



URBAN PROJECT HUB 2020-2022 FINAL REPORT:

Witnessing the Power of Hope across Six Balkan Festivals

MOST - Urban Project Hub

Prepared by: Dana McKelvey, researcher

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Introduction

The mission of MOST is to boost the music market of the Balkans by connecting and supporting people in the world music market through four different channels. The Urban Project Hub program is one of them and supports creative project ideas focusing on the local or regional music scene of cities in the Balkan region.

This report details the projects of six grantees for the Urban Project Hub, which supports creative project ideas focusing on the local or regional music scene of cities in the Balkan region. Grantees received training focusing on cultural management and cultural policy, one-on-one mentoring, financial support (5 000€ each project), and networking and community-building opportunities with leading cultural actors and institutions.

Brief summary

The Urban Project Hub Pillar for MOST, for participants, trainers, and for myself as a researcher, carved pathways of connectedness after the long hiatus in live music brought on by the coronavirus pandemic. While conducting fieldwork in Bosnia and Herzegovina for my PhD in Sociology and Social Anthropology at Central European University, I was lucky enough to become part of the MOST network of musicians and practitioners—a project that, in the words of a recent MOST award recipient, Branislav Radojković of the Belgrade-based band Naked who has watched the world music scene in the Balkans grow for more than a decade, MOST has helped “open the door for young people from the Balkans to learn management, booking, sound engineering...the circle continues and continues, year after year.”

After fostering a warm-but online-community in our initial meetings for the Urban Pillar, I had the opportunity in 2020-2022 to travel for on-the-ground research and conversations at each participants' festival. Through these new friendships, I came to understand Branislav's passion and appreciation for MOST; the financial and also social support of MOST broke through the roadblocks common to each of Pillar's participants, namely, stunted bureaucracy, a lack of attention to cultural life, and especially a lack of hope (and eventual emigration) of youth.

In opposition to hopelessness, I observed the ways in which these dynamic projects represented the goals of MOST (which means “bridge” in Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian) to connect and support

actors of the world music scene—not only the artists themselves, but also the spaces, managers, and institutions involved. I observed the emotional and personal aspects of gathering. What connections, tangible and intangible, were made at these festivals? And how were these connections particular to the Balkan urban settings in which they took place? The Balkan region is often called the “most” or bridge between several cultures because of its complex history; but, it is also a region in which personal connection and unparalleled hospitality towards foreigners, making it easy to forge bridges.

MINI-PROJECTS

1. ESTAM World Music Fest in Kragujevac, Serbia – Aleksandra Pavlović

Project leader: Aleksandra Pavlović

Mini-project title: [ESTAM World Music Fest](#)

Mentor: Ivan Petrovic

Date: September 3-4, 2021

Venue: Knežev Arsenal, Kragujevac, Serbia

Audience of 200 per night

Partner organization: Studentski Kulturni Centar Kragujevac



ESTAM staff

Report: I embarked on my journey from Banja Luka via a bus to Belgrade, where I had enough time to sit with my coffee and get taken by the Belgrade spirit before my second bus to Kragujevac,

Serbia. Like the musicians headed to the ESTAM festival, I had spent many months without the opportunity to travel, let alone to travel to a space created by forward-thinking, and internationally conscious, people. I would soon see that ESTAM provided exactly this medicine.

Alexandra organized my stay in the center of Kragujevac for myself, representatives of other organizations such as the Belgrade based Multikultivator, and the participating musicians, creating an informal space of connection beyond the festival hours. Alexandra explained to me the significance of the World Music Fest setting—the historic Knežev Arsenal, founded in the mid 1800s, and a place she now hopes to be converted into a venue for concerts, music videos, graffiti artists, and more. With the “urban pillar” in mind, Alexandra aimed, through the festival, to support the transformation of the Arsenal, a place of industrial heritage, into a creative and cultural hub. After months (even years) of digital encounters with art becoming the norm during the pandemic, it was exhilarating to see an audience of diverse ages, backgrounds, and social circles come together at the Arsenal to form and to witness not only one another, but also musicians from around the region and the world.

