

focus KOSOVO

Newsletter of OPIC partners in Kosovo
July – September 2014

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Political Stalemate in Kosovo

Dear reader,

We will continue further with the third issue of Newsletter about the work of OPIC partners in Kosovo. In this issue of the Newsletter you will read news related to cultural development, gender equality, participatory decision-making, as well as the current social and political issues in the country. Kosovo spent the last months coping with the political and institutional crisis. We enter the fourth month since national elections took place, while the main state institutions have not been established yet. The political forces have not yet been able to overcome the differences, thus prolonging numerous processes that impact the lives of citizens.

Kosovo citizens proved their maturity and democratic orientation by casting their votes, enabling the election processes to be assessed as fair and regular. In spite the societal commitment to democratic values, the political spectrum of the country is still struggling to fulfil their constitutional responsibilities. The current developments are seen as quite harmful for civil society attempts to restore public trust towards state institutions. The political forces are being constantly invited to show political and institutional maturity as the situation has become alarming. Kosovo has reached the limits of functioning in an institutional gap. The current stalemate needs to be overcome soon and democratic reforms shall resume.

EC Ma Ndryshe

Another achievement of YAHR

The degraded situation of the sidewalks in Lipjan mobilized Youth Association for Human Rights who produced a media report on this issue, following also the removal of the new sidewalks project from the 2014 budget. In an extraordinary Municipal Assembly meeting, the authorities decided to bring the project back and allocate necessary budgetary means to fix the sidewalks in 2014. This was yet another successful case of YAHR advocacy towards local government institutions in Lipjan.



5-QUESTION INTERVIEW

Theatre as an agent of social change



Arts and artists are social change agents. Kosovo offers unique opportunities to utilize arts and culture for activism that could bring social change, democratic reform and development. ODA Theatre is one of the most prominent cultural organizations in Kosovo that promotes arts in education and cultural poli development. For the five questions interview of this issue we invited ODA's direktor, Florent Mehmeti.

1. Who is ODA Theatre?

ODA is an independent theatre created in 2003 with a dedication of a professional development of the theatrical art, encouraging inter-relations with other arts, building strong arts and culture foundations for coming generations. Its work is structured in areas of the original artistic production, hosting other cultural and artistic events, undertaking programs and projects in the field of arts in education and cultural policy development. For its 11 years of work ODA has been highly active with more than 50 small and large scale projects with a permanent presence in the international cultural scene networking and building partnership with many regional, European and international artistic and cultural organizations.

2. What are the challenges to keep standing artistic life in the theater?

Challenges for maintaining a qualitative and persistent artistic and cultural program in a cultural climate that has been and is currently in Kosovo are numerous and difficult. The main challenge has been a lack of substantial public support from the institutions as a result of not reformed governing mentality in the country for 15 years now. This has produced a number of subsequent challenges that has weakened ODA's position in undertaking new initiatives especially in the international scene, making us unequal with our counterparts in Europe. The necessity has brought ODA in an allegoric situation of 'jumping into the ocean and learn swimming to survive'.

3. How much artistic space does ODA Theatre provide for younger generations?

The driving force of our work is to offer artistic and cultural space for new and incoming generations so we provide

possibilities for youth to empower themselves. Furthermore since our establishment we have initiated a number of large projects offering young people opportunities for building strong basis for their further development. Using artistic expressions and contemporary methods of theatre making we have initiated 20 pilot theatre clubs in elementary schools of the country with 400 children participating in a regular twice a week sessions in their school environment.

4. How often do you have theater performances?

We tend to have 2-3 theatrical performances a week, although during the year we produce, co produce and host a big number of other cultural events including events that happen regularly for long time now in ODA such as Prishtina International Jazz Festival, Skena Up festival, Rock for Rock and many more. In average there are around 200 events in a calendar year that are provided to our audience.

5. How often do you have theater performances?

ODA is the initiator of the Cultural Forum, a network of 41 independent cultural organizations in Kosovo. Since its creation we have been the main driving force of the network and currently we are a temporary secretariat of the network. Cultural Forum is a joint initiative of the actors of the independent scene in Kosovo aimed at achieving flourishing, diverse, relevant/influential and sustainable independent cultural sector in Kosovo. In our mission, we believe that the independent culture is key to the development of society and in achieving our vision we are lead by the principles of solidarity, inclusion, transparency, independency, accountability and cooperation.

