: a constant cultivation, a culture which breeds the Present, the Now! It is democracy in the making. This process incorporates all kinds of twists and turns yet it keeps reinstituting itself incessantly. When one realises that responsibility and respect comes forth from within, and regardless if one is actually Greek or not, it sheds light on what Socrates meant when saying “Greeks are the ones that partake in the Greek culture”.

Can you think of an example of a case study of shared or contested heritage related to your particular field of interest (ethno-music, history, archaeology, contemporary art, art history etc.) and how would you approach its presentation?

Aemilia: Picasso’s “Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. R. M.)”, created in 1907, and the usage of African masks, (among Asian or Iberian indicatives) in his portrayal of womanhood as the scary, confrontational “Other”. Interestingly enough Picasso’s only portrayal of a western woman is that of Germaine, the woman “responsible” for the death of his very close friend and possibly lover, Casagemas, who committed suicide in 1901 because being impotent Germaine denied to marry him. Picasso, according to Dora Maar, who “devoured” women and changed styles with every next lover, was a repressed homosexual. Interestingly enough this painting which, is probably dealing with Death and the sexual instinct for Life, intertwines genders, social stereotypes, colonialism, diverse cultures and artistic styles in thickly interrelated levels and cannot be truncated into easily digested chunks. However, although “Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. R. M.)” is considered a seminal painting to western contemporary art, we tend to remain at the surface of stylistic introduction to other cultures, (the African masks etc.) while the art market has not allowed a reading on manhood which would destroy the myth of Picasso as the ultimate male and surely reflect upon the value of his paintings.

But I should have first just mentioned the obvious: the ongoing (!) dispute over the Parthenon Marbles known as “the Elgin marbles”, removed between the years 1801 to 1812(!), from the Acropolis, by the Earl of Elgin, and now displayed in the British Museum.

Even Lord Byron, his compatriot and contemporary, could see that this was an act of vandalism and looting and wrote about Elgin: “Loathed in Life nor pardoned in the dust...” Let us therefore be reminded that which lies beneath “contested heritage” is always connected with profit. Even though the parties involved may feel as the protagonists, they may only be the leverage for pushing towards facilitating profit for parties that lay in the dark. In our region, the Balkans, the pressure to “reconfigure” the land has been a plight with no ending. Nowadays, among other things, we read about the energy market and we are entangled in its plot.

In a context of uncertainties and dystopias, what is the role of cultural heritage?

Aemilia: Culture, (which is based on cultural heritage but does not coincide with it) keeps people together as an infrastructure of sorts. It is a signifying system, a way of life that forms both the individual but also the collective and its connectivity. A sense of identity stems from it while the need for meaning is possibly more important than survival itself. Blood has been shed for centuries by people fighting for what they believe in, yet we remain rather naïve. After all, in our times, technology, Internet and dense interconnectedness of all sorts changes who we are, both on the level of Selfhood but also on the level of Collectiveness. It is therefore rather redundant to keep talking in terms of “cultural heritage” when Covid-19 has forced us all to realise not only the fragility of Life but how important art and culture, as an ongoing phenomenon, is for our survival.

One of the challenges for researchers and practitioners in the field of cultural heritage is to develop more inclusive approaches to share heritage in order to transgress social and national boundaries. Any idea of how you would implement this into your particular field of interest?

Aemilia: The “inclusive approach”, “transgressing social and national boundaries”, is not a good idea because it ends up being against diversity and variability while subduing conflict and controversy.

Obviously, we tend to undermine what Heraclitus taught us; that “all stems out of war”, meaning that we have to appreciate that in order to move forward we must undergo the dialectic of opposing forces, the Hegelian “thesis, antithesis, synthesis”, and accept the ever-changing flow of becoming. Furthermore, we tend to forget that People incorporate something cultural, which they feel drawn to, because it creates meaning for them. Once they do, they claim it as their own and protect it because it shapes who they are. It is human nature to the extent that even what is recognised as Selfhood is a construct not only on a social level but also on a neurophysiologic level. In this light we should invest in the future, creatively!

“Culture as an ongoing process which incorporates all kinds of twists and turns, yet it keeps reinstituting itself incessantly”

What signifies the national narratives are that they do not include layers; they are one-sided, often chronological and has a sense of a fixed, static, historical truth, about them, said Anderson in 1991. Do you agree with this citation and why?

Aemilia: I disagree. Cultural heritage is as much a thing of the past as well as a living corpus that gets to be investigated, or not, by the extent of how we value and understand what has been, in the way we act Here, Now, Today.

Let us not be willing to erase memory, because it is only through dealing with the past that we can possibly evolve into something better in the future. Cultural heritage therefore cannot be considered fixed, but an ongoing process that interprets the past, also through the actions of the present.

Another method of challenging the national narrative, regarding shared or contested heritage, would be to go from the particular to the universal. Cornelius Holtorf writes: “(...) the new cultural heritage can transcend cultural particularism by promoting values and virtues derived from humanism and a commitment to global solidarity.” What do you think about this?

Aemilia: Amused by generalisations of this kind I’m at the same time appalled by where they could lead us. We cannot leap “from the particular to the universal” if we do not understand that what we perceive as a particular given, humanism for example, is not a shared understanding nor a given! For example, human life is not valued by terrorists. “Martyrs” who are not only willing to sacrifice their lives to bring havoc, but are actually proud to spread death, have also an idea of a “universal” that needs to be spread around, this way or the other! Nor are human rights a given, even in societies that have bled in order to defend them.

When we discuss about shared or contested heritage the issue of time is essential, and in extreme cases of recent turmoil, the best method for reconciliation might not be to address the past as individually relatable; but rather that the past should hopefully remain in the past. Do you think that this can be implemented into our context?

Aemilia: No, this is not possible either. Meaning that which informs the present is, partly, that which has already been established in the past. We need to understand that we

should invest more in the present and creative processes, and yet at the same time be careful not to popularise the “past” in order to make it agreeable to the wide public or the market. The “past” indeed requires invested time and knowledge and we should be equally unwilling to deconstruct it so as to make it a commodity of sorts, nor think that it can remain dormant and let it “rest in peace”.

Do you think that the realm of words can influence the way the audience read the stories related to heritage (shared or contested)?

Aemilia: No. Words are only words. It is the way that words are used that makes a difference and it is only through communication that we can create common ground. Talking about “audiences” therefore, as is being suggested by the question, implies that “audiences” are rather passive listeners, and take in what is suggested by the “speakers”. However, this is never the case. “Audiences” do not exist passively because they are in reality partly co-authoring what is being put on the table. I, therefore, cannot but wonder: is what is being suggested here some propaganda of sorts?! If that is the case it will instigate further conflict.

When dealing with shared history and heritage international cooperation has the potential to foster more understanding within and between cultures. Do you agree with this? What is your personal experience?

Aemilia: Yes, I agree provided that this is possible. If the cultures involved value dialogue, communication, and the individual as an agent of change, then it “could foster more understanding within and between cultures”. The Galichnik residency in North Macedonia, is such a positive and successful case that I experienced personally. We should however note that heritage or cultural issues are/were not the goal of the residency, although they tended to surface. Making art is/was the goal of the residency; within the western paradigm of what art is about, which already established freedom of expression as a given (a common ground we should not take for granted). However not all cultures are open to that kind of dialogue and exchange.

In this light another incident, that I experienced personally, comes to my mind. I was invited to participate in a workshop in Greece, supposedly aimed at making art interactively. For this workshop, which involved only women Greek and refugees, the Greek women were not only advised by the organisers to be dressed “modestly” (they demanded no sleeveless dresses-it was Summer), but also that we would have to accept to undergo inspection by the refugees’ husbands, or their men kin (brother or whomever was considered “responsible” for them), in order to be allowed to finally interact among us. I declined participating.

The interview is conducted within the framework of the project “Shared or contested heritage”, implemented by ALDA Skopje and Forum ZFD. The aim of the project is to improve cross-border cooperation between North Macedonia, Greece and Bulgaria. The project raises awareness of the role of contested histories and shared cultural heritage for the EU integration processes among heritage practitioners and cultural workers. The content of the interview is the sole responsibility of the interviewee and does not always reflect the views and attitudes of ALDA and Forum ZFD.

Cultural heritage belongs to Humanity

An interview with Prof. Elizabeta Dimitrova, art historian specialised in the Byzantine scholar, interviewed by Ana Frangovska, art historian and curator.

"Cultural heritage belongs to the whole of humanity; it just happens that a certain country takes care of the heritage located on that country's geographic territory."

Elizabeta Dimitrova, art historian and Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje



Elizabeta Dimitrova, MA and PhD in art history from the University in Belgrade, is a Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia (University of Ss Cyril and Methodius). Within her scientific work, she devoted herself to the study of art, culture and socio-cultural features of the early Christian and Byzantine eras. In that context, she interpreted and was the first to publish the program, iconographic and artistic features of the ceramic icons from the Vinicko Kale site. Whereafter, Vinicko Kale became in the '90s one of the main archaeological attractions in the Balkans. Mrs Dimitrova identified the programmatic and iconographic concept of the frescoes in the Episcopal Basilica in Stobi based on the fragmentarily preserved parts of the decoration from the 4th century. Many of her scholarly works are devoted to the analysis and contextualisation of the symbolic meanings of the iconography of the early Christian mosaics in Stobi, Heraclea Lyncestis, and the antique town of Lychnidos. In the field of Byzantine art culture, she wrote a monograph dedicated to the Church "Assumption of the Most Holy Mother of God". Mrs Dimitrova is a very well-known worldwide researcher and a commissioner of many activities related to protection of cultural heritage.

What is the impact of Cultural Heritage on solving issues related with shared or contested heritage?

Elizabeta: The impact of heritage is one of the most influential aspects in this context, if one should have doubts about its value, capacity, management opportunities, protection options etc. On the other hand, if one wants to treat heritage as property, one should know that heritage is priceless therefore it cannot be treated as a property of any kind. Cultural heritage belongs to the whole of humanity; it just happens that a certain country takes care of the heritage located on that country's geographic territory.

Do you engage in cross-border cooperation with professionals from Greece and Bulgaria and do you find any difficulties in its realisation?

Elizabeta: I do have cooperation with colleagues from Bulgaria (ongoing project for digitalisation of cultural heritage with professors from Sofia) and permanent cooperation in the process for review of archaeology and history papers with professors from Athens. In that regard, I have never had any problems, difficulties or pending issues involving historic dilemmas or any other kind of misunderstanding so far (including origin of the heritage or its institutional/non-institutional management, protection etc.).

***“Cultural heritage should be treated
as a precious accomplishment of people’s
creativity of a certain time”***

We do have heritage that can evoke different – sometimes difficult or competing – views and emotions, depending on the approach and viewpoint. The challenge of dealing with such divergence lies in the attempt to simultaneously convey these different views and voices when presenting this heritage to the public. Do you agree and do you think that this is an essential task when dealing with heritage and histories that speak to different people in different ways?

Elizabeta: When we say heritage, we address the qualitative scope of art works, artefacts, monuments and sites originating from different periods in time and diverse actions of human civilisation. Cultural heritage should be treated as a precious accomplishment of people's creativity of a certain time, not as a mean for creating political views or manifests. It is a testimony to the creative potential of a certain epoch and its historic, economic, social and cultural amplitude; therefore, it should be interpreted in that manner – as a positive reflection of a historic momentum that is gone forever, leaving a precious trail in a certain artistic or cultural medium/sphere.

Do you think that being more polyvocal, engaging, diverse, (self-)reflective and participatory may solve some of the obstacles on the way of presenting cultural heritage (shared or contested)?

Elizabeta: One should be methodologically correct, chronologically precise and historically accurate to be able to be a real spokesman of the “bright” side of cultural heritage, since the “advocacy” can have a negative side, as well. Cultural heritage has been left to us for more pleasant reason than to be utilised as a political/social/national weapon. As soon as one realises that it is left for admiration (art works) proper investigation (artefacts) and touristic presentation (monuments), the misuse of cultural heritage stops being interesting or valid.

Can you think of an example of a case study of shared or contested heritage related to your particular field of interest (ethno-music, history, archaeology, contemporary art, art history etc.) and how would you approach its presentation?

Elizabeta: Of course, the church of the Holy Virgin in the village of Matejche, in the north part of North Macedonia first comes to mind. It was commissioned in the golden age of the Serbian medieval state, during the reign of Emperor Stefan Dushan as a mausoleum of the former Bulgarian princess Elena in the region of present-day North Macedonia. It belongs to the historic legacy of three modern states; yet, nobody takes care of it and the church is almost in decay. Instead of debating whose heritage it is (I remember some discussions on the subject), someone should ask whether they could do something for this heritage to survive in order to be classified historically or otherwise; if the church is gone, there will be no heritage left for discussion.

How we choose to remember the past and how we choose to move forward are the critical issues of today. What does cultural heritage mean in different national and regional contexts? Who can claim it as theirs, and who decides how it is preserved, displayed, or restored? How to share cultural heritage?

Elizabeta: With mutual initiatives (cross-border and/or international) for its protection and scientifically verified presentation (historic, chronological, thematic, artistic etc.). In my field of expertise, it is very simple – it is Byzantine cultural heritage, i.e. belongs to the medieval cultural and artistic production, manifesting certain architectural, iconographic and artistic (architectural and iconographic se isto taka artistic, zatoa sum stavila painterly) features, the quality of which is the main hallmark recognised by its visual character.

“What signifies the national narratives are that they do not include layers; they are one-sided, often chronological and has a sense of a fixed, static, historical truth, about them”, said Anderson in 1991. Do you agree with this citation and why?

Elizabeta: As I said before, cultural heritage is not an instrument for national or political dialogue. It represents a reflection of how cultivated the people had been in the past (defined by certain chronology). Also, it reflects how cultivated we are in our efforts to take care of the legacy and preserve it for posterity. Cultural heritage has the following main specificities: it originates from a certain historical moment (chronology), it is shaped in a certain visual form (typology), it has certain recognisable qualities (classification) and it has certain existential needs (protected or unprotected). In the 21st century, we have to focus on the last specificity, since it requires the greatest effort. Everyone can say whatever they like about the heritage if one can see it, if not, we will all share the silence of a possible destruction.

When we discuss about shared or contested heritage the issue of time is essential, and in extreme cases of recent turmoil, the best method for reconciliation might not be to address the past as individually relatable; but rather that the past should hopefully remain in the past. Do you think that this can be implemented into our context?

Elizabeta: No, because, at least, in the Balkans the past has become the main argument for shaping the future. What is more dramatic is that the past has proven to be so changeable for people in the Balkans that we no longer believe in what our ancestors have taught us. In such circumstances, the future becomes so uncertain that we are in pursuit of an opportunistically reconstructed past, defended by the role imposed to cultural heritage. Therefore, we have to give the legacy a new, more productive and highly affirmative function and save it from the current abuse and exploitation.

Do you think that the realm of words can influence the way the audience read the stories related to heritage (shared or contested)?

Elizabeta: By all means, that is why we need reliable spokesmen. Rhetoric skills have been much appreciated since the Ancient times due to their effect on people from all walks of life. The realm of words can have many effects (positive or negative) and that is why words should be selected carefully, intoned in a good will and passed through “secure” channels of professional approach and ethic standards. Cultural heritage, in its most basic definition, means creation and as such deserves creative approaches, treatment and appreciation.

The interview is conducted within the framework of the project “Shared or contested heritage”, implemented by ALDA Skopje and Forum ZFD. The aim of the project is to improve cross-border cooperation between North Macedonia, Greece and Bulgaria. The project raises awareness of the role of contested histories and shared cultural heritage for the EU integration processes among heritage practitioners and cultural workers. The content of the interview is the sole responsibility of the interviewee and does not always reflect the views and attitudes of ALDA and Forum ZFD.

Reconnecting broken bridges through art & culture

An Interview with Alexandros Stamatiou, photo reporter from Athens, Greece, interviewed by Ana Frangovska, art historian and curator.

""With the great help of culture, we shall keep on being the active creators of the new era of humanism and global solidarity.""