The first night of ESTAM World Music Fest began with the collaboration of Sudeshna Battacharya, a connoisseur of North Indian classical music and one of only three global masters of the the rababa instrument, and Rastko Obradovic, a saxophonist who finished his studies in Oslo and performs not only with a quartet in Kragujevac, but also with international musicians specifying in other genres. The meditative sounds of Sudeshna and Rastko held the audience in a spell, and their unique mix of jazz and Indian classical music typified the “bridge” building philosophy of MOST. Sona Jobareth, the second performer of the evening, was just as groundbreaking; she is the first female virtuoso ever of the kori, a harp-like instrument from West Africa. Her attitude drew more than just the cultural bridge between her native Gambia and the Kragujevac audience, but also between herself and the audience, and between music and societal issues. She led an engaged audience in chants of Muso! or “power” for women, who, in her words, “work so hard to achieve their goals despite restrictions.”

The second night featured the Nenad Vasilić Trio. Vasilić, a double bass player and composer, forms an innovative bridge between the rhythms and melodies from Balkan folklore and the broader genre of European jazz. Along with Marko Zivadinović on the accordion, and Rastko on his saxophone, Vasilić brought what

was to me, an American who has lived in the Balkans for years, the local spirit to the World Fest. After witnessing the trio lean into their improvisation, complete masters of their craft, the audience was carried to a different musical universe with the sounds of Naked, a core band who mixes urban groove with Balkan tradition, describing themselves as in an "endless search" for their true musical identity. Even the toddlers in the audience danced to Naked's wild energy, while I was treated with traditional Balkan hospitality by the organizers and volunteers to rakija and a tour of Kragujevac's kafanas. Luckily, Aleksandra ensured the legacy of these two wonderful evenings beyond the event itself, organizing interviews with each performer that are now published on the "SKC Kragujevac" Youtube page.

Aleksandra expressed her satisfaction with the event, especially after various attempts to secure the space, to deal with bureaucratic delays, weather issues, and of course, with covid, all of which amounted, in her words, to a "Sisyphian job". But I could sense hope prevailing, both on the ground with the assistance of her friends who came to volunteer from Kraljevo, from Sona Jobareth and her band who were willing to go into mandatory quarantine for 10 days after returning to the U.K. from Kragujevac, and from Belgrade-based concert promoter Vladimir Djordjević, who offered me a ride back to the bus station with the musicians the following day. Aleksandra succeeded in her goal of moving the location of ESTAM from its previous location in a theater hall, where people "were limited to a seating area with no dancing, drinking, and socializing during performances." She also forged connections between MOST and her organization, SKC or Studenski Kulturni Centar which is funded by the Serbian government, and even inspired interest in the arsenal after decades of dilapidation. City hall officials approached the SKC delighted by ESTAM's success and initiated not only a committee for the renovation of the arsenal, but also a competition among students of architecture to draw solutions for the arsenal complex. Thus, Alexandra's 2021 ESTAM festival took its place not only as part of the continuing tradition of bringing world music to a Kragujevac stage, but also helped begin what could be a permanent revival of a long-forgotten cultural landmark.

Bassist for Naked Branislav Radojković perhaps best described how the MOST principles of continuity and community played out in Kragujevac, explaining to me how he has known the community of SKC for over a decade, and definitely plans to perform in Kragujevac again. Beyond its connection with the broader city,

Naked maintains a longstanding relationship with Nenad Vasilic of the trio, who worked on production and mastering of Naked's newest album *Srećna Tuga*, illustrating just how broadly MOST participants can form mutually beneficial networks across genres, technical skills, and regional origin. Branislav even joined MOST in Lisbon this year for WOMEX, the Worldwide Music Expo.

Beyond the musicians' experience, Branislav highlighted how, particularly in a city the size of Kragujevac, "It means a lot, especially for a smaller place, for something to happen in their own city that they love." He explained to me that unless the people of Kragujevac travel to Belgrade, few opportunities exist for diverse cultural experiences. But through ESTAM, citizens of Kragujevac could experience at once the reinvigoration of their own cultural heritage site, and the musical hybrids of world music.

Photos:





2. Street Delivery in Baia Mare, Romania – Izabella KisKasza

Project leader: Izabella KisKasza

Mini-project title: Street Delivery

Mentor: Katharina Weiner

Date: October 1-2, 2022

Venue: Dacia Park, Baia Mare, Romania

Audience of 50 per day

Partner organization: City Makers, Municipiul Baia Mare



Izabella KisKasza

Report: Izabella KisKasza's project in Baia Mare, Romania more than exemplified the persistence of hope—a theme running through each of the 2020-21 Urban Pillar projects. During a long and winding trip to Baia Mare in September, I received news that Izabella's Street Delivery festival would be rescheduled due to rain. I felt sorry that Iza's intense efforts for the first post-covid "Street Delivery"—an annual setting up of special spaces where young artists and community organizations can perform on the streets, in squares, and other public spaces—might go to waste. But as soon as I met her, I realized that as the founder of Street Delivery and as someone committed to transforming her city, she would not let rain get in the way.