Meeting of the Consultative Committee in Vitia

Advocacy Training & Resource Center in cooperation with Municipality of Vitia, held the first meeting of Consultative Committee for Citizens Participation in decision-making processes. Participants in this meeting were members of Consultative Committee, Chair of the Assembly, Deputy Mayor and Gender Equality Officer of Municipality of Vitia. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss regarding role and importance of Consultative Committee, on increasing the participation of citizens in decision making processes at local level. During this meeting, President and Vice President of Consultative Committee were elected, as well. [Read more.](#)



A reading evening by Josef Winkler

On Monday, September 15, the guest in Qendra Multimedia was the well-known Austrian writer Josef Winkler. In front of the Prishtina audience Winkler read parts of his novels "Der Leibeigene" and "Natura Morta" and at the end of the reading he had a conversation with Jeton Neziraj, the moderator of the evening. Besides various guests, the evening was attended also by the Austrian Ambassador to Kosovo, Mr. Johann Brieger, who also delivered a speech. The writer's coming in Kosovo was made possible by the Austrian Embassy to Kosovo and the Austrian Library.

Translation Windows – International Day of Translation

Qendra Multimedia in cooperation with The Writers Association of Kosovo organized a literary event. The event agenda included a book promotion called "Three dramas" of the Kosovar playwright Arian Krasniqi, and the International Day of Translation. Writers and translators read and discussed the challenges of the literary translation. This activity was part of the collaboration of the literary associations in the region such as "Udruga Kurs" from Split, "Krokodil" from Belgrade, "PEN Qendra" from Sarajevo, "Goten Publishing" from Skopje, "Poeteka" from Tirana and "Qendra Multimedia" from Prishtina.

The voice of women in decision making

Syri i Vizionit in the framework of the "Active Citizenship" project, has conducted joint workshops with women's groups, non-governmental organizations and women's groups from municipal assemblies of Peja and Rahovec. The purpose of these workshops was to draft the joint action plan for women's groups and support their priorities to local decision-making institutions. This meeting has resulted in a joint request which is going to be addressed to institutions to support the opening of a liaison office between the leaders and women, which also represent the voice of women in decision-making processes.



Women's rights activism

After capacity building trainings which CSD provided for non-formal groups of women in municipalities of Gracanica, Klokot, Ranilug and Partes, the trained members started with their self-initiative activities. Non formal group of women "Women Initiative" from Gracanica during September held a public presentation on their own research about situation and needs of women in municipality of Gracanica. This group of women had an opportunity to meet with Association of women "Jefimija" from Velika Hoca, Orahovac, to exchange experiences, contacts and share ideas on which they can work together in the future.

On the other side, three groups of women from the municipalities of Ranilug, Klokot and Partes took part in organizing the Constituent Assembly of Women Leaders Forum of South Region in Kosovo. This association gathered a big number of women organizations, associations and women which are active in their community. The aim of this association is to promote women's rights through dedicated women activists in the community.



Training on social networks

Democracy for Development (D4D) continued coaching and training sessions for Membership Based Organizations (MBOs). Given the importance of social media, during the month of September, a training was held to help membership associations on using social media to increase their influence on decision makers and improve their image and presence in the public sphere in general. The purpose of the training was to provide MBOs with techniques on how to use social media, advantages and specifics of various online platforms as well as potential risks. The membership organizations also discussed ways how to build effective strategies on membership mobilization in putting forward their interests to key decision makers. Specific aspects of various platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Instagram, etc., were also discussed including filtering of audiences based on location and needs, identification of potential members and other features.