Alexandros Stamatiou, photo reporter from Athens, Greece



Alexandros Stamatiou is a photo reporter originating from Athens, Greece. Mr Stamatiou has an impressive portfolio of photographs and documentary videos relating the political issues of the last few decades in the Balkans: documenting the situations after the wars that happened with the decay of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; the name issue in North Macedonia; Greeks in Albania; coverage of conflicts between Albanian paramilitary troops UCK from Kosovo and authorities in North Macedonia; coverage of NATO's bombing of Kosovo and Serbia and many others. While recording the moments of history he was arrested and hurt. His photos have been published in a lot of prominent journals and media such as: To Vima, Ta Nea, Eleftherotypia, Epsilon, Kathimerini, Eleftheros Typos, Naftemporiki, Time, Elsevier, Het Parole, Newsweek, Xinhua, New York Times, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung etc. Since 2006 he has been working for the Greek tv documentary show "BALKAN EXPRESS", broadcasted on the Greek National Television ERT3, which depicts the traditions, music, history and culture of all the countries in the Balkans. Since 2000 he relocated in Skopje while still travelling for his work.

Witnessing and documenting a lot of scenes from our recent Balkan history and hearing a lot of narrative related to culture, geography, decays, wars, conflicts he will attempt to shed some light on the topic of 'shared or contested heritage'.

We do have heritage that can evoke different – sometimes difficult or competing – views and emotions, depending on the approach and viewpoint. The challenge of dealing with such divergence lies in the attempt to simultaneously convey different views and voices when presenting this heritage to the public. Do you agree and do you think that this is an essential task when dealing with heritage and histories that speak to different people in different ways?

Alexandros: I am well acquainted with the history of our region, even though my professional experience is in photo reportage. In my opinion, in the last few decades we are witnessing a very serious situation, in which everyone wants to grab some part of history from the other. Instead of building closer cooperation and nurturing coexistence, history is being used as the most dangerous weapon for digging wider discrepancies on the Balkans. The divulged histories are not correct and consolidated according to the facts, but rather tailor-made, one history is served to the Bulgarians, another to the Greeks, a third to the Macedonians. This is shameful and should be stopped. We need to rebuild the broken bridges between the countries and my opinion is that culture and art are the best conductors for strengthening the bonds between our neighbouring countries. I currently live in Skopje, North Macedonia, I am married to a Macedonian woman, and I am working hard on bringing a lot of Greek artists here, to work closely with the Macedonian ones, in order to help in overcoming the prejudices' and the political imbalances, since this daily political playing with our people is disgusting.

What does heritage mean to you as an individual and as a citizen of your country and the world?

Alexandros: Cultural heritage is a universal value. I look at everyone's heritage in the same way, no matter of the origin, country, nation. All is ours; it belongs to the whole of humanity. Once, I had an exhibition in the Museum of photography in Thessaloniki, and an American visitor asked me, where were my photos taken. I answered that they come from different parts of the world. He said that I need to sort the photos according to the state, nation and geographical territory for better understanding. I neglected the critic coming from him, since for me, everyone in this world is the same, no matter where they come from, or what is their origin. I feel the same whether I am in Greece, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Serbia, Bosnia, everywhere I have very close friends I feel the same.

How we choose to remember the past and how we choose to move forward are the critical issues of today. What does cultural heritage mean in different national and regional contexts? Who can claim it as theirs, and who decides how it is preserved, displayed, or restored? How to share cultural heritage?

Alexandros: Politicians use the history, culture, cultural heritage for their daily political needs. In the past there were no borders, we were all the same. My father comes from Kallikrateia, Chalkidiki, so according to some parts of history I am a Macedonian. In the past my father's relatives came from Izmir, Turkey, so there were no clear borders then. After that the borders were made and everyone went mad, grabbing and attempting to take possession of the past, the history, the heritage. I will insist on my opinion that only through culture we can go forward. When I saw how well Greek and Macedonian artists got along (on one residency that I organised) that was the biggest pleasure. Just with the power of the artists and the culture we can show our teeth to the politicians and celebrate humanity. After the signing of the Prespa Agreement, I experienced a very interesting situation, in which many of my friends, Greeks, called me and told me that they do not agree for the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to be renamed North Macedonia, but should be named simply Macedonia. This means that that there is still hope that we can reconnect the broken bridges.

Do you engage in cross-border cooperation with professionals from North Macedonia and do you find any difficulties in its realisation?

Alexandros: Yes, I do have great collaboration with Macedonian colleagues, and I had never had a bad experience until now. Here I feel like home. I use to live in the centre of Athens, here I live in the centre of Skopje, and I feel like a "Skopjanin". If something bad is happening with or in the city it hurts me because I feel this is my native town.

***"I look at everyone's heritage in the same way,
no matter of the origin, country, nation.
It belongs to humanity"***

Do you think that being more polyvocal, engaging, diverse, (self-)reflective and participatory may solve some of the obstacles on the way of presenting cultural heritage (shared or contested)?

Alexandros: Yes! I took many photos and recorded documentaries for museums throughout the Balkans, in Croatia, Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania, but at the National Gallery in Sofia, Bulgaria I had one of the most impressive experiences. We met and talked with their director, and I saw a great, positive reaction in his communication, he was a supporter of the idea that we are all the same, mainly humans of the world. He did not care if I spoke Macedonian or Greek, his main interest was to see what we could show to the public. So, accordingly, we organised a great exhibition in their Gallery.

Admittedly, we live in a time of lies, served by the politicians, but the art and artists do and can change the direction of the wind and the atmosphere. I am a photo-reporter that has dealt with politics for 35 years, but now I am fed up of politics.

Can you think of an example of a case study of shared or contested heritage related to your particular field of interest (ethno-music, history, archaeology, contemporary art, art history, photography etc.) and how would you approach its presentation?

Alexandros: The photography is an artefact, so it helps a lot in confirming cultural heritage or issues regarding shared or contested history. I am very often thrilled by the human eyes, the manner in which they interpret pictures, especially when it's children's eyes. Once, I photographed a child refugee from Kosovo, I photographed his emotional eyes. 15 years later, on an exhibition in Skopje, a youngster of about 20 years approached me, and asked if I recognise him. I answered negatively. Then he introduced himself being that refugee child on the photo, and said that I was an inspiration for him and that he is going to be a photographer. He learned to speak French, English, Macedonian and Albanian. So, this is one happy story. There are a lot such examples, good and bad. So, by the help of the photo or video documentation there are facts that cannot be neglected.

“What signifies the national narratives are that they do not include layers; they are one-sided, often chronological and has a sense of a fixed, static, historical truth, about them”, said Anderson in 1991. Do you agree with this citation and why?

Alexandros: I do agree, a multi-layered approach is one of the keys in solving issues related with shared or contested heritage and history. Changes in history are influenced by politicians, so the best way of addressing the issues are talks with local people from small communities. I have recorded and interviewed many villagers and old people from small communities in a lot of neighbouring Balkan countries, the most interesting thing is that they all share the same history, which is different than the switched and changed one, offered by the states through the educational institutions, as a part of the political agendas.

Another method of challenging the national narrative, regarding shared or contested heritage, would be to go from the particular to the universal. Cornelius Holtorf writes: “(...) the new cultural heritage can transcend cultural particularism by promoting values and virtues derived from humanism and a commitment to global solidarity.” What do you think about this?

Alexandros: I definitely agree with Cornelius Holtorf. We should overcome the bad experiences of our fathers and grandfathers, let the past be the past (there are

historians that can sit down, emotionless and discuss the specific and problematic moments arising from using different facts) and we, with the great help of culture, shall keep on being the active creators of the new era of humanism and global solidarity. I don't say that we should forget about our past and neglect our history, but that this should not be the obstacle for being good neighbours and collaborators, a trap in which we are falling down over and over again for the sake of the daily politics.

When we discuss about shared or contested heritage the issue of time is essential, and in extreme cases of recent turmoil, the best method for reconciliation might not be to address the past as individually relatable; but rather that the past should hopefully remain in the past. Do you think that this can be implemented into our context?

Alexandros: Yes, as I already said, the past should remain in the past, not influencing our contemporary life, and it is only with the help of culture that we can reconcile, reinforce and strengthen the relations and communications.

The interview is conducted within the framework of the project “Shared or contested heritage”, implemented by ALDA Skopje and Forum ZFD. The aim of the project is to improve cross-border cooperation between North Macedonia, Greece and Bulgaria. The project raises awareness of the role of contested histories and shared cultural heritage for the EU integration processes among heritage practitioners and cultural workers. The content of the interview is the sole responsibility of the interviewee and does not always reflect the views and attitudes of ALDA and Forum ZFD.

All cultural heritage belongs to each of us

An interview with Sanja Ivanovska Velkoska, archaeologist and conservator in the National Center for conservation of Skopje, interviewed by Ana Frangovska, art historian and curator.

"No one can say that a piece of cultural heritage belongs to someone, what we as a society care about belongs to all of us."

Sanja Ivanovska Velkoska, archaeologist and conservator in the National Center for conservation, Skopje



Sanja Ivanovska Velkoska is a PhD in archaeology, employed in the National Center for conservation in Skopje. As an expert in the field of archaeology and conservation she has considerable experience as an external consultant for other institutions and sites for protection of cultural heritage. Mrs Ivanovska Velkoska wrote a lot of scientific papers, participated in many scientific conferences and was on a scientific residency in Belgrade, Serbia and Lund, Sweden. Her wide knowledge in protection of cultural heritage in theory and practice makes her an excellent interlocutor on the issues related to shared or contested heritage.

What is heritage, how does it work and what does it mean for people with different backgrounds?

Sanja: The material and cultural values we inherited from our ancestors and their ancestors are what should be called cultural heritage. Unfortunately, its interpretation in different environments is often characterised with contrasting content.

Do you think that heritage institutions should be more inclusive or exclusive? Is it important to be clear about whose stories are being presented, by whom and for which purposes? Some practices point towards an inclusive approach through the restructuration of institutions and the fostering of supportive leadership. What do you think about this approach?

Sanja: If we want the general population to know what cultural heritage is and to nurture and preserve it unconditionally, then the institutions must make it easier to access and promote it more and in a suitable manner among the wide public. The reasons for presenting cultural heritage are not important at all because it should not be owned at all.

Do you engage in cross-border cooperation with professionals from Greece and Bulgaria and do you find any difficulties in its realisation?

Sanja: In the past, we had a greater institutional cooperation with many neighbouring countries, but that practice has slowly been declining in the last eight years. This is not due to any policies, but is a result of the extremely poor management of the institution in which I work. On a personal level, contacts with colleagues are maintained regularly. Even at my own expense, in my free time I establish connections with countries with which we have not cooperated so far. But all work remains based on a personal incentive or at the level of a small interdisciplinary group that has the idea to bring new techniques, technologies and methods of cultural heritage management from all aspects (pertaining to research work, conservation/restoration, presentation and popularisation).

We do have heritage that can evoke different – sometimes difficult or competing – views and emotions, depending on the approach and viewpoint. The challenge of dealing with such divergence lies in the attempt to simultaneously convey these different views and voices when presenting this heritage to the public. Do you agree and do you think that this is an essential task when dealing with heritage and histories that speak to different people in different ways?

Sanja: Yes, it is in practice, but it should not be. Cultural heritage must never have ethnic, religious, gender or any other contextual framework. On the contrary, I believe that all cultural heritage belongs to each of us, a part of our past and affects our present and future.

Can you think of an example of a case study of shared or contested heritage related to your particular field of interest (ethno-music, history, archaeology, contemporary art, art history etc.) and how would you approach its presentation?

Sanja: As a SIDA Fellow winner, I participated in an advanced training program on Conservation and Management of Historic Buildings at Lund University in Lund, Sweden, where I presented my case study on “Conservation and Presentation of the South Gate of the Archaeological Site Skopje fortress”. The approach at that time was guided by the principles of Europa Nostra, which have been observed and applied in my professional work regarding the integral protection of archaeological sites as cultural heritage.

“Cultural heritage should be treated as a precious accomplishment of people’s creativity of a certain time”

What is the impact of cultural heritage on solving issues related with shared or contested heritage?

Sanja: In practice, none. Theorists can find many points of contact and influences, but the operative is aware that in practice in our country it is just a dead letter on paper.

How we choose to remember the past and how we choose to move forward are the critical issues of today. What does cultural heritage mean in different national and regional contexts? Who can claim it as theirs, and who decides how it is preserved, displayed, or restored? How to share cultural heritage?

Sanja: The meanings are not as important as the approach and the attitude towards cultural heritage. We are aware that cultural heritage as a category of culture is always on the margins in our country. All efforts to amend that are still in the making, while in practice it is shown that various irrelevant populist manifestations receive more publicity, and thus more funds than any project for the protection of cultural heritage.

No one can say that a piece of cultural heritage belongs to someone, unless they personally inherited it from their parents. What we as a society care about belongs to all of us. Popularisation is the most important way to share the value of cultural heritage, and thus to increase interest in it. In a popular existence, any cultural heritage is much easier to manage and can even be made self-sustaining.

“What signifies the national narratives are that they do not include layers; they are one-sided, often chronological and has a sense of a fixed, static, historical truth, about them”, said Anderson in 1991. Do you agree with this citation and why?

Sanja: Unfortunately, this is often the case. However, there are occasional attempts to integrate the cultural heritage, which comprehensively analyses the problems, and hence the reactions to action are interdisciplinary. I repeat, this is very rare, but so far it has proven to be a successful practice. And as long as we keep treating cultural heritage from only one aspect, we will never come up with nearly ideal solutions.

When we discuss about shared or contested heritage the issue of time is essential, and in extreme cases of recent turmoil, the best method for reconciliation might not be to address the past as individually relatable; but rather that the past should hopefully remain in the past. Do you think that this can be implemented into our context?

Sanja: Yes, of course it can.

Do you think that the realm of words can influence the way the audience read the stories related to heritage (shared or contested)?

Sanja: Yes, I think so. As long as we use rich and cumbersome vocabulary with professional terms in cultural heritage stories, our target group will be the only group of people who can understand us. Those who do understand us are usually part of our professional circles or colleagues. In that case, we have completely missed the goal for popularisation of cultural heritage.

The interview is conducted within the framework of the project “Shared or contested heritage”, implemented by ALDA Skopje and Forum ZFD. The aim of the project is to improve cross-border cooperation between North Macedonia, Greece and Bulgaria. The project raises awareness of the role of contested histories and shared cultural heritage for the EU integration processes among heritage practitioners and cultural workers. The content of the interview is the sole responsibility of the interviewee and does not always reflect the views and attitudes of ALDA and Forum ZFD.

Presenting heritage in its integrality for today's society

An interview with Tosho Spiridonov, historian, anthropologist and archaeologist from Sophia, Bulgaria, by Ana Frangovska, art historian and curator.

"The analysis of heritage has two sides that must be clearly defined and presented to the people: in what historical context this heritage was created; how we "read" this legacy today."

Tosho Spiridonov, historian, anthropologist and archaeologist from Sophia, Bulgaria



Tosho Spiridonov is a leading expert in the field of ancient Thrace, historical geography, historical ethnography, anthropology, archaeology and has particular expertise in digitisation of cultural and historical heritage. He is an associate professor of history at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and director of the National Centre for Digitalisation of the National Scientific Expeditionary Club UNESCO. Mr Spiridonov participated in the creation of numerous projects in the fields of cultural tourism, ethnology and folklore. He was a director at the Museum of History and an expert at the Ministry of Culture.

He has great collaboration with colleagues from North Macedonia, very close exchange with the Faculty of Philosophy at the University "St. Cyril and Methodius", especially in the field of digitalisation of the cultural heritage and in the creation of a software for the Museums in Macedonia that is ready for implementation.

We do have heritage that can evoke different – sometimes difficult or competing – views and emotions, depending on the approach and viewpoint. The challenge of dealing with such divergence lies in the attempt to simultaneously convey different views and voices when presenting this heritage to the public. Do you agree and do you think that this is an essential task when dealing with heritage and histories that speak to different people in different ways?

Tosho: The answer to all questions related to historical heritage has been and will always be complex. It is complex because it has always been influenced by the political situation, which pursues its own goals, and in the name of which it is ready to ignore the historical truth which in itself is complex. That is why heritage should be seen as something that has two sides. One side is the legacy related to the lives of the people who created it, who actually participated in its creation and used it in their daily lives. The other side is to contextualise the heritage through the perspective present life. The present context dictates to scientists and politicians (because they study, use and present this heritage to today's people) what exactly to say, how exactly to present heritage, having today's tasks that they have to solve. That is why the analysis of heritage has two sides that must be clearly defined and presented to the people: in what historical context this heritage was created; how we "read" this legacy today. Without this unity, society will always be subject to the influence of one or the other side of the heritage's interpretation. That is why I believe that presenting heritage in its integrality is very important for today's society in order to understand its past and participate in building its future.