As soon as Iza and her colleague Diana Sabo greeted me, I could feel their passion for Baia Mare. Their attention to current social issues includes a concern for social space and infrastructure, as well as general public education on issues like environmentalism and mental health, all of which shone through in the 2022 Street Delivery. Notably, their efforts

have also been towards providing professional, emotional, and social support for Ukrainian refugees. With the border approximately 50 kilometers from Baia Mare, the war has deeply affected local life. Diana especially has worked ROUA, a coalition made by DIES Association, City Makers Association, and YMCA Romania, among others, to offer professional, emotional, and social support for refugees coming from Ukraine.

It became clear to me from our first coffee that Iza's efforts in maintaining an annual Street Delivery did not exist in isolation, but are born from her passion for improving the lives of the people of Baia Mare. This was especially true for the cause of young people. Both Iza and Diana hold leadership positions at Centrul de Tineret or the youth center of Baia Mare, where they aim to provide free and enriching activities for young people. They explained to me how many young people finishing university don't have the opportunity to work in the field they graduate from, and that this sense of hopelessness is only furthered by a lack of musical-cultural events in the city. As Diana put it, "We are working non-stop, and often waiting to get paid." Like many of my interviewees in the Urban Pillar, working for the social and cultural good often goes unappreciated, and sometimes requires them to hold multiple jobs. It was clear to me that this was a labor of love. And so, having fallen in love with Baia Mare myself, I travelled back to Baia Mare one month later, when Street Delivery Baia Mare was rescheduled after being cancelled due to rain.

With rain again falling in fits and starts, I walked around Street Delivery's afternoon activities, ranging from an expert on Falun Gong meditational practices to environmental appreciation via "tree hugging." Iza explained to me the value of Dacia Park and its decades-long abandoned cinema, which "is an emblematic building of the communist era, also from the architectural point of view. It was also it was one of the biggest theaters and with the most accurate sound in the country." She explained that the surrounding park was also a strategic choice in pursuit of this goal. "We want to deliver this space again to the public because it's a transit area more than a public park that you can go to relax... It's in the middle of the city and everybody crosses beside the park." Unlike previous Street Delivery festivals held in the main town square where people ultimately became distracted by restaurants and café, this year's festival was purposely designed to draw people in to communal activity in a green space.

The musical acts began with a group of Roma dancers accompanied by a massive live orchestra, all of whom continued when heavy winds and rain threatened to stop the act. Other notable acts included the vocal and sax duet "Golden Live Duo" who fled to Baia Mare from Ukraine, exemplifying the growing bridge between the two cultures and the profound influence the conflict has had on the city. The next day, I was honored to listen to a poetry reading of the Moldovan born Lena Chilari accompanied by live music; although I could only understand the major themes translated to me—love, family, societal frustrations—by the volunteers, I could sense the stillness and attention of the audience. I also took active part in a drum circle with the afro-folk Cercul Întreg or "full circle." As Iza explained, "The whole concept is for people not to just sit there and watch a concert—that's what our mayor delivers already. It is our purpose and our main objective to involve people and have people participate in the whole musical act." Iza added that this sort of cultural practice was lacking in Baia Mare, where local authorities really "don't understand these type of events," instead investing in flashy and self-promotional ventures where there is a strict hierarchy between audience and performer. The rebellion against this attitude continued the following evening in spite of the rain, when we heard the sounds of the GRAUI, influenced by the traditions of the Vlach ethnic group; post-punk rock from Stația Nouă; and the electronic duo Melak & Mandela, all hailing from different regions of Romania and incorporating sounds from within and beyond Romania's borders.

