

Research Brief

Feminine Frames - Poetic Justice for the Adriatic's Abandoned Places

Introduction

This research brief summarizes the findings from the project "Feminine Frames: Poetic Justice for the Adriatic's Abandoned Places," supported by the Western Balkan Fund. The project aimed to explore and highlight the cultural significance of abandoned sites in the Adriatic region (Albania and Montenegro) through artistic expression, particularly through the creation of a short experimental poetry film titled **AbandoNADA Adriatica**.

Project Overview

The project focused on various abandoned locations, including the Zog Palace, Montex Factory, Primorka Factory, and Hotel AS, which have rich histories and serve as poignant examples of urban decay and cultural heritage. Additionally, collaboration was established with **Bauo**, an organization from Petrovac, and **MuZEH Lab** from Durrës to enhance community engagement and artistic output.

- **Zog Palace:** Gifted to King Zog by wealthy individuals from Durrës in 1936 or 1937, it served various functions until its destruction during political disturbances in 1997. The palace's story illustrates the broader narrative of neglect and potential revitalization of historical sites in the region.
- **Montex Factory:** Formerly a ceramics factory, Montex played a significant role in local industry. Its closure reflects economic shifts in the region and impacts on local employment and culture.
- **Primorka Factory:** This factory specialized in producing bread and other household food products. Its abandonment signifies changes in food production and consumption patterns in the area.
- **Hotel AS:** Built by the Auto Moto Savez Jugoslavije, Hotel AS was once the largest and most luxurious hotel in the region. Its decline represents a shift in tourism dynamics and local hospitality industries.

Key Findings

1. Cultural Significance of Abandoned Sites

- Abandoned places like Zog Palace, Montex Factory, Primorka Factory, and Hotel AS are repositories of history and memory, reflecting socio-political changes over decades.
- These sites can serve as catalysts for community engagement and cultural identity, emphasizing their importance beyond mere physical structures.

2. Artistic Expression as a Tool for Awareness

- The use of poetry and visual storytelling in "AbandoNADA Adriatica" effectively captured the emotional resonance of abandoned spaces, fostering a deeper connection with viewers.
- Artistic projects raised awareness about preservation needs and inspired collective action within communities.

3. Challenges of Preservation

- Many abandoned sites faced threats from neglect, vandalism, and potential redevelopment pressures.
- The histories of these locations highlighted challenges related to ownership, restoration efforts, and public access, complicating preservation initiatives.

4. Community Engagement Strategies

- Engaging local communities in discussions about their heritage promoted a sense of ownership and responsibility towards abandoned sites.
- Collaborative management involving local actors facilitated innovative approaches to reuse and revitalization.

5. Policy Recommendations

- There was a need for supportive policies that encouraged adaptive reuse of abandoned buildings while preserving their historical integrity.
- Local authorities should consider incentives for community-led initiatives focusing on cultural heritage preservation.

Lessons Learned

- **Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Successful projects often involved collaboration among artists, historians, urban planners, and local communities to create comprehensive strategies for preservation.
- **Public Engagement:** Raising awareness through artistic mediums mobilized public interest and support for preservation efforts.
- **Sustainable Practices:** Emphasizing sustainable development practices in reusing abandoned spaces enhanced both cultural value and economic viability.

Next Steps

1. **Continued Documentation:** Further documentation of abandoned sites through photography, film, and poetry to enrich cultural narratives.

2. **Community Workshops:** Organizing workshops to engage local communities in discussions about their heritage and potential revitalization projects.
3. **Policy Advocacy:** Advocating for policy changes that support adaptive reuse initiatives and community involvement in preservation efforts.
4. **Future Projects:** Exploring additional artistic collaborations that focus on other significant abandoned sites in the Adriatic region to broaden awareness and engagement.

Conclusion

The "Feminine Frames" project highlighted the potential for abandoned places like Zog Palace, Montex Factory, Primorka Factory, and Hotel AS to serve as focal points for cultural expression and community engagement. By documenting these sites through art, there was an opportunity to foster appreciation for their historical significance while advocating for their preservation as integral parts of our shared cultural identity. The collaboration with Bauo from Petrovac and MuZEH Lab from Durrës enriched this endeavor by enhancing community involvement and promoting cultural dialogue.

Project Overview

The project ventured into the depths of the Adriatic's rich history by documenting and reimagining abandoned sites with unique historical and cultural significance. Among these sites were:

- **Zog Palace (Durrës, Albania):** This once-majestic palace was a gift to King Zog by wealthy patrons in the late 1930s. Over the years, it served various roles before succumbing to political unrest in 1997. Its journey from grandeur to ruin exemplifies the broader neglect of historical landmarks across the region.
- **Montex Factory (Montenegro):** As a former ceramics production hub, Montex symbolizes the industrial heart of a bygone era. Its closure reflects the region's shifting economic tides and the impact on local livelihoods and community identity.
- **Primorka Factory (Montenegro):** A cornerstone of daily life, this factory produced bread and staple goods for the community. Its abandonment marks a transformation in production methods and consumption habits, leaving behind memories of shared meals and bustling industry.
- **Hotel AS (Montenegro):** Once the pinnacle of luxury tourism, built by the Auto Moto Savez Jugoslavije, Hotel AS now stands as a poignant reminder of shifting tourism trends and the fragility of the local hospitality industry.