Which are peaceful and tolerant ways of reading and presenting facts about shared or contested history according to you?

Tosho: Reading history has two sides. One side is personal, because everyone reads it, breaking it through their personal history. For example, in Bulgaria I see that there are people who curse the time of socialism, because then the government took away some of their property or they suffered other type of losses as a result of the system. Others, on the contrary, regret socialism, because this system gave them the opportunity to study and achieve something in their lives. And although this example is not directly related to heritage, it is indicative of the refraction of common history through personal history. How to read and present historical facts?

The simple answer is – through compromises on both sides, in the name of the future of both parties in the dispute. If there are insurmountable points of contention, they must be set aside. They should be the subject of calm scientific debates and discussions, with all the source materials and evidence on the table. Throughout these discussions, both sides should not be subjected to political and media pressure until a positive result is achieved.

Do you engage in cross-border cooperation with professionals from North Macedonia and do you find any difficulties in its realisation?

Tosho: Yes, I have cooperation with colleagues from North Macedonia. So far I have no difficulties in this cooperation – on the contrary, I meet a positive response to our initiatives and I respond alike to their initiatives.

Can you think of an example of a case study of shared or contested heritage related to your particular field of interest (ethno-music, history, archaeology, contemporary art, art history etc.) and how would you approach its presentation?

Tosho: I work in the field of ancient history, historical geography and archaeology. With the DIOS Society and the National Research and Expedition Club – UNESCO – Sofia we engaged in cooperation with colleagues from the University of Skopje and the archaeological site in Stobi and we jointly developed software for the work of Macedonian museums and it is ready for implementation in practice.

Together with my colleague Svilen Stoyanov we participated in a conference in Ohrid, dedicated to the preservation of cultural heritage in North Macedonia.

I must say that I see small issues pertaining to the lack of geographical coordinates of each archaeological site, which will prevent the localisation of these sites in their exact place on the archaeological map and will make it difficult to work together. However, it opens room for a joint work in which we could cooperate – we can train Macedonian archaeologists to deal with this problem, which is essential in archaeological practice; the same is true of ethnographers and historians.

How we choose to remember the past and how we choose to move forward are the critical issues of today. What does cultural heritage mean in different national and regional contexts? Who can claim it as theirs, and who decides how it is preserved, displayed, or restored? How to share cultural heritage?

Tosho: Remembering the past is a matter of experience, and the experience is either personal or public. The personal experience of the past determines “my” attitude towards this past, which may not coincide with the public one. Social experience depends on many factors, the most important of which is the goal of today’s society and by what means can this goal will be achieved. Public experience forms the national context of cultural heritage, because it determines what selected points of reference in the history of this society will lay in the pursuit of its current goals. The regional context is something else, and it depends on the geographical location, on the local development of the given area and on the relations with the neighbouring areas. One geographical area may be more related or less related to another, and this is the most important factor as we go back in time. It all depends on the geographical location – whether an important trade route passes through a given region, whether the conditions allow a certain craft to develop, whether the region is influenced by this or that neighbouring region. Each region belongs to one or other society/state. All this happened as a consequence of the historical development of the given lands. Therefore, it is the job of this society/state to take into account the interests of each region that has fallen as a result of this historical development in this society/state. In this manner only will it be possible to build a cohesive society – when the interests of each region are

taken into account. Neglecting the interests of a region leads to differences in society, which in turn leads to an unstable society. Hence the answer to the question – each region wants to preserve samples of its culture – restored, preserved, displayed. Because the further back in time we go, the greater the differences in cultural development between the different regions we see due to the weaker communications between the different regions of a country. Man has not come up with many different ways to share the patterns of cultural heritage. In summary, these are three ways – research, education and cultural tourism, each has its own specifics and can be considered at length.

“What signifies the national narratives are that they do not include layers; they are one-sided, often chronological and has a sense of a fixed, static, historical truth, about them, said Anderson in 1991.” Do you agree with this citation and why?

Tosho: What Anderson says is mostly about national stories, and it’s true. What is the purpose of these stories? The national narrative has one important task – to unite the people of one territory by telling a chronologically constructed story that tells them the historical truth about themselves. He somewhat ignores the past, because there may be facts that will make one doubt whether this society is really as homogeneous as presented, whether there are no separate groups of people in it who think differently, and so on. In other words – if we start from the rule that the nation is a new stage in the ethnic development of society, it must have its own history; with it begins a new ethnic formation.

“Remembering the past is a matter of experience, and the experience is either personal or public”

Another method of challenging the national narrative, regarding shared or contested heritage, would be to go from the particular to the universal. Cornelius Holtorf writes: “(...) the new cultural heritage can transcend cultural particularism by promoting values and virtues derived from humanism and a commitment to global solidarity.” What do you think about this?

Tosho: The national narrative built on humanism and global solidarity is in the same direction as Anderson’s thinking. The same is important for Holtroff – he thinks that in no cultural heritage can be found in the past that would unite the population of a given

country in the present. That is why it is important to find a new heritage – these are new “monuments of cultural heritage”, subordinated to humanism, to solidarity between the people in a country. Leaving aside to some extent the specific suggestion of the old monuments, these new “monuments” are universal, and they will unite people in the name of the future goal. These may be brand new monuments, but they may also be some of the past that will receive a new interpretation, subject to the goal – to unite the population around a single red thread – from the past. However, these old monuments must be carefully selected so as not to disturb the feelings of people who perceive them differently.

When we discuss about shared or contested heritage the issue of time is essential, and in extreme cases of recent turmoil, the best method for reconciliation might not be to address the past as individually relatable; but rather that the past should hopefully remain in the past. Do you think that this can be implemented into our context?

Tosho: The past is the past! It must not be distorted or transformed in the light of today’s political or national tasks. Such a transformation will lead to greater complications within the society/state itself and to greater difficulties in solving today’s tasks. A new nation must be built on two main pillars. The first is the past, the second is the future. The past – no matter what it is, is not crucial, it only tells us that a population lived in this area in the past. That is why a certain point in time is chosen, from which the gradual formation of the new nation begins – no matter what the reasons. It is important what the roots are, but more important is what today’s population creates, how they process the knowledge about themselves. It could be as (planting one variety of apple on another tree – a rough but true principle – the roots are old, with their “history”, but the apple already represents a new variety, and this is more important.

Do you think that being more polyvocal, engaging, diverse, (self-)reflective and participatory may solve some of the obstacles on the way of presenting cultural heritage (shared or contested)?

Tosho: I believe that anyone who deals with cultural heritage and works with good intentions and commitment can solve at least one of the problems. The disputed heritage must be considered in the context of the time in which it was created. At that precise moment it met the requirements of that society. However, viewed in the context of today’s society heritage looks (or presents itself) in a different way. It’s all a matter of how today’s society “sees” this legacy, not what it represented then. In the theory of the ethnos, each new ethnic group is built on the basis of at least two other, relatively different ethnic groups. If we do not recognise these ethnic groups, then obviously we will have difficulties in building “ours”, today’s ethnic group.

Do you think that the realm of words can influence the way the audience read the stories related to heritage (shared or contested)?

Tosho: As is well known, politics is an art of compromise. If the story is written in a way that respects the views of both parties, anyone who reads it can find in it what interests them. Then the cultural heritage will be clearer, understandable and accepted by society.

The interview is conducted within the framework of the project “Shared or contested heritage”, implemented by ALDA Skopje and Forum ZFD. The aim of the project is to improve cross-border cooperation between North Macedonia, Greece and Bulgaria. The project raises awareness of the role of contested histories and shared cultural heritage for the EU integration processes among heritage practitioners and cultural workers. The content of the interview is the sole responsibility of the interviewee and does not always reflect the views and attitudes of ALDA and Forum ZFD.

Cultural heritage is the environment in which we develop

An interview with prof. Darija Andovska, composer, pianist and author of orchestral, chamber, solo, vocal, film, theatre and dance music, as well as music for multimedia projects, by Ana Frangovska, art historian and curator.

"Cultural heritage is alive and intertwined in all segments of our day to day life, it's in the language (the rhythm), it's in the lullabies and many other aspects."

prof. Darija Andovska, composer, pianist and author of orchestral, chamber, solo, vocal, film, theatre and dance music, as well as music for multimedia projects



Darija Andovska is a Macedonian trademark in the field of contemporary music, being a composer, pianist and author of chamber, solo, orchestral, symphonic, choral music as well as film music, theater, dance and multimedia projects. Her works have been performed on festivals and concerts in North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Georgia, France, England, Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Austria, Albania, Russia, Mexico, Canada, Poland, Romania, Armenia and the United States of America. Her music has been recorded on CDs and sold in Switzerland, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Italy, North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Germany, and her scores have been published by Nuova Stradivarius – Italy, Sordino – Switzerland, Association of Composers – North Macedonia. Won several competitions, nominated and awarded as well for film and theater music all over the world. Chosen by MusMA (Music Masters on Air) as one of the best young composers in Europe for 2013/2014. Nominated (2014) and twice awarded (2013, 2015) the “Virtuoso” award for Best Composer in Macedonia. Won the Cultural Honor Award of the City of Zürich – Best Composer in 2014. Macedonian music ambassador for the project CEEC 17+1 between China and central- and east European countries for 2016/2017 and 2018-2020. Awarded state prize “Panche Peshev” 2018 for highest achievements in music art. Andovska is an artistic director of the Days of

Macedonian Music festival, under the Association of Composers of Macedonia – SOKOM. Works as professor at the Faculty for music and Faculty for dramatic arts at the State University “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” in Skopje.

Music is also an integral part of the cultural heritage. Very often, contemporary musicians find inspiration in the traditional sounds and intertwine some elements of ethno-folklore in contemporary compositions in order to transmit the spirit of belonging to a certain place. Mrs Andovska being an educator (as a professor at the Academy of Music in Skopje) and an active creator in the field of culture and, as well as being a constructive critic of the Macedonian modern society, is appropriate relevant interlocutor on the topic of our research on shared or disputed inheritance.

We do have heritage that can evoke different – sometimes difficult or competing – views and emotions, depending on the approach and viewpoint. The challenge of dealing with such divergence lies in the attempt to simultaneously convey these different views and voices when presenting this heritage to the public. Do you agree and do you think that this is an essential task when dealing with heritage and histories that speak to different people in different ways?

Darija: Our heritage is not what we choose it to be. It's the environment that shapes our thoughts, beliefs, even our taste ever since we were kids, like the environment shapes up and directs the stem cells to develop into different tissues. It's not about how it is presented to the public, it is already a part of us. The public that doesn't come with the same heritage, can just observe it and accept it as it is, as a cultural diversity or partly relate to it, if there's any connection. There's actually no challenge in this, unless it's put in the context of daily politics.

When dealing with shared history and heritage, international cooperation has the potential to foster more understanding within and between cultures. Do you agree? What is your personal experience?

Darija: I don't see why this “shared history” is so prominent in the case of Macedonia. I don't see any other countries dealing with such a problem or claiming to have shared history. Let's challenge Greece and Turkey to have a shared history and heritage, or Greece and Bulgaria, or France and Germany, or Serbia and Croatia and Slovenia... let's stop here. No, it doesn't have a potential to foster more understanding, but just more oppression towards one of the parties involved.

***“Our heritage is not what we choose it to be.
It’s the environment that shapes
our thoughts and beliefs”***

Can you think of an example of a case study of shared or contested heritage related to your particular field of interest (ethno-music, history, archaeology, contemporary art, art history etc.) and how would you approach its presentation?

Darija: These subjects are not in my particular field of interest. I am interested in contemporary music, moreover, ethno-music has, despite some similarities, completely different parameters in each country, so it cannot be construed as “shared” heritage.

In a context of uncertainties and dystopias, what is the role of cultural heritage?

Darija: Cultural heritage is the environment in which we develop.

Can we achieve reconciliation with the help of music (and its differences and similarities) if we place it in a new context?

Darija: There’s no dispute that requires reconciliation in these matters. It’s just different. You cannot reconcile it.

One of the challenges for researchers and practitioners in the field of cultural heritage is to develop more inclusive approaches to share heritage in order to transgress social and national boundaries. Any ideas on how this approach would be implemented into your particular field of interest?

Darija: Yes, it’s a challenge because this approach is artificial. It’s redundant.

“What signifies the national narratives are that they do not include layers; they are one-sided, often chronological and has a sense of a fixed, static, historical truth, about them,” said Anderson in 1991. Do you agree with this citation and why?

Darija: That’s not the case with cultural heritage. Cultural heritage is alive and intertwined in all segments of our day to day life, in one way or another. It’s in the language (the rhythm), it’s in the lullabies, it’s in the anatomy structure and many other aspects. This situation may be applicable to some history books.

Another method of challenging the national narrative, regarding shared or contested heritage, would be to go from the particular to the universal. Cornelius Holtorf writes: “(...) the new cultural heritage can transcend cultural particularism by promoting values and virtues derived from humanism and a commitment to global solidarity.” What do you think about this?

Darija: Yes, we can all add up to this and enrich the world, but not on the account of one nation or another.

When we discuss about shared or contested heritage the issue of time is essential, and in extreme cases of recent turmoil, the best method for reconciliation might not be to address the past as individually relatable; but rather that the past should hopefully remain in the past. Do you think that this can be implemented into our context?

Darija: I hope not. Having our own cultural heritage, language, history, etc. is a part of our basic human rights.

The interview is conducted within the framework of the project “Shared or contested heritage”, implemented by ALDA Skopje and Forum ZFD. The aim of the project is to improve cross-border cooperation between North Macedonia, Greece and Bulgaria. The project raises awareness of the role of contested histories and shared cultural heritage for the EU integration processes among heritage practitioners and cultural workers. The content of the interview is the sole responsibility of the interviewee and does not always reflect the views and attitudes of ALDA and Forum ZFD.

Cultural heritage as the best example of cultural dialogue and cooperation

An interview with Maria Tsantsanoglou, Acting General Director at MOMus and the artistic director of MOMus-Museum of Modern Art-Costakis Collection, Thessaloniki, Greece, interviewed by Ana Frangovska, art historian and curator.

"Culture can also be defined as a tool for better understanding and defence of humanitarian values, it speaks an all-human language and nations contribute with their cultural achievements to this universal language."

Maria Tsantsanoglou, Acting General Director at MOMus, Thessaloniki, Greece



Maria Tsantsanoglou is Acting General Director at MOMus and the artistic director of MOMus-Museum of Modern Art- Costakis Collection in Thessaloniki, Greece. Her research field and publications mostly refer to the period of Russian avant-garde. She has specifically dealt with subjects such as synthesis of arts, visualpoetry, art and politics as well as with Russian and Greek contemporary art and contemporary art in Caucasus and Central Asia. She was member of the State Committee of the Ministry of Culture for the Costakis Collection reception (1998). She collaborated with the Ministry of Press and Mass Media as a scientific associate on subjects related to the cultural furtherance and promotion at the Greek Embassy in Moscow (1994-1997) and later on as Press Attaché (1997 – 2002). She taught History of Greek Art at the Moscow State Lomonosov University (1997-2001). She published a significant number of articles and participated in numerous conferences in Greece and abroad. She was the co-curator of the 1st Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art (2007) and the director of the 2nd Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art (2009). She established an excellent cooperation with the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje and hereafter she shares with us her opinion on ‘shared or contested heritage’.

We do have heritage that can evoke different – sometimes difficult or competing – views and emotions, depending on the approach and viewpoint. The challenge of dealing with such divergence lies in the attempt to simultaneously convey different views and voices when presenting this heritage to the public. Do you agree and do you think that this is an essential task when dealing with heritage and histories that speak to different people in different ways?

Maria: Tangible and intangible cultural heritage has the peculiarity that on the one hand it is transmitted, protected and valued, but on the other hand it is identified and redefined by society itself as it belongs to it. Cultural heritage cannot be imposed and impressed through artificial ways neither in society as a whole nor in a part of society. In this sense, any different approach of cultural heritage by part of the society should be governed by the rules of respect for human rights.

Which are peaceful and tolerant ways of reading and presenting facts about the shared history or contested history according to you?

