An ongoing project in the city of Mostar designed by Abart/Art production targeting the issues of public space and public memory in Mostar.

NGOs in Mostar play a vital role in working on the ground to mitigate the conflict and to support the reconciliation process. The NGO OKC Abrašević has long engaged with the issues surrounding the polarization of Mostar and has strived to implement activities that are able to look beyond the city’s divisions. Its Youth Centre is among the few spaces which refuses to design and plan activities tailored solely for one ethnic group. The Centre works as an umbrella for several groups working in the fields of art, music, ecology, media production, and education.

Over the last two years, the Centre has been given two large grants to carry out cultural projects directly focusing on the division of the city. The activities so far implemented and coordinated by the Abart/Art production team have been successful in attracting the attention of the media and in engaging the population of Mostar. Abart has also been working on the establishment on international networks with other organisations working in divided cities in order to exchange experiences and offer comparative materials and analysis. Amongst others, the ESRC funded Conflict in Cities and the Contested State project offers an interesting perspective on the issue of divided cities as it understands ‘everyday life’ as one of the main areas to be researched and addressed. The collaboration between Abart/Art production and the Conflict in Cities PhD student Giulia Carabelli, started in November 2009, establishing a productive dialogue between the two research projects.

Since November 2010, MDG-F (Millennium Development Goals - Fund) and Erste Stiftung have been supporting the development of “(Re)collecting Mostar”, a collaborative project with students from the two universities in Mostar, which aims to critically reflect on issues of public space and public memory in Mostar.
Public space is understood in this context as a place open to all citizens where they can gather, interact, discuss and work towards the achievement of common goals. In addition, public spaces hold a virtual dimension, functioning as depositories of public memories. Shared spaces in Mostar have gone through a shift, becoming increasingly shaped by contingencies related to the urban polarization. The main problem that "(Re)collecting Mostar" wants to address is the fact that, in Mostar, public spaces are deliberately neglected.

The process of neglecting public spaces went hand in hand with a process of erasing and rewriting public memory in order to support nationalist discourses and increased polarization. The complexity of this issue sits in the fact that ideologies are part and parcel of everyday life therefore the process of revealing the mechanisms shaping the living environment can be very difficult. Collecting and reinterpreting public memory could bring a new perspective on how ideologies work in everyday life, but it could also provide a platform from which to negotiate the question of a common history. In fact, the importance of dealing with public memory could raise awareness about the significance of shared public spaces as places for open discussion and civic action.

"(Re)collecting Mostar" is articulated in four main phases:

- Phase 1: November 2010-February 2011: Mapping public spaces in Mostar (Abart)
- Phase 2: March-May 2011: Artistic/creative mapping of public spaces (students and invited artists)
- Phase 3: June-August 2011: Collecting data on public memory in Mostar (Abart and students)
- Phase 4: September-October 2011: Assembling, archiving and displaying material collected and produced (Abart and students)
At the end of each phase the material produced is exhibited in the space of the Youth Cultural Centre Abrašević and presented in roundtables open to the public. At least one artist is invited to design an artistic intervention in a public space which is relevant to the outcomes of the concurrent phase of the project.

Since November 2010 Abart has been researching about the development and the expansion of Mostar throughout its history, outlining the changes in its urban structure with a particular interest in commercial spaces and places for social life/leisure/culture. The material gathered was presented to the students in April 2011. They spent a week with the invited facilitator architect Dubravka Sekulić (Belgrade). After reviewing the material they started working independently on conceptualising individual projects which could both contribute to the general goals of “(Re)collecting Mostar” and satisfy their own curiosities about the city. In order to provide parameters for the project, Abart invited the students to focus on an East to West ‘cutting’ of Mostar from Musala Square to Rondo. The idea of concentrating on this part of the city came about during the first research phase. This area has long been one of the liveliest and most vibrant areas of the city in terms of memorialisation, commemoration, public art and public gatherings. However, the ideology behind the objects and events in this area have varied according to the socio-political zeitgeist of the day. The students presented their initial ideas during a panel discussion open to general public in April 2011. Parallel to the development of the student-work, Abart has been putting together a collection of semi-structured interviews with citizens of Mostar (currently living in Mostar and living abroad/in other cities) about the use and significance of public spaces in the city. Interviewees were asked about their daily and past interactions with the city, and encouraged to give comments about cultural and social life in contemporary and pre-war Mostar. The large majority of the interviewees stressed that they viewed the transformations that have happened in the cultural scene of Mostar as problematic.
The exhibition marking the end of the third phase of the project was opened on June 11th and titled “I živjeli su sretno do kraja života/And they lived happily ever after”. The exhibition displayed the students’ works in progress, research material written and produced by Abart, an audio-photo lecture prepared by Husein Oručević and Ronald Panza, titled “The dormitories of Mostar – from ideology to subculture of habitation”, as well as a reading from a selection of Bogdan Bogdanović’ texts: “Grad i Budućnost” (Town and the Future, 2001), “Gradoslovar” (Urban Dictionary, 1982) and “Urbs & logos: ogledi iz simbologije grada” (Urbs and Logos: essays on the symbolism of town, 1976).

The invited artist, Gordana Andjelić Galić (Sarajevo), intervened in three different locations across the city. The first intervention titled “Ovo nije moj mir/This is not my peace” took place at the Partisan Monument, the second “Dislokacija/Dislocation” in OKC Abrašević’ courtyard, and the third, “Pranje/Washing” in the plateau under the Old Bridge.

The next phase of the project will concentrate on the issue of public memory. The aim of this third phase is to gather memories from the citizens of Mostar and to put them in dialogue with the existing material about public spaces in order to delve into the dialogical nature of public memory and public space.

The last phase aims at assembling the material collected and produced in order to set up a temporary depot in the Youth Cultural Centre Abrašević. The depot is envisioned as a temporary museum space where “(Re)collecting Mostar” could be displayed in an interactive way to keep open the dialogue with the citizens of Mostar and interested parties. Ideally the depot will be transferred in a permanent venue in the future.

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