The most lasting memory of the festival was the impact I could see on the youth volunteers from Centrul de Tineret who worked from the festival's incipient planning stages all the way through the physical labor of setting up the stage in between each act under the attentive mentorship of sound engineer Tudor Nemeș. With many of the volunteers coming from difficult family backgrounds and lacking hands-on experiential learning in local schools, Street Delivery gave them invaluable lessons in flexibility, responsibility, and professionalism. I especially befriended Beatrice-Rada Mărieș, an intern who served as Iza's right-hand man to contact the artists and ensure the festival's logistical follow-through. She told me, "People in Baia Mare are really into their problems and think only their problems matter. But it's not just about having the same routine everyday or going to the same place...I am sometimes working the same stuff everyday and this Street Delivery was fresh air for me. Our city is sometimes very sad if you don't have these festivals. These activities, if you are an adult, could bring out a little bit of childhood again, and it's very important not

to lose this spark. I think this child spirit brings you alive and gives you the power to go on." When I asked about the rain and how she went on in spite of the setbacks, she simply said "I had to show people something different. That's it. That this kind of park could be changed, could be alive again. And to show them that you can really learn something from the music and all these activities." Both Bea and Iza are committed to bringing back Street Delivery next year, and to continuing the fight for Baia Mare's cultural life by offering socially relevant programs, emergent musicians, and linkages with partner organizations like Centrul de Tineret.

Photos:





3. Contemporary Jazz and Beyond in Sofia, Bulgaria and Novi Sad, Serbia - Vasil Hajigrudev

Project leader: Vasil Hajigrudev

Mini-project title: Contemporary Jazz and Beyond

Mentor: Ivan Petrovic

Date: July 29-31, 2022

Venue: Sofia Central Station, Sofia, Bulgaria and Fruska Gora, Novi Sad, Serbia

Audience of 90-110 in Sofia, 120-140 in Novi Sad

Partner organization: Horz Collective



Vasil Hajigrudev

Report: Balkan hospitality served me well in Sofia, Bulgaria, where I inadvertently lost my cell phone in a taxi and nearly missed the first show in Vasil Hajigrudev's ingenious dual festival between Sofia and Novi Sad, Serbia. After a spontaneous adventure that was fitting itself to the spirit of MOST, I found myself in the Sofia central train station, where the artists performed a pseudo-performance art piece in tandem with announcements of arriving and departing trains which, usually going something like, as Vasil joked, "This train's gonna arrive late...of course every train always arrives late!" Passersby were captivated by Vasil on double bass and Hristina Beleva on the traditional Bulgarian gadulka, and later by the Novi Sad-based Dragon's Fuel. One passionate passerby even dragged a box in front of the musicians as a place for them to collect donations, exemplifying the exact kind of encounter that Vasil intended by situating his project in places not usually intended for performance.

While Vasil encountered some delays in cooperating with local urban authorities, he emphasized how his connection with MOST helped spark interest in the train station's PR, who want to establish relationships with international organizations. (In fact, it was the first ever of any such concert at the train station.) While he originally envisioned the festival's second night in Novi Sad as taking place in the forest—the pure opposite of a bustling train station—he managed the same vibe at "Gorski Smešto," a quaint outdoor café bar high above central Novi Sad, complete with a fire pit and communal seating areas. As sax player for Dragon's Fuel Predrag Okiljević noted of Vasil and Hristina's performance, "It was so quiet and people surrounded them...people wanted to hear the sounds and we didn't have to tell them, they just sensed the vibe and became quiet. I loved it. That's really beautiful."

When asked why to build a bridge between Novi Sad and Sofia in particular, Vasil recalled his sustained relationships with musicians in both places, and noticed that while he knows both cities and their spaces intimately, many Serbians and Bulgarians do not. This connection emerged not only between the two urban spaces, but also between their respective genres. Predrag in particular explained to me his newfound fandom of Hristina Beleva. "She inspired me and through her I broadened my horizons musically. I discovered more of ethnic Bulgarian music. It was blown away by the gadulka, and it's the first time in my life that I heard it." Now, Dragon's Fuel is working on some new songs inspired by the "whole experience" of Vasil's project.

Predrag and his bandmates in Dragon's Fuel joined Vasil and Hristina at the train station and Gorski Smešto in welcoming environmental/ambient noise "like an extra band member." And just as Vasil and Hristina blend African, Indonesian, Serbian, Bulgarian, and jazz influences, Dragon's Fuel is unafraid to mix funk, jazz, and a touch of Pannonian/Vojvodinian folklore. The young band members have already achieved much since the band's inception in 2016, including collaborating with Vasil on the Horz Collective, whose mission is to create bridges between Serbian and Bulgarian musicians. While both cities are sizeable and boast lots of cultural offerings, Predrag had the sense that some people in his native Novi Sad are "kind of slow" when it comes to attending new experiences, and was pleasantly surprised that the event drew such a warm audience. "People approached us afterwards and said how they felt. It was really special."