Maria: History, shared history as well, has the objectivity of the recorded facts (what undoubtedly happened) and the subjectivity of their interpretation. It has also been many times a subject of falsification. History is studied and taught by scholars, who present the facts and openly discuss them and is not an object of political manipulation. When politicians deal with history for nationalistic reasons, people should be cautious.

Do you engage in cross-border cooperation with professionals from North Macedonia and do you find any difficulties in its realisation?

Maria: I represent a big cultural organisation for visual arts in Thessaloniki and I consider the cooperation with North Macedonia important and seriously pursued it not only out of self-interest but because I believe that this could mutually enrich our relationship. I met exceptional, creative and inspiring people in North Macedonia. I am especially speaking about the colleagues from the Museum of Contemporary Art of Skopje who also sought a substantial cooperation with us but I am sure that this practice applies to other institutions as well. Now we have the best possible relations, we are very proud to be friends with great prospects for further mutual cultural events.

Can you think of an example of a case study of shared or contested heritage related to your particular field of interest (ethno-music, history, archaeology, contemporary art, art history etc.) and how would you approach its presentation?

Maria: The organisation of two exhibitions, one produced by the Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA) in Skopje and presented in Thessaloniki entitled “All that we have in common” and the other produced by the MOMus – Museum of Contemporary Art of Thessaloniki and presented in Skopje entitled “Am I that name or that image” gave the first incentive of a case study. **Other collaborations will follow that will embrace the culture of our region as we believe that what unites us is much more and important than what may separate us.**

How we choose to remember the past and how we choose to move forward are the critical issues of today. What does cultural heritage mean in different national and regional contexts? Who can claim it as theirs, and who decides how it is preserved, displayed, or restored? How to share cultural heritage?

Maria: I believe that cultural heritage does not always belong exclusively to a single nation but leaves its mark on a wider geographical area, where different nations interact and share common experiences over time. Hence the rich common Balkan folk tradition in music, dances, fairy tales etc. **This interaction should be seen as a treasure trove of cooperation and good relationships.**

“Cultural heritage is a treasure trove of cooperation and good relationships”

“What signifies the national narratives are that they do not include layers; they are one-sided, often chronological and has a sense of a fixed, static, historical truth, about them”, said Anderson in 1991. Do you agree with this citation and why?

Maria: I would rather not talk about fixed national narratives but about important cultural events that have been recorded in the collective memory through heritage and oral tradition and have been historically recorded and preserved. Of course, these retain their importance as long as they are listed as acts that promote human values and protect the peoples’ freedom and social justice with emphasis not on hostility but on the question of brotherhood and good neighbourliness of the peoples.

Another method of challenging the national narrative, regarding shared or contested heritage, would be to go from the particular to the universal. Cornelius Holtorf writes: “(...) the new cultural heritage can transcend cultural particularism by promoting values and virtues derived from humanism and a commitment to global solidarity.” What do you think about this?

Maria: I think that my previous answer partly answers this question as well. Cultural heritage can be the best example of cultural dialogue and cooperation when it is not limited to the national narrative and, of course, when it is not interpreted to serve narrow nationalistic purposes. Especially when there are similar features of cultural heritage, such as music, folk dances, fairy tales, as is often the case in the Balkan region.

When we discuss about shared or contested heritage the issue of time is essential, and in extreme cases of recent turmoil, the best method for reconciliation might not be to address the past as individually relatable; but rather that the past should hopefully remain in the past. Do you think that this can be implemented into our context?

Maria: Culture can also be defined as a tool for better understanding and defence of humanitarian values, it speaks an all-human language and nations contribute with their cultural achievements to this universal language. In this sense, cultural exchanges contribute to the building of a better future.

Do you think that being more polyvocal, engaging, diverse, (self-)reflective and participatory may solve some of the obstacles on the way of presenting cultural heritage (shared or contested)?

Maria: Definitely, I do believe this. Through pluralism, diversity and participation, cultural workers aim to create conditions of tolerance and mutual understanding that could potentially solve such obstacles.

Do you think that the realm of words can influence the way the audience reads the stories related to heritage (shared or contested)?

Maria: Genuine art does not have one single level of interpretation, it is the object of thought and not of absolute knowledge. A creation that is interpreted unilaterally and one-dimensionally is either incomplete as a work of art or its approach is problematic.

The interview is conducted within the framework of the project “Shared or contested heritage”, implemented by ALDA Skopje and Forum ZFD. The aim of the project is to improve cross-border cooperation between North Macedonia, Greece and Bulgaria. The project raises awareness of the role of contested histories and shared cultural heritage for the EU integration processes among heritage practitioners and cultural workers. The content of the interview is the sole responsibility of the interviewee and does not always reflect the views and attitudes of ALDA and Forum ZFD.

Language is one of the most valuable cultural heritage sites

An interview with Vladimir Martinovski, professor at the University of “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” in Skopje, Department of Comparative Literature, interviewed by Ana Frangovska, art historian and curator.

"As difficult and arduous as they are, mutual reconciliation, acceptance and cooperation are the real tasks of today's generations, to leave a better world for future generations."

Vladimir Martinovski, professor at the University of "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje



Vladimir Martinovski is a poet, prose writer, literary critic, translator and musician. He is a professor at the General and Comparative Literature Department of the “Blaze Koneski” Faculty of Philology, “Ss Cyril and Methodius” University, Skopje. He received his Bachelor and Master’s degrees at the Faculty of Philology, and his PhD at the University of the New Sorbonne – Paris III. He has authored the following books: “From Image to Poem – Interference between Contemporary Macedonian Poetry and Fine Arts” (a study, 2003), “Maritime Moon” (haiku and tanka, 2003), “Hidden Poems” (haiku, 2005), “And Water and Earth and Fire and Air” (haiku, 2006), “Comparative Triptychs” (studies and essays, 2007), “Les Musées imaginaires” or “Imaginary Museums” (a study, 2009), “A Wave Echo” (haibuns, 2009), “Reading Images – Aspects of Ekphrastic Poetry” (a study, 2009) and “Quartets” (poetry, 2010). He co-edited the books: “Ut Pictura Poesis – Poetry in Dialogue with Plastic Arts – a Thematic Selection of Macedonian Poetry” (with Nuhi Vinca, 2006), “Metamorphoses and Metatexts” (with Vesna Tomovska, 2008).

If we are to promote our rich cultural heritage, then the most logical thing to do is to preserve both the tangible and intangible cultural heritage in writing... consequently

literature. Literature survives the test of time and is always apprehended. Interviewing Vladimir Martinovski on issues related to 'shared or contested heritage' gave us very knowledgeable, tasty and rich context in the research.

Cultural heritage tends to promote the creation of icons, which simultaneously tend to create stereotypes that risk negatively affecting individuals and groups. Such an icon needs to be critically deconstructed. What is your opinion about this discourse?

Vladimir: As the word suggests, cultural heritage is something we have inherited from previous generations. And, as well, we have borrowed it from the future ones, on behalf of whom we have an obligation to protect it. Yet, cultural heritage is something we should earn. Let us enter into living communication and save it from oblivion. Cultural heritage should enrich and ennoble our lives. To help us better understand the people of the past, and better understand each other today. To help us understand that the great achievements in art and culture belong to all mankind as signposts pointing out the best in any human. Andre Malraux said that art is one of the few things that humanity can be proud of. But when the complexity of cultural heritage is neglected, and simplifications are made based on looking through the national dioptré, it is quite easy to fall into the traps of stereotypes such as “we are the cultured ones, the others are the barbarians”. Therefore, the creation of “icons” has two faces. On one hand, it is good to have examples from people of the past, to know and respect their meaning, and to constantly strive for their achievements and values. But even here a measure is needed. On the other hand, there is the danger of indulging in the temptations of uncritical idealisation, hyperbole, and simplification, which can lead to an idolatrous relationship, emptied of essence.

Do you think that the realm of words can influence the way the audience read the stories related to heritage (shared or contested)?

Vladimir: Words are always necessary, so there is a huge responsibility in them. The novelist Michel Butor said that all “dumb artefacts” (artistic or architectural) are interpreted with the help of verbal discourse, “which surrounds them”, starting from the titles of the works. In other words, material, immovable cultural heritage, among other things, requires to be interpreted, explained through language. The attitude towards cultural heritage could certainly be compared to “reading” and interpreting stories. Some stories go on for millennia, some are forgotten. If the present or future generations are not shown the value, meaning, uniqueness of an object from the past, they could neglect it completely, leaving it to oblivion and the “ravages of time”. Cultural heritage requires care. Although intangible, language is also a cultural heritage site, one of the most valuable. It is through language that we realise that cultural heritage is something alive, in which each of us participates.

When dealing with shared history and heritage, international cooperation has the potential to foster more understanding within and between cultures. Do you agree? What is your personal experience?

Vladimir: International cooperation is crucial for both mutual understanding as well as understanding the concept of cultural heritage. Although there is a tendency to talk about national cultural heritage, which is quite legitimate, in essence no culture exists in isolation from others and all great achievements in culture belong to all mankind. As a phenomenon, culture is a palimpsest and the whole of culture is essentially shared. Understanding many phenomena in art, literature and culture at the national level necessarily leads us to intercultural dialogues, exchanges, as well as facing the fact that there are regional cultural achievements, as well as larger cultural zones. Great art crosses all boundaries. I have participated in many international literary festivals, where literary works are practiced by the authors to be read in the mother tongue, and then read in translation so that the local audience can understand them. It is wonderful to hear the diversity of languages, the different “music” of each language. Poets create in a language they inherited from their ancestors. But every song in the original and when translated, is not only the fruit of a linguistic tradition, it also belongs to world literature. Some of the most beautiful achievements in all segments of art are created precisely because of the mixing of cultures.

We do have heritage that can evoke different – sometimes difficult or competing – views and emotions, depending on the approach and viewpoint. The challenge of dealing with such divergence lies in the attempt to simultaneously convey these different views and voices when presenting this heritage to the public. Do you agree and do you think that this is an essential task when dealing with heritage and histories that speak to different people in different ways?

Vladimir: Unfortunately, just as material heritage (from fields to old family homes) can be a kind of “apple of discord”, likewise is the nationality of important personalities, artists or works of art from the past get bitterly disputed. Instead of critically perceiving the importance, value, and worth of those individuals or works, the discourse of belonging and possession is sometimes forced and absolutised. Some authors belong to more cultures and I do not see anything wrong with that. On the contrary. There are authors who have created in multiple languages, in multiple environments, under the influence of multiple cultures and poetics. Instead of stubbornly arguing over their belonging to a single culture, it is far better to look at them as bridges between cultures or as a common, shared value.

“The attitude towards cultural heritage could certainly be compared to “reading” and interpreting stories”

Do you think that being more polyvocal, engaging, diverse, (self-)reflective and participatory may solve some of the obstacles on the way of presenting cultural heritage (shared or contested)?

Vladimir: The epithets you enumerate are beautiful: diversity and pluralism and self-reflection and criticism are needed, as well as scientific acrimony and readiness for different opinions, arguments and interpretations. Cultural heritage should be preserved, nurtured, to be a part of our lives.

Can you think of an example of a case study of shared or contested heritage related to your particular field of interest (ethno-music, history, archaeology, contemporary art, art history etc.) and how would you approach its presentation?

Vladimir: As an example for shared heritage I could point to the poem “Ο Αρματωλός” / “The Serdar” (1860) by Gligor Prlichev (1830-1893), a work written in Greek, in which thematic patterns and stylistic features from Homer’s epics, the Byzantine epic tradition, the Renaissance epic and the Macedonian folklore are intertwined in a masterful way, all through the talent of an exceptional poet, who received the epithet “the Second Homer”. This poetic masterpiece dedicated to the death of the hero Kuzman Kapidan has been translated many times in both Bulgarian and Macedonian, and with its value certainly enters among the most important literary works created not only in the Balkans, but also in Europe in the XIX century. As an example of shared heritage, I would like to point out the Old Slavic language, Old Slavic literacy and literature, as a common root of all Slavic languages, including, of course, Macedonian. Challenging the authenticity of the Macedonian language due to daily political agendas which we are witnessing these days is extremely problematic, as it could translate as a challenge or dispute of the Macedonian literature, art and culture.

In a context of uncertainties and dystopias, what is the role of cultural heritage?

Vladimir: In these pandemic circumstances, we have all become convinced of the fragility, vulnerability and insecurity of today’s humanity. Due to insatiable consumerism and greed for profit, we have become a threat to other forms of existence, as well as to our

cultural heritage. In a short time, our everyday life began to look like a dystopian novel. We have seen that war conflicts in the last decade in different parts of the world have irreversibly damaged significant cultural treasures. The economic crisis that is inseparable from the pandemic crisis can also affect the neglect of cultural heritage. However, let us not give in to pessimism. Just as Boccaccio's Decameron was created during a plague epidemic, these difficult months on our planet are sure to create works of art that will grow into a significant cultural heritage site. We learn to appreciate some things only when we realise that we can easily lose them.

One of the challenges for researchers and practitioners in the field of cultural heritage is to develop more inclusive approaches to share heritage in order to transgress social and national boundaries. Any ideas on how this approach could be implemented into your particular field of interest?

Vladimir: We live in a digital age, in which inclusiveness and accessibility to different forms of cultural heritage is also realised through the Internet: from digitised manuscripts and books to accessible sound libraries and virtual visits to buildings and museums. These “digital versions” of cultural heritage are important both for archiving, as well as for new ways of presentation, close to contemporary and future generations. However, this does not exonerate us from the responsibility for permanent protection of the existing cultural heritage.

Another method of challenging the national narrative, regarding shared or contested heritage, would be to go from the particular to the universal. Cornelius Holtorf writes: “(...) the new cultural heritage can transcend cultural particularism by promoting values and virtues derived from humanism and a commitment to global solidarity.” What do you think about this?

Vladimir: I agree with Holtorf. It is in these times of crisis that we see how much these values are needed, and to what extent the values and virtues of humanism and global solidarity have been forgotten. We are all connected and we can all help each other in many areas, with the care for cultural heritage being one of them.

When we discuss shared or contested heritage, the issue of time is essential, and in extreme cases of recent turmoil, the best method for reconciliation might not be to address the past as individually relatable; but rather that the past should hopefully remain in the past. Do you think that this can be implemented into our context?

Vladimir: We can learn a lot from the past. Among other things, that we should not allow ourselves to sacrifice the present and the future for the sake of the past. As difficult

and arduous as they are, mutual reconciliation, acceptance and cooperation are the real tasks of today's generations, to leave a better world for future generations.

The interview is conducted within the framework of the project "Shared or contested heritage", implemented by ALDA Skopje and Forum ZFD. The aim of the project is to improve cross-border cooperation between North Macedonia, Greece and Bulgaria. The project raises awareness of the role of contested histories and shared cultural heritage for the EU integration processes among heritage practitioners and cultural workers. The content of the interview is the sole responsibility of the interviewee and does not always reflect the views and attitudes of ALDA and Forum ZFD.

CONCLUSION:

CULTURE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT TOOL IN THESE STRANGE TIMES

Conclusion of the research on the project “Shared or contested heritage” written by: Ana Frangovska, art historian and curator.

In this specific time, in which the question for confirmation or challenge of our identity as a state, people and entity with its own language and cultural values is becoming increasingly relevant, I received a subtle task from ALDA and ZFD Skopje, to conduct a research on the topic of ‘shared or contested heritage’ that should geographically cover Bulgaria, Greece and North Macedonia. For that purpose, I interviewed 10 professionals in the fields of cultural heritage, art history, history, journalism (cultural workers, visual artists, musicians, writers) who answered questions related to ‘shared or contested heritage’. The participants were invited to answer questions including what cultural heritage represent for them, whether national narratives should be directly related to the ways of presenting and popularising cultural heritage, whether cultural heritage and culture might contribute to resolving some disputed or dystopian points in communication, and whether cultural heritage would lead us to coexistence and humanism, or towards deepening certain points of divergence, etc.