Clogged Sidewalks

EC Ma Ndryshe presented the results of the latest research on the perceptions of citizens on urbanism in the city of Prizren. Same as in 2013, this research perpetuates the notion that the primary concern of the citizens of Prizren is the blocked sidewalks, which poses a violation of the right of free movement. In the list of concerns, except the blocked sidewalks to a high

percentage rate stand illegal constructions and lack of green areas too. Two major concerns of the senior citizens in the city are the lack of venues for pensioners and vehicle-clogged sidewalks, whereas another great concern of women of the city, except blocking of the sidewalks, remains street safety. [Read more.](#)

Rethink public space

Lack of transparency in governance, lack of green spaces in the city and unjustified occupation of public spaces has prompted EC Ma Ndryshe to propose a new vision for the use of public space around the Prizren municipality building. The aim of the organization is to foster discussion about the manner of handling the public space in Prizren. EC Ma Ndryshe believes that the city offers many opportunities to turn public spaces to the citizens' service. This principle should also apply to all spaces around the buildings of institutions, as the citizen should have physical access to the work of their elected political representatives. See the visual presentation of the vision.



Short TV stories

NGO Experimental Studio Group (ESG) produced three short TV stories. The first one is featuring health system and the work of mobile medical staff in rural sites populated by Serbian community members in Pec/Peja region. The second story deals with the beginning of school year in Gorazdevac elementary school. Professional school staff is investing efforts to manage modern educational process in spite of financial problems. The third story is picturing the problem of garbage disposal in Belo Polje village, Pec/Peja municipality. The decision of Pec/Peja Municipal Assembly to move dump container to the center of the village is a serious threat for local residents increasing the risk of spreading contagious disease. Member of Municipal Assembly representing Serbian community promises this problem to be solved in the next weeks.

The "Scorecard" for municipal assemblies of Prizren region

"points" for Municipal assemblies: Prizren, Suhareka, Malisheva, Rahovec, Dragash and Mamusha. The purpose of this "scorecard" is unbiased informing and citizens objective about

the work of their elected officials during the period January-June 2014. This assessment is based on nine pillars of assessment. [Read more.](#)

Gender budgeting component required

Kosovo Democratic Institute (KDI), has organized a meeting on "Incorporating gender component in municipal budget planning." Invited to the meeting were members of the Municipal Assembly of Prizren, gender Office in Prizren, director of the municipal departments of Prizren Municipality and Civil Society Organizations. The purpose of this meeting was a general commitment to watch and reflect on the opportunities and challenges of the municipality of Prizren on inclusive budgeting especially General Gender Budgeting. Read more.

Greater commitment to youth required

Kosovo Democratic Institute (KDI), has organized a conference on "Local Policies in the Youth sector, the experiences of the municipalities of Prizren region." In this conference, were presented the findings of the analysis on local policies of Prizren municipal governments in the youth sector. In the context of the findings of this study, specific recommendations have been highlighted as: strengthen and support

the youth sector with greater budgetary resources to local youth policies and code division (lines) budget for the youth sector, the involvement of youth in the municipal activities with the aim of involving them in decision-making, increased cooperation between the municipalities of Prizren and the Ministry Culture, youth and Sports on the coordination of youth activities. Read more.

Women's Association

Women's Association conducted a survey with 300 respondents from Gjakova to assess the impact of the Local Communities in the welfare of the communities, the communication between citizens and local government and the issues citizens want to address through these forums. In addition, Women's Association engaged community in the process of amending the regulation on Local Communities, while the Municipal Assembly agreed to change certain rules. Women's Association will provide the Chair of the Municipal Assembly with suggestions for amendment.



Internal democratization of political parties

KIPRED continued regular activities within the project for internal democratization of political parties. During the period from July to September, except for advocacy and informal meetings with representatives of political parties and other stakeholders from the public and local government institutions, KIPRED has organized three training sessions with political parties in Vushtria, Peja and Podujeva. Also, the manual "The legal framework and democratic practices of political parties in Kosovo" was published. This manual is intended for representatives of political parties, but also for the parties interested to learn more about the legal framework regulating the activities of political parties, as well as standards and international best practices for political parties.

Mental Health Matters - Video

Based on this year's motto of Youth International Day "Mental Health Matters", PEN prepared a video related to the importance of mental health. It consisted of some short and useful advices on how to maintain a good mental health and on how to solve any particular problem in a healthy way. Watch the video.