Both bands are already planning how they can ensure the project's sustainability, especially because they have already made one such "train station concert" in Plovdiv, Bulgaria when it was European Capital of Culture in 2019. As Vasil told me, "With this biography with train stations, now any train station would have us!" I am looking forward—even if I lose a phone again—to witness more of Vasil's keen eye for transborder collaboration, iconic performance settings, and support of emergent local artists.

Photos:







4. TAKT Festival in Novi Sad, Serbia – Jelena Božić

Project leader: Jelena Božić

Mini-project title: [TAKT](#)

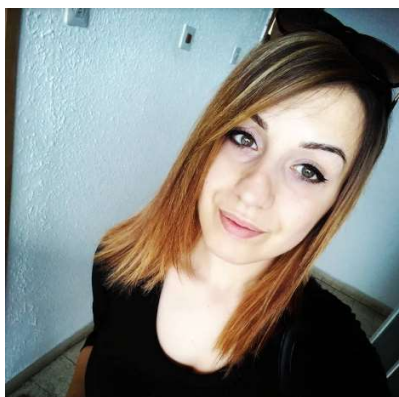
Mentor: Márton Méhes

Date: September 23-26, 2021

Venue: OPENS Youth Center, Novi Sad, Serbia

Audience of 700

Partner organization: Kulturanova



Jelena Božić

Report: The TAKT festival in Novi Sad more than continued the MOST spirit of interconnectivity. As a head organizer with Kulturanova, Jelena Božić succeeded with the help of MOST to continue the decade-long TAKT project of promoting young singer-songwriters from the region and beyond who create outside of the usual commercial/pop standards. Jelena emphasizes the need for youth, especially in Serbia, to experience cultural phenomena beyond the local framework, and even managed to offer free entry to TAKT, thus opening access across class lines. The festival featured an impressive 150+ artists, from filmmakers to musicians to visual artists to speakers on relevant issues such as women in the cultural industry and urban access to people with disabilities. Representatives of national minorities including Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks and Polish also showcased their talents and expertise.

TAKT was set in the newly opened OPENS Youth Centre, one of the network of cultural stations belonging to the Novi Sad European Capital of Culture project. This was an apt space for MOST's goal of connection, as the club is intended for young people and organizations to use free of charge for projects, seminars, trainings, conferences, and workshops. Jelena thought strategically about space not only for the performances themselves, but across the four days of the workshop. She sought to connect organizers, artists, and volunteers by accommodating them in the same space, giving them the opportunity to foster lasting personal connections. Jelena emphasized to me the significance of these informal spaces of connection, saying that "This is where new ideas can be shared, not only musical, but also institutional."

The event's free of charge adds to its spirit of informality. This, Jelena says, "is especially important for young people who are often confined to radio- and pop- based music" to gain access to new sources of inspiration. As one of the over 700 audience members added, "I really like that there is a festival like this in the region which honors the courage to come on stage with a song you wrote yourself and without many special effects, actually often without a band, to say what you have to say. it takes a lot of courage to do that." For some artists, like MOST's own Viktória Salgó, TAKT was the first opportunity to show their songs on stage—a life changing experience that can give confidence and jumpstart musical careers. As for experienced musicians, there was the chance to advise one another, discuss future collaborations, and hear about venues across the region. And lastly, for audience members, there was the chance to gather after the pandemic hiatus. "The atmosphere

is always good, and there are always good vibrations,” reported one young audience member for TAKT’s promotional video.

Of special note this year, some artists and coordinators represented TAKT in Szeged, Hungary, where they made lasting cooperations with Hungarian bands. There, different songwriters from Novi Sad performed adaptations of the songs of the late Đorđe Balašević’, who was committed to peacebuilding in the Balkans. This “bridge” is just one example of TAKT’s sustained impact. Jelena told me that this year, more than ever before, she received calls from past participants satisfied with their experience and hoping to perform again. Already, Jelena and her team plan for next year’s festival, showing that the bridges being built not only span a vast geographic region, but also last far beyond the dates of the festival itself.