In approaching the research with certain expectations and attitudes, despite the certain inconveniences and uncertainties I went through, in this concluding presentation I would like to say that I am very satisfied with the final outcome that with minimal deviations, the position of respect for cultural values and heritage as universal values of humanity that belong to each individual and component, are confirmed. National narratives and history are important in identifying affiliation, but they are also a manipulative tool in the hands of politicians, and according to the needs of certain daily political interests, they can be changeable and distorted. Politicians manage to indoctrinate the people and influence the "nurturing" of the "apple of discord", but cultural heritage and professionals related to the protection, promotion, presentation and interpretation of that cultural heritage, along with contemporary cultural creators (who create excellent examples of cultural heritage for future generations) should loudly and decisively influence the daily political backstage games, and offer their own mechanisms for coexistence, cooperation, reconciliation, dialogue and the creation of a common future, free from nationalisms, genocides, seizures and superiorities. The past should remain in the past, and we should deal with our future.

Dystopian or problematic points of history should continue to be the subject of peaceful debates and discussions, by historians from the disputed entities, carried out with calm emotions and without passions.

They should continue, without pressure and daily political inputs, to research and compare artefacts and historical evidence, trying to determine the disagreements more accurately and relevantly, without hurting anyone's feelings or disputing someone's existence. Probably this is where this multilayered and multifocal approach should be justified as a mode that is possible and permissible, without pleading for exclusivity and possessiveness.

Instead of presenting a fixed cultural identity and a fixed narrative, the complexities of the individual would be highlighted if the culture is being perceived as flexible and in development, rather than homogenous. In such a way, a sense of a shared human identity can be expressed, instead of a cultural one, making it possible to express understanding and forgiveness over cultural borders. The importance does not lie in presenting facts to a passive "audience" but rather in the ideas and the thoughts that the cultural heritage awakes in people. The use of cultural heritage should address a moving target, with the realisation that the past is in continuous creation and so are perspectives upon it. This demands an approach that is organic in character, rather than a static one. A process-oriented approach through dialogue would be one way of achieving this goal.

When cultural heritage is used in ways that present multiple perspectives and readings of events, it will promote tolerance towards other human beings and cultures. If cultural identities are perceived as flexible and vibrant, this process can bridge distances between human beings instead of increasing them.

We have always celebrated diversities, they are the bridge that enables us to surpass all inconsistencies and disagreements. Let us continue to celebrate these diversities, but it must not lead us to a dead end in which we will refuse to celebrate the moments of overlapping, similarities, geo-historical changes over the centuries, of the cultural mixing pot and the strange directions of the Balkan winds.

Should history be an obstacle to the future of a modern entity or state? Should we allow ourselves to stumble upon the challenges we live in now, and instead of building a secure and stable good neighbourly relationship together, with European perspectives for all, to become captives of dystopia?!

We should commit to building new policies to represent our cultural values, to appreciate both our own and those of others and to agree to present the perspective and vision of the other objectively (because each narrative uses different sources). To be citizens of this world who appreciate every contribution of past generations, to learn from them in order to become more valuable and greater people who will nurture higher humanistic values. Contemporary culture and art are proving to be excellent modalities for coexistence and reconciliation, for overcoming imposed prejudices, for celebrating diversity and spirituality. The cooperation of cultural workers from different countries takes place smoothly and fruitfully. There are many prolific examples that indicate the content and quality of cooperation between neighbours. This leads to the conclusion that politics should not abuse history and cultural heritage as a tool for artificially creating disputes between modern states, instead they should be concerned with creating future policies to strengthen good neighbourly relations and foster cooperation at every level. Controversial moments in history and issues of shared or contested cultural heritage are a living process that will be discussed, debated and elaborated in the future, but on a professional level, it should be free from emotions and pathos, and approached as a universal value, which in a given period of time was part of a fluid historical and geographical context.

PANEL DISCUSSION:

THE POWER OF HERITAGE AND CULTURE

The Power of Heritage and Culture was a Virtual panel discussion organised on the 25 November 2020 organised by **ALDA - European Association for Local Democracy** and **Forum ZFD**.

The panel gathered the following very relevant speakers from different fields and backgrounds dealing with cultural heritage in order to open our minds to the everyday struggles and delight of working on this topic offering insight on their individual approaches as well as their experience with international and cross-border cooperation.

The Speakers:

- Ms. **Antonella Valmorbida**, Secretary General of ALDA - European Association for Local Democracy
- Prof. **Vladimir Martinovski**, PhD, Professor of Comparative Literature at the Faculty of Philosophy, University Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Skopje, North Macedonia
- Ms. **Sofia Grigoriadou**, PhD candidate in Social Anthropology, Panteion University, Athens, Greece
- **Kristijan Kovachev**, guest lecturer at the South-West University “Neofit Rilski”, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

The Moderator:

- **Ana Frangovska**, senior curator

In these strange times when we are struggling with the biggest World enemy in recent times, invisible to the eye, the pandemic of the COVID virus, we are still facing other “demons” such as the position power politics - the constant questions that confirm or challenge our identity. This adds further burden to our social responsibility, as professionals dealing with heritage, as critical masses, as intellectuals, cultural workers, historians. This demands of us answers to questions such as: what is the power of

cultural heritage³; whether national narratives should be directly related to the ways of presenting and popularising cultural heritage; how can we contribute towards the resolution of some disputed or dystopian points in the communication of cultural heritage and culture; whether heritage will lead us to coexistence and humanism or to deepening certain points of divergence, etc.

National narratives and history are important in identifying affiliation, but they are also a manipulative tool in the hands of politicians, and according to the needs of certain daily political interests they are changeable and distorted. Politicians manage to indoctrinate the people and influence the "nurturing" of the "apple of discord", but cultural heritage and professionals related to the protection, promotion, presentation, interpretation of that cultural heritage, along with contemporary cultural creators (who create excellent examples of cultural heritage for future generations) should loudly and decisively influence the daily political backstage games and offer their own mechanisms for coexistence, cooperation, reconciliation, dialogue and the creation of a common future, free from nationalisms, genocides, seizures and superiorities.

The past should remain in the past, and we should deal with our future. Dystopian or problematic points of history, with calm emotions and without passions, should continue to be the subject of peaceful debates and discussions by historians from the disputed entities. They should continue, without pressure and daily political inputs, to research and compare artefacts and historical evidence, trying more accurately and relevantly to determine the disagreements, without disputing the existence of a people. In this aspect, a multi-layered and multifocal approach should probably be justified as a mode that is possible and permissible, without pleading for exclusivity and possessiveness.

The use of cultural heritage should address a moving target, with the realisation that the past is in continuous creation and so are perspectives upon it. This demands an approach that is organic in character, rather than static. A process-oriented approach through dialogue would be one way of achieving this. When cultural heritage is used to present multiple perspectives and readings of events it will promote tolerance towards the whole of humanity and its diverse cultures. If cultural identities are perceived as flexible and vibrant, it can thus bridge distances between people instead of increasing them.

Contemporary culture and art are proving to be excellent modalities for coexistence and reconciliation, for overcoming imposed prejudices, for celebrating diversity and spirituality. The cooperation of cultural workers from different countries takes place smoothly and fruitfully.

³Cultural Heritage is an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values.
Cultural Heritage is often expressed as either Intangible or Tangible Cultural Heritage (ICOMOS, 2002).

Should history be an obstacle to the future of a modern entity or state? Will we allow ourselves to stumble upon the challenges we live in now and instead of building a secure and stable good neighbourly relationship together, with European perspectives for all, will we become captives of dystopia and solidarity?! Should the EU integration processes be blocked using as an excuse “revisioning of the history” and misusing the objectives of the history as a humanitarian science? Wasn’t the right for self-identification the basic human right?

Can we confirm the position of respect for cultural values and heritage as universal values of humanity that belong to each individual and component?

We offer in this publication an overview of what was discussed during this panel which introduced four different approaches from different field for dealing with the much debated and relevant topic of the power of cultural heritage.

Ms. Antonella Valmorbida,

Secretary General of ALDA - European Association for Local Democracy

Ms. Valmorbida spoke about the European perspective of cultural heritage in the Balkans. ALDA has been working in the Balkans since the end of the conflict and since then the association has been involved in the processes of reconciliation in the region. The Balkans are always a big challenge when it comes to variety of identity, which importance has been often misunderstood from a European perspective. When we work around the concept of heritage and culture one of the learning points Ms. Valmorbida shared from her experience is that it represents an immaterial wealth which is at the heart and mind of people and no clear understanding can be offered as to why it means so much. It falls into those matters that seem trivial to Europe but mean very much to the people in the Balkans. Nevertheless, the struggle around cultural heritage, culture, locations and traditions around this heritage has actually been witnessed all around Europe. Therefore, peace projects and development projects that have been implemented so far in the European Union, and that dimension of the European project is not mentioned enough. Consequently, it should be pointed out that it has been a key means to overcome the diversities and the clash over common and disputed cultural heritage. If we consider that the European project today is very normative, especially for the Balkans, going through chapters, through criteria more or less clear, through legislative approximation, Ms. Valmorbida points out that one of the messages that could be shared is that the European project is not only a development of laws, but also incites dealing with these crucial elements which are cultural heritage and identity. She stresses that this issue is so complicated that one

of the key words from which everything actually started, as a peace process, is the word – reconciliation. Reconciliation has been THE word which started the ball rolling in the direction of peace. This has been the key word amongst the principal historic enemies which were France and Germany, who are still working on cultural heritage locations, hot spots where there is shared cultural heritage. One of those places is the city where ALDA is based, Strasbourg. It is a particular place where European institutions are especially represented, such as the Council of Europe, the European Parliament. The reason for this is because this city is a key location symbolic of reconciliation, and where this culture is both shared and disputed. In some countries of Europe, there were also civil wars. The civil wars in Italy for example, had made it a lost country for several years, with families divided, with extremely big divisions. Therefore, what was fundamental for the creation of Europe first was – reconciliation. Ms. Valmorbidia reminded that the second word was an immense challenge and it is not sure that its significance in terms of challenge was entirely perceived. It's the European Union's slogan itself which is "United in diversity". This is the cultural slogan of the Union, and what it means is that diversity is recognised diversity but it does not separate. It is through this slogan that the European Union is trying to overcome the identity issue – divided but united. Therefore, Ms Valmorbidia inferred that it is a constant struggle which is today also at stake (because of the context of the sanitary crisis) because this long division among citizens who are not able to meet will leave a trace. She anticipated that after this pandemic we will have to go back to the initial boxes and oblige people to meet each other again. Because we as people are never safe from the perspective of isolation. The more people are isolated the more there are dangers that the barriers can start forming again. We have this common language which is English that we are speaking at this webinar which enables us to share and comprehend each other. Therefore, Ms. Valmorbidia reminded that Europe's slogan "United in diversity" is a big challenge that we are trying to overcome on a daily basis. To move back to the word reconciliation, the symbolic behind it is to forgive yes, but not to forget. Challenging things have happened to all countries but we have to go through the process of reconciliation for the sake of our communities. Consequently, the role of reconciliation has been driving the European Union process. There has been a lot of effort on the community and government level to further this process and maintain it, especially through commemorative places so, we do not forget. Another element of reconciliation is what is inferred to as cross-border reconciliation. Ms Valmorbidia stressed that it is through these projects that our diversity and our cultural elements meet. Sometimes, they are hybrid and in others they are sharper but ***one of the successes from a European Union perspective has been the constant wish to erase the borders, to keep down the wall.*** Examples for that is the common market, the cohesive policy in Europe which is not planned country by country but region by region, and sometimes regions which share a border. So, there are some critical borders as is the case between Germany and Poland which are united together with a common policy so that they are structurally together.

Cross-border cooperation helps to reconcile and erase the big walls. The concept of good neighbouring relations is also very important and this is why there are policies created through approximation in order to talk and deal with the same issues collectively. When it comes to identity and how much we share of the same identity, how much do we all have at the European level the feeling that we are sharing the same destiny and the same identity where our diversity can find a common point. Ms. Valmorbida stressed that there is still a long way to go and unsurety that the European project strives towards the “opus europeus” but that Europeans are very strongly connected to this idea of “united in diversity” and to push too much in the direction of flattening in it, would turn in a negative direction. So, the valorisation of local identities should be dealt in a cautious way as not to create a negative reaction that sometimes occurs. The question of identity is a multi-level process, a person has several levels of identities, link to the place, link to their profession, link to their status. From that perspective, the challenge is to accept this multi-level identity. One of the key aspects of the success of the European Union so far has definitely been those key words accepting diversities and trying to transform them into something else and working on reconciliation through the care of some cultural elements and heritage. Ms. Valmorbida concluded by describing the Balkan region thus: **“I see the Balkans as a big heart sometimes it expands, sometimes it shrinks but it keeps pulsing.** There is constantly this idea of I cannot live with you but I cannot live without you. We have a lot to learn together going through this exercise.”

Prof. Vladimir Martinovski,

PhD, Professor of Comparative Literature at the Faculty of Philosophy, University “Ss. Cyril and Methodius”, Skopje, North Macedonia

Prof Martinovski described his perspective to this very interesting issue the power of culture and the power of heritage from the viewpoint of literature, especially comparative literature as a discipline which is cosmopolitan, as well as his personal experience as a writer. He pointed out that when we discuss the power of heritage and culture, we must firstly have in mind that cultural heritage is something important that we have inherited from previous generations. On the other hand, we have also borrowed it from the future generation on behalf of whom we have the obligation and responsibility to protect it. Yet, cultural heritage is something that should be earned, we should let us enter into living communication with it and save it from oblivion. **Cultural heritage is something that should enrich our everyday lives, help us better understand the people of the past and better understand each other.**

Prof. Martinovski inferred further that cultural heritage can also help us to better understand human creativity, to help us understand that the great achievements of art and culture belong to all mankind. An example for this is one of the greatest works of ancient literature “The Metamorphosis of Ovid” where the poet points out, in the last lines of his work, that he has created a monument that will last much longer than him, the better part of his being will be preserved because of his poetic work. In this context Andre Malraux said that art is one of the few things that humanity can be proud of. In this complex and ongoing process of thinking and rethinking as well as the preservation of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage the language has primordial value. The novelist Michel Butor said that all “mute artefacts” are interpreted with the help of verbal discourse, “which surrounds them”, starting from the titles of the works. In other words, material, but also immaterial, tangible and intangible cultural heritage requires to be interpreted and explained through language. The attitude towards cultural heritage could certainly be compared with storytelling also the process of “reading” and interpreting stories. Some stories go on for millennia, but unfortunately some are forgotten. That’s also the case with cultural heritage of every kind. That is why, the major threats for cultural heritage are ignorance, stereotypes, nationalism, intolerance and war. In that context, Prof. Martinovski pointed out that art education and education in the field of cultural history are extremely important when we talk about the role of cultural heritage. If the present and future generation are not shown the value, the meaning, the uniqueness of an artefact of the past, they could neglect it, completely surrendering it to oblivion. That is why cultural heritage requires constant care, the language is also cultural heritage, one of the most valuable. Today, we talk about on this panel and exchange ideas thanks to language. It is through language that we realise that cultural heritage is something that is alive in which each of us participates. Through language we can also realise that the present artistic creativity cannot be separated from the cultural heritage and artistic tradition of the past. In this context, one of the major premises of Blaze Koneski, one of the major Macedonian poets, scholars and one of the most important cultural workers in 20th century Macedonian history who pointed out that each poet, each artist, each writer is connected with the tradition, with cultural heritage. He was saying that while he was writing a poem he was always linked with the legends, with the myths, with these oral traditions he inherited from the past. On the other hand, every poet, every writer is using the language that was created from the previous generations. His or her poems will communicate with future generations of readers if they understand the same language. Prof. Martinovski inferred here that one other element very important for the cultural memory is also the translations of literary works. Therefore, the international and cultural dialogue, exchanges and cooperation are crucial for both mutual understanding as well as cultural heritage. Although there is a tendency to talk about national cultural heritage which quite legitimate, in the context of contemporary society but also in the context of my discipline, comparative literature, it is important to point out that there is no culture

which exists in isolation from others, the concept itself of culture is linked to the concept of palimpsest, all great achievements in culture belong to all mankind. As a phenomenon, culture is a palimpsest and the whole of culture is essentially shared. Understanding many phenomena in art, culture and literature at the national level necessarily leads us to international dialogues, exchanges, as well as facing the fact that there are regional and cross-cultural achievements, as well as larger cultural zones. On the other hand, the power of heritage is also deeply connected with the concept of diversity, that is why the European Union slogan is so poignant “united in diversity”. Prof. Martinovski pointed out that he had participated in many international literary festivals, especially in the field of poetry, where literary works are presented by the authors to be read in the mother tongue, and then read in translation so that the local audience can understand them. It is wonderful to hear the diversity of languages, the different linguistic and cultural legacy and also the “music” of each language. He gave an example that is used in the Macedonian language, as an example of shared heritage, the old Slavic language, old Slavic literacy and literature important for all Slavic states and nations, all over Europe as a common root of all Slavic languages including the Macedonian language. Prof. Martinovski shared his concerns related to the challenging of the authenticity of the Macedonian language in these days, in the 21st century due to daily political agendas which we are witnessing these days characterising them as extremely problematic. Because it could challenge a dispute over Macedonian literature art and culture and from this perspective, each poet, each writer is connected and cannot create outside of the context of the native language although there are many writers that are creating in different languages. Poets create in a language they inherited from their ancestors but every poet in the original and when translated is not only the fruit of linguistic tradition but it also belongs to world literature. ***Great art crosses all boundaries and that is why cultural heritage belongs to all mankind.*** Some of the most beautiful achievements in art and culture are created precisely because of the mixing of cultures. I would like to stress that if we understand the power of heritage and culture, we should have in mind that they are also fragile because the products of human culture and art as we all have witnessed can be destroyed. In this pandemic circumstances for instance, we all have proof of the fragility and insecurity of today’s humanity. Due to consumerism and greed for profit we have become a threat to other forms of existence as well as to our own cultural heritage. We have seen that war conflicts all over the world in the last decade have seriously damaged significant cultural treasures. That’s why one of the most important long-term measures should be about the care of cultural heritage by cultivating the culture of tolerance and peace. We learn to appreciate some things only when we realise that we can easily lose them. The economic crisis which is connected to the pandemic crisis can also affect the care for cultural heritage. However, in this difficult period we also have the opportunity to witness how important art and culture are for all of us. ***Just as Boccaccio’s Decameron was created during a plague epidemic in the Renaissance period, these difficult months on our planet are sure to create works of art that will grow into a significant cultural heritage site.***

