

Revival of City Squares in Balkan Cities



“Which space do you use as a square?”

Revival of City Squares in Balkan Cities is a project that aims to reflect on a new, creative idea of the public spaces, questioning people who use and live those spaces about values and problematic re-use of city squares in order to create new, vibrant, creative and liveable community spaces.

Country / region or city:

Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro

Name of Cooperation Project:

Revival of City Squares in Balkan Cities

Partner organizations:

Co-Plan Institute for Habitat Development (Tirana), Coalition for Sustainable Development – CSD (Skopje), EXPEDITIO Centre for Sustainable Spatial Development (Kotor), Polis University (Tirana)

Duration of project:

January 2011 – December 2012

City squares, as places for democratic and cultural expression in contemporary cities and focal points for civil and social relations, are a vital stimulus to entrepreneurship and development of the cities.

However, over the last two decades, the urban transformations of the Balkans' cities - under the duress of neo-liberal rebuilding projects and globalization desires - demonstrate in a continuum a remarkable neglect of public functions of the city squares as public spaces. Such neglect takes different forms. A common one is the physical neglect and neglect of the soft infrastructure: the role that different communities play in the city, the space where exchange takes place, the grounds where people express their identity through culture and arts. Another is - politicians using city squares for (personal) political experiments and a rehearsal for populist politics.

The goal of the project is to contribute to revival of city squares as viable public places that foster cultural identity and promote diversity through enforcement of public policies and active community participation.

The specific objectives of the project are:

- To promote national and regional policy discourse on how city squares can be transformed into vibrant community places.
- To develop a platform for transforming open public spaces into vibrant places that serve community needs.

rcsbc.blogspot.com
www.co-plan.org
www.expeditio.org
www.kor-csd.org

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Revival of City Squares in Balkan Cities will be implemented through following activity areas:

- Examination and analyses of the current use of city squares in each of the 4 cities: Tirana, Dures, Kotor and Skopje and assessment of potentials for their transformation;
- Regional workshops in order to stimulate regional exchange of ideas regarding the discourse on city squares and their potentials to be transformed into vibrant community places that meet community cultural, social and economic needs;
- Mapping and networking with organizations / actors that operate nationally / in the Balkans, by using participative approaches and partnerships in order to build on existing achievements and to secure active involvement of all relevant stakeholders;
- Dissemination of practices and knowledge gained in pushing actions forward for transformation of city squares through local websites on revival of city squares, articles in *Forum A+P* magazine, newsletter, social platforms, PR materials and documentation, *Roadmap for a Liveable Cities* publication and the closing conference;
- Consultative process on validation and support of guidelines with key stakeholders (including public officials, segments of civil society and citizens) through meetings and round tables;
- Facilitation of a community-based process that engages a full range of local stakeholders (citizens, professionals, policy makers), and brings people with diverse ideas into dialogue in an inclusive process that produces workable recommendations with significant impacts, the project foresees the following specific activities:
 - Elaboration of a set of viable guidelines on city square transformation
 - Development of local policy documents on city square transformation.

The project expects to achieve the following direct results:

- Examination of the current use of city squares in each of the 4 cities: Tirana, Dures, Kotor and Skopje and assessment of potentials for their transformation documented and disseminated with key stakeholders.
- Enhancement of knowledge, participation and networking of professionals and civic actors in Balkan Region in using city squares as centres for social and cultural exchange.
- A Platform for transforming public space into vibrant community places established.
- Manual (Guidebook) on how to carry out city square transformation process.

The Swiss Cultural Programme in the Western Balkans (SCP) is run by Pro Helvetia, the Swiss Arts Council, upon mandate of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. The SCP encompasses Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo. It supports local partners, which emphasize the variety, independence and performance of cultural life. The SCP regional cooperation projects focus on the capacity building and institutional development processes of cultural organizations with a regional orientation. ■