Photos:





5. The Audiovisual Harmony Project in Skopje, Macedonia – Stefan Momić

Project leader: Stefan Momić

Mini-project title: The Audiovisual Harmony Project

Mentor: Márton Méhes

Date: September 10, 2022

Venue: Suli An, Faculty of Arts, Skopje

Audience of 80

Partner organization: Pirka



Stefan Momić

Report: The Audiovisual Harmony Project in Suli An, a han built in the Old Bazaar of Skopje in the 15th century, was an unforgettable introduction for my first time in Skopje. Despite several delays due to the pandemic, Stefan Momić and his partner David Nikolovski, a drummer and audiovisual artist who handled the festival on-the-ground and was the audiovisual artist behind the kaleidoscopic images projected across the Suli An courtyard during the evening's festival, more than succeeded in drawing bridges between Macedonian and world music, and between the established and the new.

Stefan and David struggled not only with pandemic, but also bureaucratic, delays. While they'd long dreamed of pulling off such a performance at Suli An—something no one had done in Skopje before—it was the MOST grant along with support from the Faculty of Arts that helped them finally secure the space. While the team was very pleased with the hospitality of the Faculty of Arts, they expressed how, as for their colleagues in the Urban Pillar, it is a constant fight to secure funding. "We have a lot of ideas and a lot of people," said Stefan. "But trust me, we've been working for nothing since the beginning, for years we are working for nothing just to make art because we

are all art fanatics." But through support from MOST, as Stefan and David explained to me, organizations with a vision don't have to solely rely on personal connections with local authorities. Furthermore, they explained how rare it was in Skopje that their team at Pirka, an organization that produces innovative audiovisuals for local artists, seeks to collaborate rather than compete with other local organizations. No matter which story they told me regarding the misadventures of pulling off a festival in Skopje, they made me laugh and retained a hopeful spirit.

On the night of the show, we hung a poster in front of Suli An and watched as locals and tourists in the Old Bazaar became curious and began filling up the courtyard. David's visuals were spellbinding. "The whole visual branding was influenced by the Macedonian traditional patterns that you can find on traditional clothes, kafanas, everything that dates back in time," David explained. "The main inspiration and idea for the event was tradition meets contemporary so after brainstorming, we took those traditional patterns or motifs and made a contemporary platform like a kaleidoscope pattern with them, plus motion graphics and animations with contemporary variations of colors, so I think we achieved the meeting between the time periods." It was particularly inventive how David included archived footage of traditional Macedonian singers, which he hoped would help people reflect on their cultural heritage.

The visuals were accompanied by live music composed and conducted by Antonie Veskovski of the Skopje philharmonic orchestra, who specializes in percussion, traditional instruments, and especially in the vibraphone and marimba. Antonie shares Stefan and David's sentiment that the state of politics in the Balkans "does not help us to grow a little bit and be focused on culture, or to any music that is not commercial or kitsch." He strived to compose a piece meant for this meeting of old and new at Suli An, and had the chance to experiment with electronic music for one of the first times in his life. Along with strings and percussion, he introduced the sounds of the traditional woodwind Macedonian kaval. The themes and improvisations between instruments, genres and time periods produced what he called a "duality" of concepts constantly playing with one another. In the future, he hopes to reproduce the piece with a bigger orchestra, and emphasizes the need for organizations like MOST to keep prioritizing such rare cultural events in Macedonia.

Antonie's sounds were first met with quiet awe in the courtyard of Suli An. Later, as the music swelled and the visuals along with it, people began to dance and more passersby stopped in, including many foreigners who came to meet us and learn more about the concept behind the event. Local DJ and audience member Dejan Talevski said that "the authentic location combined with the video mappings and great musicians was something to feed all our senses. Many tourists who stopped by while doing the tour of the old bazaar gave the event an additional flavor." He told me just how rare it was to see this kind of event at Suli An, which shows the extent to which Stefan's project revitalized an essential urban setting in Skopje. Lucky, the Pirka team recorded the concert on no less than four cameras and a drone, and will edit and publish it as a lasting contribution that they hope reaches an international audience.

Although Stefan is currently living outside of Macedonia, he hopes to return eventually to his home, which he knows "has a certain degree of magnetism." "I want to make a change in my society because I've seen the problems....not to do it just for me, it's for my whole organization." Before applying to MOST, Stefan did not know much about world music. But when his inspiration was sparked, he attended every possible MOST session, of which he notes, "During the project and all the lessons I learned, we had very fantastic speakers that I admire to this day." Now, he's developing plans for a pan-Balkan competition of world music bands that would include not only different genres, but a different city and stage for each performance. Along with David and Antonie, he looks forward to expanding upon the ideas explored in the Audiovisual Harmony Project.