Ms. Sofia Grigoriadou,

PhD candidate in Social Anthropology, Panteion University, Athens, Greece

Social anthropologist Sharon Macdonald uses the term difficult heritage to define heritage that is not celebrated but on the contrary is unsettling. Bringing this idea to the Greek context anthropologists Eleana Yalouri and Elpida Rikou examined Greek heritage also as a potentially difficult one despite all its glory and everything it has been linked to. In general, they refer to the domination of the past over the present in Greece that can be paralysing. Ms. Grigoriadou said that as an artist educated and having worked in Greece, the very tyrannical issue regarding ancient heritage is that the current cultural policies in Greece have focused mainly on the prevention and promotion of Greek cultural heritage which has been a source of economic capital. However, contemporary art has not equally been supported, there is a lack of funds, infrastructure. Lately, there has been a proclivity of big interest for contemporary art in Athens but mostly from private institutions which are still a new development in Greece. Still, heritage and antiquity overshadow contemporary production. There are examples of contemporary artists who allow this ancient heritage to take over their work by doing an assimilation of the heritage, or reproductions of it, or a confirmation of it. However, since the Olympic games of 2004 there is a big rapture in this context, there is a change in the narrative using words such as progress, prosperity, modernisation on the one hand and on the other, the national heritage is still regarded as a timeless thread that has endured in time, clean and uninfluenced from everything that happened after the golden years of Pericles. Ms. Grigoriadou inferred that there is a prevailing idea, as in other European countries, of a pure national identity that is not based and has no connection to contemporary art, cinema, music, and this can be witnessed throughout all the cultural fields. The big funds spent during the Olympic games and also the glorification of “Greekness” that took place during the games has led to criticism on behalf of artists. This wave of discontentment had intensified even more after the 2008 crisis and later with the social crisis and the political approach to heritage, the subversive affirmation and idealisation of antiquity, of Greek nationalism, even of Hellenism. Consequently, most artists became critical towards these idiosyncrasies. ***Contemporary artists and cultural workers are producing new heritage for the future, they also produce new uses of existent heritage.*** Ms. Grigoriadou pointed out that her own interest does not lie in shared cultural heritage per se but shared and common artistic practices that deal with heritage in Athens and in Skopje. She mentioned the ways in which art practices deal with heritage, such as the demand to establish new heritage, these practices are focused on building something, building communities, building archives, working on official level for the establishment of new heritage. The second category would be the practices focused on destabilisation or the undermining of “big truths” in a way that artists through their artwork provoke discomfort, uneasiness and reflection. In general, if we accept that

we live in a post-modern life the question that poses itself today is – how modern this idea of nations is. However, there is no denying that the concept of a nation still creates real feelings and provokes real actions in reality, and nationalism is not over, on the contrary it is currently on the rise. Ms. Grigoriadou poses that the rise of nationalism in such an evident way may be due to the new ways of communication, social media could be the cause of even more polarisation, although maybe not deliberately. However, what is apparent is that it is getting more challenging to deal with the idea of nations, nationalism and national feelings. Ms. Grigoriadou declared that it could be construed as elitist or paternalist to say let's abolish everything linked to nationalism the idea might be ridiculous or obsolete when something is characterised as global, universal, but these adjectives may also bring on negative representations in some people's view. We should think on how to communicate these messages in a different way or how to think of these ideas in a different way because so far, we have witnessed them backfiring and bringing forth more radical opinions. For example, thinking about art in terms of increasing idealisation, initialisation in terms of rising nationalism in times of online communication and this idea of you are either with us or against us. Ms. Grigoriadou further mentioned that we need to accept that there are dystopias, there are uncertainties and they shouldn't be confronted with certainties, moralisations and affirmations. In her opinion the ambiguity that art can offer is needed because it contributes and nourishes the debate. The solution, is to contribute in an agonistic way and not in an antagonistic way. When it comes to heritage, art could assist in pointing at stereotypical relations towards antiquity and criticising what is taken for granted. Moreover, international cooperation of any kind is a very important way of getting to know each other and understanding what is happening on the other side at times it awakes the individual and challenges the set opinion on "other" people through a prism of a generalised idea on who they are thus, breaking a lot of stereotypes. Ms. Grigoriadou shared the thought processes during her art project in Skopje and identified the main issues as: "who am I" and "how do I wish to communicate my art from which position, is it a position of power coming from Greece, a country that brought on the name change". In the end Ms. Grigoriadou chose for her inner researcher to speak, by filling a diary with all of these questions that arose in her mind and the ways she was reacting to Skopje. One of the thoughts she inferred, was that "Skopje is an interesting city with interesting things going". She shared that this realisation made her uncomfortable because it brought back feelings, she had about the people coming to Athens a few years ago during the crisis. When asked why come at such a time in Athens the visitors' most common reply was that the city was interesting, among other things because of the crisis. In conclusion, Ms. Grigoriadou shared this realisation ***"this made me feel as though I was treated as part of a spectacle, part of crisis tourism, and I felt that when Athens is drained and it is not "interesting" anymore then people will fly to new places that will be called New Berlins as Athens was.*** At the moment when I came to Skopje and I met the people and found them interesting I felt as if I was the same as the tourists and expats that I have

met in Athens and found it problematic. Then, I spoke with people on their thoughts on this new image of Skopje as the New Las Vegas and other characterisations and the conclusion we came to is that – it is not interesting it is painful, ***new changes that arise are sometimes regressive but inevitably they are also food for thought.*** So, I live in Skopje now, in this interesting city, having to deal with a lot of thin lines, but spending time in Skopje and having projects and relationships here have made me more reflexive on these issues.”

Kristijan Kovachev,

guest lecturer holding seminars in Anthropology of the Middle Ages, Cultural Anthropology and Theory of Culture at the South-West University “Neofit Rilski”, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

The topic of cultural heritage is very wide but also very current following what is happening between Bulgaria and North Macedonia. The issue of cultural heritage is multi-faceted and must be addressed through an interdisciplinary approach. Mr. Kovachev started his address with the Latin maxim *sine ira et studio* – without anger and passion, which is often used to remind historians not to get carried away by emotions when writing about the past. The scientific approach not to adhere to directly but be critical of the sources. Mr. Kovachev further inferred that according to him, the time for narration of national stories by historians has passed. Of course, there are still historians who write about the great Bulgarian national history in the Middle Ages that Bulgarians should be proud of. However, in correlation, there is a group of researchers trying to find other ways to present the common past and heritage, in line with the new trends in historical science that are often opposed by nationalists. They have entitled this approach – alternative history. According to Mr. Kovachev this is the right approach in dealing with the issue of past and heritage. He continued, by saying that ***the problem could be solved scientifically beyond the spectre of emotion, by presenting these alternative stories outside the official national narrative, under the scope of the definition of shared history and common heritage.*** Conceiving this heritage as common and shared will be a long process, especially in societies that think strictly in national frameworks. An example is the city of Ohrid. In antiquity the Illyrians lived in Ohrid and at the same time there was the presence of ancient Greeks, later it was in the borders of the Roman Empire. After the 10th century it was within the borders of the Bulgarian state after 1018 Ohrid fell within the borders of the Byzantine empire, later followed a period in which it was sometimes in the borders of Bulgaria sometimes within the borders of Byzantium. In the 14th century Ohrid was part of Serbia and at one point it was even a member of the

Albanian Gropa family. After the 15th century, Ohrid was already within the borders of the Ottoman Empire. In the first decades of the 20th century, it was ruled by Bulgarians, Serbs, it then entered Yugoslavia. Apart from that, after the 8th century the papacy made claims to the lands where Ohrid is located, in the 13th century the Pope sent Catholic bishops in the city. Therefore, Mr. Kovachev established that Ohrid is a disputed territory inferring that Bulgarians think of Ohrid's heritage is Bulgarian heritage, the capital of the Bulgarian king Samoil, and Macedonians think of it as theirs, some would even consider Ohrid as the great Albanian project. What is the solution to the problem? It is apparent that the writing of military and political history within nationalism is problematic. However, ***a historical approach that shifts from the great national stories to the daily life of ordinary people, how they lived, how they thought the world around them, could be the solution.*** Many researchers are now focusing their research not so much on the studies of politics, glorious victories and great kings but on microhistory. In this approach, it is true that the historical sources of the ordinary lives are few but that is exactly why it is an academic challenge. European science has been dealing with the subject of microhistory since the 20th century. There are among others, Giovanni Levi and his school on microhistory in Italy, Aron Gurevich in Russia. Going back to the case of Ohrid as a disputed territory, which can also be considered from another perspective. The cultural heritage of Ohrid, which is a sacred place for Bulgarians, Macedonians, Albanians, Greeks, Serbs would benefit from a new reading as a common Balkan and common European heritage without distorting historical facts and without opposing the interests of the countries in their current borders. This would be possible by presenting the alternative story. The one that will not divide us. For example, the history of art and culture, here as the Macedonian art historian Tsvetan Grozdanov did through his work. However, this approach is only possible if modern western conceptions of nations are accepted as imagined communities, according to Benedict Anderson, and as a product of the 18th and 19th centuries. Excluding the nationalist discourse Medieval Ohrid can be seen as a place of contact between East and West, which is also set in its image system, frescoes, icons and so on. It seems difficult to fight the iron curtain of nationalism, but, this is again an academic challenge. In a supra national context cultural heritage can unite the communities. In this regard the attempt to develop cultural roads on behalf of the Council of Europe is indicative. They act as channels for intercultural dialogue and promote a better knowledge in understanding the shared European cultural heritage. Mr. Kovachev pointed out that ***a good opportunity is the development of global networks for shared cultural heritage which will strengthen universal values.*** The foundation for this has already been laid out. Let's take the example of Bulgaria and North Macedonia again. The cooperation between the department of ethnology at the Sofia University and the Skopje University and their joint scientific conference. The cooperation between South-West University "Neofit Rilski", Blagoevgrad, the University of Skopje and the Institute of National History in Skopje is also indicative. Here is the attempt to construct a multidisciplinary commission to solve the problems

of the common heritage. However, there is a difficult road ahead to uncover the common and shared heritage, this will be the case as long as the political discourse dictates how we talk about the past, the cases where politicians have used the past to argue their current policies. Solving the problems must become an aim for historians and their task is not easy: to talk about the past as it is, without additional embellishments influenced by current politics and nationalism. In closing, Mr. Kovachev repeated “*sine ira et studio*”.

Q&A

The discussion during the Q&A portion of the event was developed through the contribution of the audience and the speakers and moderator amongst themselves.

What specific actions, policies, measures can be implemented to contribute to a positive shift in political culture which will promote shared instead of divisive culture and lay the foundations for bridging the gaps as opposed to deepening them?

Kristiyan Kovachev

Society should give the word to scientists and people from academia not to politicians who deal with politics not science.

Prof. Vladimir Martinovski

Prof. Martinovski agreed on the point that cultural heritage can be used as a bond, a bridge, a way to better understand each other. In that sense, the main role should be carried out by cultural workers, artists, as well as scientists specialising in this particular area.

Sofia Grigoriadou

From an artist's point of view, in this sense art is a very good approach in dealing with heritage because it can really shake our point of view and change our minds, move our ideas. There are many examples of art works that have changed a little and even a lot on how we perceive the world and especially our own truths and certainties. That is why this is a very useful direction in which to think.

Prof. Vladimir Martinovski

Prof. Martinovski added that this communication through art is very important. A few examples for it in the field of literature are for example the international award called “Balkanika” thanks to this award focused on contemporary writers from all over the Balkan region, we have the opportunity to get to know each other better, to have new translations of the works of really brilliant authors from the region and to encourage a readership. He agreed with the points of the other speakers on collaboration and cross-cultural projects, including this project “Shared and contested heritage” as well. When people get to know each other through art, through different artistic practices, not only literature but also visual arts, theatre, cinema and when they realise that neighbouring countries recognise their difference but also are made aware that they face similar problems, similar situations of the contemporary life. That is why communication through art can help us to bridge these gaps imposed by the daily politics.

How loud are we? In terms of trying to become a loud sound in the ear of the politicians to change the approach to these very disputed questions of dealing with shared or contested heritage? Do we need to be louder and how? Because we do a lot of projects, we do a lot of cross-border collaborations, but we lack visibility.

Prof. Vladimir Martinovski

Prof. Martinovski answered that he had read the interviews done in the framework of this project and it pleased him but came as no surprise that people from different art fields, academic world, scholars have brilliant regional collaborations. However, in his opinion most people are not aware of this because there is no media attention to it. Artists do many projects together, there are many new translated works, or many new scientific projects but it is not communicated enough. He posed the example of the collaboration between North Macedonia and Bulgaria witnessing beneficial meetings among writers in Skopje and in Sofia. In 2019 as vice-president of Macedonian PEN, Prof. Martinovski shared his experience of an extraordinary meeting with the colleagues from Bulgaria that brought on many projects and many ideas but was not communicated in the media because it is not a conflict. In his opinion the media is unfortunately more interested about disputes and conflicts, “this dramatic political fight”. That is why he agreed that we should be much louder.

Ana Frangovska

Ms. Frangovska added that we should probably be more active in the media and request more space in the media because that is where people get their information, they read newspapers or blogs, social media. Therefore, she said, we should dedicate more to promotion and sharing the knowledge about cross-border cooperation in each field, even in the field of history, there are a lot of projects in that field as well which are very prolific and very successful.

Sofia Grigoriadou

Ms. Grigoriadou agreed with the fact that there is a lack of visibility and it is very needed. She shared that the in-between position in which are artists is helpful as a strategy, being inside the situation as well as outside of the situation. Within an institution there is more visibility, outside an institution there is more freedom of speech and more space for sincerity. Combining these two positions we can have as cultural workers in and outside is our possibility to speak up about our positions and say them louder.

The topic is very interesting and current, especially at a time where we are all alienated from each other due to the pandemic. My question is related to the role of libraries in the promotion of cultural heritage, tolerance, education of all generations, in promoting cooperation in the cultural field. Do you think that libraries might be a key factor in promoting tolerance, bringing neighbours closer together in the cultural field and greater cooperation in the field of language and culture promotion?