Young People with special needs

Performance and Exhibition from the group of Young People with special needs named "Qendra për Jetë të Pavarur" was organized by PEN in order to make people aware that young people with special needs, regardless their condition are able to be creative and socially active. Another reason was to break the

prejudices still existing in our society about people with special needs. They exhibited their handmade crafts and performed with drums at the same time. This activity took the attention of many citizens passing by, who stopped to enjoy the great music and to buy any of the accessories made by group members.

Institutionalizing Learning Centers

Roma and Ashkalia Documentation Center had meetings with the MCRO's in six municipalities where the organization works. RADC helped Podujeva municipality with relevant information on the local action plan for the Strategy. Regarding the institutionalization of the existing Learning Centers, RADC in partnership with KEC (Kosovo Education Center) and KFOS (Kosovo Foundation for Open Society) organized a workshop with the CSO's that are managing the existing Learning Centers, aiming to further the advocacy toward Ministry of Education to place Learning Centers under their umbrella and provide financial support.

Women learn from women how to start businesses

Women's groups of Local Municipalities (Klina, Istog, Deçan, Peja and Rahovec) realized exchange visits in different organizations from a number of municipalities to share their experiences on establishing family businesses run by women. In addition, the groups exchanges knowledge on organizing advocacy campaigns, being present in decision-making forums and other issues of joint concern. Representatives from the group of women from Krusha hold a session about strengthening the role of women in business and in society, establishing joint businesses within a local community, investigating the Kosovo market for their products, and managing a joint business group of women.

Workshop on development of YAHR's strategy 2014-2018

Youth Association for Human Rights held a workshop with the aim to develop its strategy for the years 2014-2018. In this workshop attended by 10 staff members and representatives of the

organization's board, YAHR managed to produce its strategic plan 2014-2018, which will guide the strategic development process of the organization in the upcoming years

Initiative for protection of Lumbardhi Cinema

In the framework of the Initiative for the Protection of Cinema 'Lumbardhi', 56 organizations from all over Kosovo published a joint statement pointing out to various legal arguments why Cinema "Lumbardhi" in Prizren should be protected and not be demolished or privatized. Through this joint statement, the organizations have clarified their willingness to use all democratic means to oppose the demolition of the building or altering Lumbardhi primary function. Based on the arguments provided in the declaration, 56 organizations require cessation of the privatization process and express their disagreement with the efforts to demolish certain parts of Lumbardhi building. Read the statement.



The School for European Integration – now also in the north of Mitrovica

The School for European Integration organized its initial workshop in Kopaonik between 30 and 31 of August 2014 – an initiative implemented by the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society's concept Reconnecting Mitrovica. The workshop hosted 30 participants from 4 municipalities of the north from different sectors such as municipal

officials and public institutions, members of the civil society, media, and students. The workshop was carried out by well known integration process experts from Serbia and ambassadors of neighbouring countries (now part of EU), who shared their knowledge and experience with the participants.

Intangible Heritage Days in Prizren

Prizren hosted the week dedicated to intangible (spiritual) heritage, during which the activities were broken into Filigree workshop for students and Invisible Public Space. The filigree workshop had 12 participants from Skopje, Gjakova, Korça, Junik, Prizren, Prishtina and Tirana. Throughout the week, these youngsters have been working with the filigree craftsmen from Prizren, concurrently attending a program of lectures and visits to the cultural heritage sites. Upon completion of the workshop, each participant produced a filigree piece of work, which then was exhibited at the closing day of Hajde! The week was organized in the framework of the joint EU/CoE project that promotes cultural diversity in Kosovo. Read more.



Progress Report critical on civil society involvement

European Commission's 2014 Progress Report for Kosovo stated that "An empowered civil society is a crucial component of a democratic system and should be recognised and treated as such by Kosovo institutions." The report points out to the weak government capacity to implement the strategy for cooperation with civil society (2013-17). In addition, the report concludes that "Cooperation and consultation between civil

society and the Kosovo institutions, notably with the government, continue to be ad hoc and unsatisfactory." It was stated once again that civil society involvement, if requested at all, comes only at the end of the legislative process rather than at its beginning. In addition, the report finds that "Civil society does not systematically receive feedback on its recommendations", asking for improvement in this area. Read the Report.

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