Photos:





6. Northeastern Bosnia Artistic Alliance and Sound Engineering Workshops in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina – Anes Husanović

Project leader: Anes Husanović

Mini-project title: Northeastern Bosnia Artistic Alliance and Sound Engineering Workshops

Mentor: Katharina Weinert

Date: June 25-26 and July 31, 2022

Venue: Underground Club, Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Audience of 6 workshop students + a leading expert

Partner organization: TUZLA LIVE Association



Anes Husanović

Report: Anes Husanović, who has worked in Tuzla and its surrounding region for decades to resist ethnic divides and create opportunities for youth, is well underway on his vision for an artistically united northeastern Bosnia. In place of the political and entity-based divides that usually determine Bosnian geography, Anes seeks to build a “most” or bridge between Tuzla, Brčko, Gradačac, Doboј, Lukavac and Bijeljina on the basis of a shared commitment to creativity. Covered genres will be as diverse as the towns themselves, spanning theater, electronic music production, painting, and dance.

As someone who has faced the challenges of a post-Dayton Accords cultural sector for decades, Anes can say with a passion that “all these divisions in the last 20 years or so are artificial, and they are making not only cultural but also economic divisions between people.” He sees these results particularly among young people in his native Tuzla, who struggle to find opportunities at all for putting on exhibitions or concerts. The municipality, he tells me, instead invests in a small number

of festivals with "more or less the same artists rotating for the last fifteen years." Another outstanding issue is the lack of spaces in Tuzla's urban center; local leaders do not gear money towards any multipurpose spaces, and Anes usually has to rely on spaces rented out by his colleagues. Against the mainstream political culture, Anes says that the goal of the network is education and regular exposure to new content. In the collaborative and democratic spirit of MOST, he is extremely open to the needs and desires of young people. "They might have an interest in painting, visual arts, not only music...If you let their spark on any interest grow, they can really try and do something with it."

At the first official workshop of the network in Tuzla, Darko Saračević, sound engineer for well-known acts such as Divanhana, and Sandi Bratonja of the band Urban&4 gave young musicians hands-on experience in live and studio sound engineering. Like Anes, Darko has long worked with youth NGOs, and knows the struggle of working with local authorities that "realize we are raising healthy young kids that think with their own heads and do everything they can to shut us down." In his native town of Travnik, for instance, he feels that officials are more concerned with keeping their jobs than genuinely investing in cultural life. But he was very happy with how enthusiastically the workshop students responded when he revealed some of his trade secrets, and the acts with whom he's worked. Rather than just learning from Youtube, which became so common during the pandemic, Darko's students practiced with how to position microphones to an instrument and how to make a coherent mix for the audience, among other key skills. This is especially important in the region, where oftentimes bands set up themselves in local bars without the assistance of an audio expert. After mastering live audio, students learned the following day from the acclaimed bass guitar player Sandi Bratonja more about studio production and disseminating the recording post-event.

Denil Babović of the Tuzla-based band "s-alt," a band blending rock, blues, funk, and jazz, benefitted greatly from the workshop. In addition to writing and playing music with s-alt, he's used to what he jokingly calls the "guerilla production" of picking up promotion, event planning, and sound engineering in the absence of concrete support. He told me how the workshop even produced an impromptu jam session in the city center a few days later, where Denil and the other young attendees hauled the equipment and applied all the knowledge from the workshop to a real setting. This kind of networking is perhaps the most

invaluable to Denil, who sees that "people are leaving Bosnia left and right." "There's fewer and fewer musicians left, fewer people working in the field of music at all," he laments. "We want to know as many musicians as possible in case someone can't make a gig or we need replacements, or vice versa." Luckily, Denil is already a MOST grant recipient for the following year, showing great promise for the beginning of Anes' diverse network. While the situation in Bosnia is, as Anes puts it, "divisions, divisions, divisions," he hopes that the Tuzla canton and surrounding region can proudly become "the ones trying to take care of the synergy between people!"

Photos:





Dana McKelvey

Researcher, Urban Project Hub pillar - MOST project