Prof. Vladimir Martinovski

Libraries are very important they act as a museum of the cultural heritage of literature as well as language. In the National libraries for instance, or in the big libraries all over the world books can be found written in many different languages, we can learn about many interesting things and encounter the thoughts of brilliant people from the past. Prof. Martinovski voiced that he fears that unfortunately during this pandemic period, they are not very visited. Even in the case of North Macedonia, it was a bit frightening because the libraries were closed until June-July. Libraries, and not only them, but cultural centres as well, multimedia libraries, places where we can learn about different artistic practices, where we can watch films or be part of some cultural events, all those places can really encourage cooperation.

Sofia Grigoriadou

Libraries are very important as well as knowledge and education. In times of Corona, when we are closed inside our own spaces, the internet is a platform where we get our share of knowledge and in this sense Ms. Grigoriadou also mentioned archives, who also deal with cultural heritage and open up a lot of information.

Kristiyan Kovachev

Mr. Kovachev agreed that libraries have a big role to play in the issue of shared heritage. He also answered with another question, because the problem, at least for Bulgarian society, is how to motivate people to go to the library, check information and not only trust what is said in the media.

Ana Frangovska

Ms. Frangovska added to Mr. Kovachev's position by saying that unfortunately people don't visit libraries as often, nor museums and exhibitions. Some people say it's related to our standard and our economical situation, it is certainly related to the level of education and with their belief that they will find more information looking at the television, hypnotised by already packed given information.

Speaker to Speaker: Sofia Grigoriadou to Kristiyan Kovachev

Some thought or ideas about the paradox of UNESCO or the idea of the international heritage mission. On one hand it preserves the heritage but on the other hand it exposes it to transformation. It forges new identities, it brings tourists, it brings a lot of movement but it also can lead to more nationalism sometimes, the fear of something such as collective danger. Do you have any thoughts on this?

This issue is a big one. Ohrid for example has a lot of problems with its international cultural heritage. There are projects to transform the cultural environment but according to some researchers there are dangers to the local heritage and according to them we can't talk of the common European heritage because of these problems. UNESCO has several reports regarding the transformation of cultural environment in Ohrid and there is currently a big discussion on Ohrid's heritage the common and shared European heritage.

Does formerly politically motivated subventioned art deserve to be considered as cultural heritage and consequently be protected?

Sofia Grigoriadou

This is a very big question and hard to answer, because it depends on the context. Heritage changes, maybe not drastically but over the years can change slowly. Some things are protected that are created by governments or supported by governments and in the next government they are not protected anymore, they are not considered heritage anymore and they are destroyed, covered or silenced. It is difficult to answer what should happen.

Prof. Vladimir Martinovski

Prof. Martinovski agreed with the complexity of the question. He disputed that formerly politically motivated subventioned art can cover many things such as the Sistine Chapel or some of the greatest pieces of art which were motivated by the church. We can go even further for example Virgil's Aeneid was linked with the political power of Octavian August or should we talk about contemporary cases? It is difficult to give a simple answer. It depends on the work of art, we have to have in mind the aesthetic values as well as the whole context.

ARTICLES

COOPERATION ON THE TOPIC OF SHARED AND CONTESTED CULTURAL HERITAGE

The European Union has reaffirmed time and again their dedication to the promotion and protection of cultural heritage. In the document "[Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe](#)" they introduced the importance of cultural heritage thusly: "Europe's cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, is our common wealth – our inheritance from previous generations of Europeans and our legacy for those to come. It is an irreplaceable repository of knowledge and a valuable resource for economic growth, employment and social cohesion. It enriches the individual lives of hundreds of millions of people, is a source of inspiration for thinkers and artists, and a driver for our cultural and creative industries. Our cultural heritage and the way we preserve and valorise it is a major factor in defining Europe's place in the world and its attractiveness as a place to live, work, and visit.

However, this action does not only apply to European Union countries but also to the cross-border regions, the whole of the European continent and beyond. These objectives have also been strongly supported by the [Council of Europe](#) "We strive towards a Europe where the diversity of cultures, the arts, and cultural heritage are essential to the development of a genuine openness of mind and basic rights, and where open and interactive processes and practices of culture that combine to help us deal with the complexities of living with ourselves and one another."

Following these maxims and discussing the topics of shared and contested cultural heritage this project "The power of heritage and culture" has stirred us in many diverse directions. Here follow some concrete examples, differing in format and context on how shared and contested heritage has been studied, put to use and engaged with through international cooperation.

In the following pages you will find individuals and organisations: "trying to conserve cultural heritage from sliding into oblivion"; giving advice from their own experience of "concentrating on small "uniting events" with respect for the thoughts and beliefs of the other generated by open-minded individuals, municipality workers, cultural workers, artists and museum workers, mostly speaking the language of the others, who undertook the role of bridge builders."; working on inspiring projects "where ethnic and cultural borders are erased in the name of shared creation."; and "the appeal to work together in the spirit of European values and mutual benefit is superior to the philosophy of nationalism and the narrow-minded pursuit of domestic political success."

ARTICLES

OVERCOMING LEGACIES OF THE PAST: DEVISING THE BEST MODEL FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS

Ana Krstinovska, *senior policy analyst*

The year 2020 has been a critical one for Europe: the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic repercussions served as an ultimate test for EU's solidarity, while Brexit dealt a big blow to EU's legitimacy and *raison d'être*. On the bright side, North Macedonia and Albania made a major leap forward by starting EU accession talks after several years of standstill in enlargement policy.

Their unwavering determination to join the Union proved that for the countries in the Western Balkans, the EU remains a strategic choice and a role model to follow in the process of societal reform and modernisation.

While the transformation needed to align with EU values and *acquis* is by no means an easy one, what is even more difficult for the Western Balkans is to overcome bilateral tensions among themselves and with EU member states, which bring along the risk to postpone EU accession indefinitely. While the EU lacks specific mechanisms to adjudicate bilateral disputes, it can offer a framework for dispute resolution on the basis of shared heritage and prospects for a joint future. At the member state level, it can also provide a number of examples of contested history, tested solutions and lessons learnt, some of which could serve as guidance for the Western Balkans to overcome their internal tensions as well as disputes with neighbouring EU member states.

The essence of the European peace project

In 2012, the EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its stabilising role “*in transforming most of Europe from a continent of war to a continent of peace*”. Being built on the ashes of World War II, the creation of the EU was based on the premise that only profound economic interconnectedness could prevent countries from waging war at each other. The French dependence on German coal and the German dependence on French steel developed into an all-encompassing cooperation which serves as the main driver of European integration today. It also contributed to put an end to French and German hegemonic ambitions and led to gradual rapprochement between the people, on the basis of shared interests and values. The Franco-German friendship was reinforced with the [Elysee Treaty](#) signed in 1963 which stipulated that national leaders should meet at regular intervals and coordinate on matters related to foreign, security and defence policy. 40 years later, joint history textbooks were prepared teaching French and German students identical content.

While being the most prominent, Franco-German reconciliation is not the only case which proves that the appeal to work together in the spirit of European values and mutual benefit is superior to the philosophy of nationalism and the narrow-minded pursuit of domestic political success. [Polish-German reconciliation](#) which took almost half a century to happen is another example that the legacies of war and suffering could be overcome when the future is at stake. While the fall of the Iron Curtain certainly contributed to a more favourable geopolitical landscape, burgeoning activities of civil society groups, the constructive role of the Catholic Church and continuous remorse expressed by German leaders were crucial to bring the people of both countries closer together as a key milestone for the subsequent EU enlargement toward Central and Eastern Europe.

The EU has also played a major role in the [Northern Ireland Peace Process](#) by providing a neutral setting for dialogue in the European Parliament, a framework for the Irish identity to develop in a broader European context and financial support to ensure sustainability of the peace agreement. This proves EU’s strong potential to act as an honest broker between its member states, as opposed to situations involving an EU member state and a third country. This can also be supported by the example of the Cypriot issue and the impossibility to reach a solution over the island which Southern part is a part of the EU, while Northern Cyprus does not have a recognised international status. However, since the failure to resolve the [bilateral dispute between Slovenia and Croatia](#) on the Gulf of Piran, which eventually became an intra-EU issue after Croatia’s accession, the EU has adopted a stance that an acceding country should resolve all bilateral issues before it joins. Given the voting rules in the EU’s Council of Ministers which require unanimity on matters pertaining to enlargement, such a position provides any member state with the possibility to block any candidate country from making progress toward membership, even if it is in EU’s strategic interest.

The Western Balkans – litmus test for EU’s ability to export peace, stability and prosperity

Recurrent tensions between North Macedonia and Bulgaria, Greece and Albania, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo etc. are not centuries-old enmities profoundly anchored in their citizens’ mindset. To the contrary, they are the product of the painful Yugoslav dissolution process, new independent countries’ state-building efforts, the quest for own national identity and minority rights, toppled with rising nationalism and irresponsible domestic politics as by-products. Not all the countries have fought wars among themselves, but even those with traditionally good people to people relations often seem to seek and emphasise issues that divide them and bear the potential for disagreement. In a region like the Western Balkans, torn across many lines – national, ethnic, religious, social, linguistic - the EU integration process as endgame is the “glue” which keeps the patchwork together. However, past conflicts and recurrent tensions perpetuate the region’s vulnerabilities, alienate the countries from their EU perspective and hold the potential to export instability toward neighbouring EU member states.

In the past couple of years, North Macedonia made the spotlight as a country which managed to resolve all outstanding issues with the neighbours by signing two international agreements: the [Prespa Agreement](#) with Greece, putting an end to the three-decade long name dispute and the [Treaty on Friendship, Good-neighbourliness and Cooperation](#) with Bulgaria. The Europe-wide praise of North Macedonia’s good will and efforts to overcome all the obstacles to EU membership seemed to create momentum for all the governments in the region to invest more efforts and resolve mutual contentions, especially raising the expectations about the Serbia-Kosovo issue.

However, Bulgaria’s recent veto on the adoption of the negotiation framework for North Macedonia’s EU accession talks and the opening of the first intergovernmental conference, because its [additional demands](#) were not met regarding Macedonian language, joint history and minority issues, showcases the fragility of the hard-won agreements and the looming risk for North Macedonia to go back to the 10-year long status-quo in its EU integration. At the same time, what is often overlooked is the negative effect that the failure of such agreements could have on the other countries in the region: the non-EU member states may lose any incentive to compromise in order to join the EU, while the EU member states may continue the practice of adding unrelated and unrealistic conditions for EU accession, further undermining EU’s enlargement policy as both core value and strategic tool for upholding rule of law, human rights and good governance in the Western Balkans.

The way forward – is there a unique European model?

However, the risk for bilateral agreements to fail does not apply to the Western Balkans only. Since the last change of government in Poland, there have been repeated calls by Polish government officials for [Germany to pay war reparations](#), which undoubtedly resonate with a part of the population. Brexit and the recent refutation of some terms in the exit agreement by the British government raise doubts about the [sustainability of the Northern Ireland peace process](#). On the other hand, one potential solution for the bilateral dispute between Slovenia and Croatia would be to [bring the issue in front of the European Court of Justice or the European Commission](#). Given the precedence of EU legislation and courts over the national level, these recent events open the possibility that maybe the EU institutions could be a more efficient actor in the resolution of bilateral issues between member states, than in cases involving third countries. Such a scenario would increase the likelihood that the Western Balkans will join the EU as soon as they are objectively ready and strengthen EU's credibility and influence in the region.

When comparing the above-mentioned bilateral agreements, six elements can be identified which underpin the long-lasting success of the Franco-German reconciliation vis-à-vis the others:

- the conscientious attitude by national leaders who acknowledge their responsibility not to allow the atrocities to be repeated ever again;

- the high level of awareness that renewal of continued conflict could cause utmost harm to both sides, while closer cooperation spurs economic development;

- the desire to maintain and strengthen the bilateral relationship through open, frank and result-driven approach in discussing contentious issues;

- the unconditional support by the international community, namely the USA at the time, both political and financial;

- the necessity to follow a particular order in the reconciliation in which the rationality of economic interdependence and cooperation precedes the emotionality of political and human rapprochement;

- the straightforward approach to domestic audiences, freed by the desire to score domestic political points on such delicate matters.

In such a context, there are a number of actions that the EU could undertake to facilitate the resolution of bilateral disputes at its borders:

- call to responsibility both its member states and candidate countries to put EU core interests and values before national politicking;

- emphasise the need to respect international law and EU values and openly pinpoint cases of violation, regardless of the state that commits them;

- encourage and support effective mediation by independent bodies;

- in line with its current internal debate on “strategic autonomy”, to acknowledge enlargement as both a strategic interest and tool to convey its values on a broader scale and move from unanimity to qualified majority voting.

At the same time, Western Balkans and EU member states involved in bilateral disputes should:

- embrace the culture of compromise which is inherent in EU-level policy making;

- refrain from the use of populist rhetoric on bilateral issues to score domestic political points;

- *actively promote the shared heritage and commonalities that unite their people in neighbouring countries, instead of the divisive points.*

THE DANUBE RIVER CONNECTS PEOPLE AND CULTURES

Stanka Parac, *President of the Balkan Network for Local Democracy*

Beautiful event last night. Culture came back to life with a great spectacle! Thanks to everyone who made it possible for all of us – music and art lovers but also all the citizens. We are very happy and proud that we have this chance to host and enjoy the music of such a fantastic Orchestra and watch our favourite movies outdoor.

This is one of the comments by the audience in Novi Sad and Subotica (Serbia), Ilok and Vukovar (Croatia) after four concerts by the Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra held in open air in September and October this year, taking due care of safety measures during the Covid 19 pandemics. This event was not just an ordinary concert. The musicians from both sides of the border selected a shared cultural topic: Charlie Chaplin's films, one of the most famous and recognisable figures in movie history to celebrate his birthday. In its outdoor location, at the beautiful "Trg slobode", FILMHarmonia delighted thousands of spectators of all ages who sat not only on chairs, but also on concrete paths, bikes, roofs of cars, or watched the programme from nearby windows.

The **FILMHarmonia** is an exact representation of how creative artists visualise a new cultural product that brings together not only films and music but also the music performers and the audience from two neighbouring countries with a long history of bilateral conflicts. Rita Kinka, one of the renowned pianists from Novi Sad who joined the Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra in this amazing cultural venture said after the concert: *It was a great pleasure for me to incorporate the sound of the piano, under my fingers, into a joint sound. It was also a great challenge in every sense. This project is a place where ethnic and cultural borders are erased in the name of shared creation. Music is beyond all borders. Music brings people together. This project strongly confirms shared cultural values in our neighbourhood.*

Art on the River brings together the curators from eight countries of the Danube basin: Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria whose main role is to select up to four artists from their countries to represent two (old and young) generations of artists: artists aged over 50 years and artists younger than 30, who grew up before and after the fall of the Berlin wall. **Eight cities** along the Danube riverbank serve here as the main open stages and exhibition halls, while the touring exhibition "Art on the River" brings forward a continuous inter-generational dialogue. It takes place without any preconceptions or clichés not only about the artistic neighbourhoods of formerly divided countries in the Danube region, but also celebrates

the existent diversities of cultural identities. The exhibition provides a deep insight into *traditional and out of the box artistic* expressions and positions across different generations who share the same need for crossing the boundaries in the search of beauty. This ongoing travelling exhibition will be on the move in 2020 and 2021 and will also connect the two European Capitals of Culture, Novi Sad 2022 and Timisoara 2023.

As early as 2007, the Hungary-Serbia border region has seen a plethora of inter-cultural exchange and cooperation projects connecting local people, local communities and a wide range of organisations and institutions located at the distance of some 8-10 km but divided by the borderline between the EU and Serbia. In many ways, it was exactly the borderline between the two countries that inspired the people living in this neighbourhood to seek ways for cross-border communication and keep the shared cultural heritage alive as well as to promote it in order to make it better known on both sides of the border. *Theatre art as a regional hub for children's socialisation* connects children's theatres from Subotica and Szeged provides an innovative learning and exchange tool for the purpose of education, information, promotion and experience exchange in the field of theatre art for children. However, this project is about more than engaging children in artistic creative workshops on both sides of the borderline. It is also about interactive learning of Hungarian and Serbian as neighbouring but very different, not so easy to learn, languages.

Our Borderless Art Nouveau Culture project connecting the culture of twin cities Szeged and Subotica, shows how important this architectural heritage is at the border area of Hungary and Serbia (and in particular for the multicultural region of Vojvodina). The architectural style was most prominent between 1890 and 1910 during Austro-Hungarian times often inspired by natural forms such as the sinuous curves of plants and flowers. The most outstanding architects Jakab Dezso (1864–1932) and Komor Marcell (1868–1944), designed the synagogues, nursing homes, public buildings, and private villas which today are a significant part of urban architectural heritage in this region. Their major projects include the Synagogue and the City Hall of Subotica (considered as the most beautiful city administration hall in Southeast Europe), the municipality building of Tirgu Mures, Romania, and a concert hall in Bratislava. Therefore, the preservation and promotion of this distinctive cultural heritage makes the cities of Szeged in Hungary and Subotica in Serbia unique cultural tourist destinations. Art Nouveau buildings and the heritage of the two twin towns form a complementary local and regional attraction that serves also as the solid basis for a joint tourist destination in the border region of Hungary and Serbia.

Three strongly trending activities among modern holiday makers in Europe today are: visiting cultural monuments, authentic nature experience and physical activity. Therefore, it comes as no surprise, that cycling tourism has the strongest growth of all the tourism segments, thus becoming one of the priorities within a number of Interreg Cross-border cooperation programmes connecting countries in the Danube region. In many ways, cycling and the cycling routes along the Danube River, across large Pannonian plains connects the desire to pursue sport activities with the discovery of natural and cultural heritage in a unique way. *Veloregio or Pannonian 8* are some of the successful stories that utilise this cross-border potential, so that the natural and cultural heritage combined with cycling tourism also help increase overnight stay and enables mobility of workforce. The famous bicycle path along the Danube leads as far as from Germany through Austria, Hungary, Slovakia and northern Serbia. This is one of the illustrations how the Danube river cooperation programme connects people and cultures and helps improve the quality of life in both urban and rural communities in this large region.

The above-mentioned examples of connecting people and local communities in border areas of many countries and along the Danube River are made possible owing to Interreg CBC Programmes and EU Danube Macro Regional Strategy (EUSDR). Since 2007, the majority of the countries in the Danube region are EU countries, and it was in 2011 that the EU Council recognised this potential by endorsing the Communication and the accompanying Action Plan on the EUSDR revised according to identified priorities in 2019-2020.

Good neighbours creating common future, development of tourism and preserving cultural and natural heritage, cooperation beyond borders are some of the key messages conveyed across communities in respective border areas engaged in making their overall quality of life better, through people-to-people and economic cooperation, while cherishing the common identity and shared European values and by promoting the richness of cultural and historical heritage.



FILMHarmonia, Subotica, October 2020

Source: <https://www.interreg-croatia-serbia2014-2020.eu/project/filmharmonia>



Art on the river, Ulm, 2020

Source: <http://danube-connects.eu/language/en/international-danube-project-art-on-the-river>



Synagogue, Subotica

Source: <https://visitsubotica.rs/en/see/art-nouveau/sinagoga>



Urban cycling, Subotica – Szeged

THE WENDISH FOLK COSTUMES AS AN ADDED VALUE IN A CROSS-BORDER CONTEXT

Viktor Zakar, PhD, Chief Editor of weekly newspaper in the Sorbian language

“Anna and I are the last ones in Döbbrick/Depsk speaking Wendish. As soon as we pass away, the Wendish language will slide into oblivion in our district,” relates Richard Šuťšic (94) sunbathing on a bench with his wife outside his courtyard, only a few steps away from the Döbbricker church. Every time when the sun bestows its warming rays upon Döbbrick, you can see this senior couple greeting the people passing through. Anna is also a Wendish speaker, but she lets Richard translate for her from the weekly newspaper “Nowy Casnik”. She does not understand some of the words from the so called “school Wendish”, which is very similar to Upper Sorbian (spoken in Upper Lusatia), which isn’t as endangered as Wendish (Lower Sorbian). Anna can often be seen wearing a colourful costume – a blue basis with flowery or whitish ornaments. It recalls the Wendish folk costumes. Anna is not the only one honouring the Wendish folk costumes. The folk costumes are one of the most prominent symbols of Lusatia. This formerly exclusive feature of the Sorbian/Wendish national identity has spread throughout the younger generations which also identify the costumes as a part of their (regional or Wendish) identity. The folk costumes got detached from the Wendish national identity and became a Lusatian regional feature. Specialised tailoring shops foster the Wendish folk costumes. They organise tailoring courses for beginners and show how to properly dress the folk costumes, because mistakes in dressing are a no-go.

In contrast to other regions of Europe, the very frequent wearing of folk costumes is not uncommon in Lusatia. Some old women still wear Sorbian outfits on a daily basis in the area between Hoyerswerda/Wojerecy, Bautzen/Budyšin and Kamenz/Kamjenc. Most women wear folk dresses during solemn festivities (award ceremonies), cultural manifestations (book readings, art expositions), folk customs (ex. Hahnrupfen/łapanje kokota) or folk festivals. School fests are also combined with folk costumes and dances and pupils are proud of wearing the Wendish outfits.

As the Wendish language is dying out, a dilemma arises among the Lusatians: Does the Wendish folk costume suffice to save Wendish identity in (Lower) Lusatia? “Without the Wendish language, some people can start to talk again about a ‘German Spreewald costume’, just as in national socialist times. The Wendish language is the mean through which everything eventually becomes ‘Wendish’. The (Wendish) folk costume is beautiful and I know that it’s for many youngsters an incentive to the ‘Wendishness’. Hence, it has

an important function. But it is not enough, only to foster the folk costumes and traditions. The language should be revitalised, otherwise nothing but folklore would survive,” says the young Wendish writer, Jill-Francis Käthlitz. In contrast to Ms. Käthlitz, many in Lower Lusatia consider the Wendish language as obsolete. But still, Ms. Käthlitz points out that the beautiful costumes can animate someone to learn Sorbian/Wendish, which is true.

Although Wendish/Sorbian costumes are still part of the Wendish culture, they have gradually become a part of the regional (German) culture too. They are quite often commercialised in advertisements. They even get instrumentalised just as in some past dark times. The right-wing populist party AFD (Alternative for Germany) presented a poster with a Wendish lady together with a Bavarian dirndl lady and a Schwarzwald lady with a traditional bollenhut in its campaign in 2017 “Colourful diversity? We have much of it – Dare to do it, Germany” in order to present Wendish folk costumes as part of the German traditions, but also to give the impression that migrants aren’t welcome in Germany. As a poor region coping with the gradual withdrawal of the coal industry, young people leave Lusatia, since there are not promising job perspectives. The region around Cottbus/Chóšebuz is permanently stirred up by right-wing demonstrations. The southern part of Lusatia is not very different. This endangers the tourism and for instance the cooperation between the neighbouring Germany and Poland, which also dispute on small criminality and car theft at the border stripe.

At the end of the Second World War, as the maps were drawn again, there were plans of an autonomous Lusatia, that Czechs, Poles and South Slavs supported. There were also projects to create another republic (Lusatia) within Czechoslovakia. The independence ideas failed, so Wends/Sorbs remained in the German Democratic Republic. The Sorbian/Wendish matter has not been reopened again. Sorbs/Wends are no object of discord today, although the Czech Republic considers Sorbs/Wends as compatriots. Historically Lusatia belongs to three countries: the largest part to Germany and the smaller ones to Poland and the Czech Republic.

In order to promote sustainable development in the new and old EU member states, the European Union has established various bordering regions such as the “Spree-Neiße-Bober” (Germany/Poland) or “Neiße” (Germany/Poland/Czechia). The NGO “Euroregion Spree-Neiße-Bober” plays a key role within the cooperation project INTERREG V “A Brandenburg/Germany – Poland”, and is mostly specialised in cultural, economic and health care projects. This NGO aids financially projects from other NGOs, museums, culture centres and other institutions in Germany and Poland, and thereby creates new ties in the NGO sector, allowing the population in the border area to better interact. Since 2008 Sorbian/Wendish culture has also been the focus of projects supported and carried out by Euroregion Spree-Neiße-Bober.

For example, the regional association Niederlausitz (member of the umbrella organisation Domowina) organised in 2016 a meeting between traditional Wendish (Sorbian) and Polish wedding processions at the Festival of Wendish (Sorbian) culture in Jänschwalde/Janšojce, where Wendish folk costumes were shown too. The Lower Lusatian Sorbian Museum Bloischdorf/Błobošojce, being part of the network “Lusatian museum landscape”, has a partnership with the Polish city of Babimost. In this twinning supported by the NGO Euroregion Spree-Neiße-Bober, the Sorbian Museum’s association in Bloischdorf organised in 2018 a traditional custom care of autumn and winter traditions with their partners from Babimost. On the 22 of August of this year, representatives from the regional association “Niederlausitz”/Domowina took part in the Park festivity in the Lusatian Polish city of Żary. There, they presented the Wendish culture, folk outfits and cookery. The project was sustained by the NGO Euroregion Spree-Neiße-Bober and the Polish NGO Żaranin, also having the Sorbian/Wendish culture as one of its emphasis. The partnership between the Upper Sorbian municipality Nebelschütz/Njebjelčicy and the Polish city of Namysłów exists since 1997. It has been intensified after Poland became an EU member. A delegation of 40 members visited Namysłów during the 13. International Namysłów days and showed Sorbian culture, traditional costumes and dances. A workshop entitled “how to dress up in a Sorbian folk dress” has been offered. The International Folklore festival Łužyca has been taking place every second year in Bautzen/Budyšin and in Drachhausen/Hochoza. This international event organised by the Domowina invites folklore groups from different parts of the world such as Algeria, Peru, Georgia and from the region, Poland or the Czech Republic. Sorbian folklore groups strengthen their contacts with fellows from the EU member states, but also with those from third countries. The folklore group “Smjerdžaca” existing since 1964 participated more than 10 times at festivals in the Czech Republic and Poland. Smjerdžaca was also one of the participants at the folklore festival Łužica in July 2019 together with the folklore group Mirče Acev, which was shortly after in August 2019 the host of the international student folk festival in North Macedonia.

Since 2019 the Sorbian/Wendish culture is part of the intangible heritage of UNESCO. Brandenburg and Saxony cannot be imagined without the Sorbian/Wendish culture. Efforts are not only made to preserve the culture but also save the two Sorbian languages. Sorbs/Wends speak a Slavic language similar to Polish or Czech, and are integrated in the German society. Therefore, they often serve as a mediator between Germans, Poles and Czechs which have not always maintained the amicable relations they have today. The examples above focused on the folk costumes and their role in cross-border projects, but other aspects (language, songs, arts) also play a role in cross-border projects. Lusatian schools, where the Sorbian/Wendish language is taught as a subject, often foster partnerships with schools in Poland or the Czech Republic.

As a minority in a large and economically powerful country as Germany Sorbs/Wends are too small to make global changes. However, they do make a lot of difference on the Eastern outskirts of Germany and not only for the benefit of tourism. The minority perspective of Sorbs/Wends as mediators or as a focus of cooperation is maybe what other countries, for example North Macedonia, Greece and Bulgaria, with contested history and shared culture can benefit from. To concentrate on small “uniting events” (i.e. folklore festivals, museum day or partnerships) with respect for the thoughts and beliefs of the other is what would certainly make a great deal of sense. The cross-border experiences of Sorbs/Wends with fellows from the neighbourhood show that the infrastructure supported by the EU, the NGO-sector in Brandenburg and Saxony, as well as the free movement of persons as one of the principles of the European Union facilitated the intensification of the cross-border friendships. ***But everything would have been futile, if there had not been open-minded individuals, municipality workers, cultural workers, artists and museum workers, mostly speaking the language of the others, who undertook the role of bridge builders.***



The Lower Sorbian Gymnasium in Cottbus is the only secondary school in Germany (and the world) where Lower Sorbian is an obligatory subject. In 2007, it celebrated its 65. anniversary.



The Wendish traditional harvest custom "Cock-plucking" (Hahnrupfen/łapanje kokota) begins in Dissen/Dešno in front of the guesthouse "Serbski dwór/Wendischer Hof". Girls wear the famous Wendish folk costumes, which are indispensable for every celebration of this sort. The cock-plucking took place on the 23th of August of this year. The cock-plucking is a celebration in honor of the harvests.



The moderators anchor the "cock-plucking" in German and Wendish. The girls are impatiently waiting for the riders to tear off the rooster's head.



The dead rooster hangs on a nicely wreathed gate. The one who catches and tears off the slightly cut rooster's head becomes the king of the harvests. And he chooses then his queen. Afterwards, two other kings are chosen. The kings become then the wreaths from the gate. At the end, everybody sings, dances and celebrates.

AFTERWORD

ALDA – EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR LOCAL DEMOCRACY

The [European Association for Local Democracy – ALDA](#) is a network of civil society organisations and local authorities working together to promote local democracy and active citizenship across Europe and the neighbouring countries. Since its creation in 1999, ALDA has been promoting peace, reconciliation and intercultural dialogue in the Balkans and beyond. ALDA's office in Skopje is active since 2007 and represents today a hub for all activities in the region. As coordinator of the cooperation between the French Region Normandy and North Macedonia, ALDA Skopje has implemented numerous activities for promotion of peace and reconciliation with different stakeholders, from students, teachers, scientists to cultural heritage professionals and artists. Exhibitions, documentaries, publications, games, seminars, trainings and other types of activities have been organised to support the reflection on topics such as “dealing with the past” and cultural heritage from the First and Second World War.

This project “Shared or contested heritage” implemented in cooperation with Forum ZFD has tackled the question of interpretation of shared cultural heritage and promotion of reconciliation in North Macedonia and the Balkans. The project idea fit perfectly into our scope of work and methodology of intervention. Namely, we have gathered the thoughts of different professionals and experts on this matter, we tried to put them together and we have presented them to a larger audience. The objective was to make people seek answers to some delicate questions outside of their invisible circles, beyond the limits created by professional background, country of origin, spoken language or system of values. Thus, we have collected the reflections of cultural heritage workers, professors, civil society activists and writers from different countries. We tackled aspects related to cultural heritage in every detail: language, identity, national heroes, politics and European values.

Besides the “comfort” we had working within our regular scope of work, the project was implemented in a very unusual context. In this year marked by a world crisis, the inevitable need for transfer of activities online was a test not only for us but also for the professionals involved. Together, we searched for the most suitable means to exchange and convey the messages we wanted to share. This shift has provided us with possibility to reach wider audience and make the project more accessible in this virtual reality. Furthermore, the social, economic and political context in the region and Europe has enhanced the need to address these questions of cultural heritage and its interpretation. Even though some would argue that the focus of public debate should

be put on economic questions rather than cultural ones, the reality shows that without tackling questions of identity, none of the countries from the region could progress and move forward.

Despite the complexity of the context, the implementation of this project was crucial for us on many levels. In these days of uncertainty and isolation, it was a clear reminder of how important it is to tackle the question of intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding. Trying to understand the other is the key towards solidarity that is much needed nowadays.

More importantly, the project was a recognition of our efforts to be a connector: connector of dots, ideas, people, territories and reflections. Within we found inspiration for future actions to support cooperation and partnership.

CONTACTS

EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR LOCAL DEMOCRACY (ALDA) – SKOPJE

ALDA Skopje is a branch of the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA) in Skopje, North Macedonia. Established in France in 1999 by the Council of Europe, ALDA is now a network gathering more than 300 members from 40 countries from EU, Western Balkans, Eastern partnership and MED countries. ALDA is dedicated to the promotion of good governance and citizen participation at the local level. ALDA Skopje is coordinator of the programme for decentralized cooperation between the French Region Normandy and North Macedonia with strong focus on peace and reconciliation.

Contact details:

Address: Partizanski odredi 43B 1/5, 1000 Skopje, North Macedonia

Phone: +389 2 6091 060

Email: aldaskopje@aldaintranet.org

Website: www.alda-europe.eu

FORUM ZFD

The forumZFD is a German organization that has been established in 1996. It trains and sends out experts to conflict regions where they work together with local partners to promote peaceful coexistence and non-violent conflict resolution. ForumZFD carries out projects in the Middle East, the Western Balkans, Philippines, and in Germany. The projects are financially supported by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation. In Macedonia forumZFD has been active from 2001 to 2005 and since 2007.

Contact details:

Address: Naum Naumovski Borce 88a, 1000 Skopje, North Macedonia

Phone: +389 2 322 8099

Email: macedonia@forumzfd.de

Website: www.forumzfd.de/en/