These sites, rich with stories, served as canvases for artistic collaboration, particularly with Bauo (an organization from Petrovac) and MuZEH Lab (based in Durrës). Together, they helped weave a narrative that brought these places to life.

Key Findings

1. Cultural Significance of Abandoned Sites

The project revealed that abandoned sites are more than dilapidated structures; they are repositories of memory and history. Each site's walls whisper tales of political upheaval, economic shifts, and cultural transformations. By reinterpreting these spaces, they emerge as symbols of resilience and catalysts for cultural identity.

2. Artistic Expression as a Tool for Awareness

Through the poetry and visual storytelling of *AbandoNADA Adriatica*, the project evoked the emotional depths of these spaces. The film acted as a bridge, connecting audiences to the sites' forgotten histories and inspiring collective action to preserve them. Art became an advocacy tool, sparking conversations about heritage and renewal.

3. Challenges of Preservation

The project highlighted numerous challenges in preserving these sites, including neglect, vandalism, and redevelopment pressures. Many of these spaces face uncertain futures due to complex ownership disputes, limited restoration funding, and restricted public access.

4. Community Engagement Strategies

Engaging local communities proved crucial to fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility. By involving them in discussions about their shared heritage, the project cultivated deeper connections between people and these spaces. Collaborative management strategies emerged as key to unlocking innovative reuse ideas.

5. Policy Recommendations

To safeguard the Adriatic's abandoned treasures, policies must incentivize adaptive reuse while maintaining historical integrity. Local governments should support community-led initiatives that balance preservation with economic and social revitalization.

Lessons Learned

- **Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Historians, urban planners, artists, and community members working together brought nuanced perspectives to preservation strategies, enriching the project's outcomes.
 - **Public Engagement:** Art proved a powerful tool for raising awareness and mobilizing communities, demonstrating the transformative potential of storytelling.
 - **Sustainable Practices:** Revitalizing abandoned sites with sustainable development practices ensured that cultural value and economic potential were harmoniously integrated.
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Next Steps

1. **Continued Documentation:** Further exploration of abandoned sites through photography, film, and poetry will help preserve their narratives for future generations.
 2. **Community Workshops:** Organizing workshops will encourage residents to actively participate in reimagining their heritage and contribute ideas for revitalization.
 3. **Policy Advocacy:** Lobbying for policies that support adaptive reuse and emphasize community involvement will strengthen preservation efforts.
 4. **Future Projects:** Expanding the initiative to include other significant abandoned sites across the Adriatic region will broaden its impact and foster regional dialogue.
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Conclusion

Feminine Frames illuminated the latent beauty and potential of the Adriatic's abandoned spaces. From the opulent halls of Zog Palace to the industrial echoes of Montex Factory, these sites are more than relics—they are integral to the region's cultural fabric. Through the power of art and community collaboration, this project reminded us that these spaces deserve not just remembrance but also reinvention.

The partnership with Bauo and MuZEH Lab enriched the initiative, blending local insights with artistic innovation. Together, they proved that even in abandonment, there is opportunity—to create, to preserve, and to honor the Adriatic's shared heritage. By continuing this journey, these forgotten places can once again become vibrant markers of identity and inspiration.

Abandoned places often harbor within their crumbling walls untold stories, forgotten histories, and echoes of lives once intertwined with their spaces. The project "**Feminine Frames: Poetic Justice for the Adriatic's Abandoned Places**" illuminates the cultural and historical significance of such sites in Albania and Montenegro, transforming them into vessels of artistic expression. Supported by the **Western Balkan Fund**, this initiative culminated in the creation of **AbandoNADA Adriatica**, a short experimental poetry film that offers a poignant reflection on the region's neglected landmarks. Through this project, these forgotten spaces found new voices, resonating with themes of memory, loss, and revival. By weaving together elements of poetry and visual storytelling, "AbandoNADA Adriatica" serves not only as a documentary of these sites but also as an artistic commentary on their past and potential future. The film captures the haunting beauty of locations like the Zog Palace, Montex Factory, Primorka Factory, and Hotel AS, each representing a unique chapter in the region's history. The Zog Palace, once a royal residence, symbolizes the socio-political upheavals that have shaped Albania. Montex Factory, known for its ceramics production, reflects the industrial heritage that has faded over time. Primorka Factory, which specialized in pasta and other food products, highlights changes in local economies and food culture. Hotel AS stands as a testament to the luxurious hospitality that once flourished in the area but has since succumbed to neglect. Collaboration played a vital role in this project, particularly

with organizations such as **Bauo** from Petrovac and **MuZEH Lab** from Durrës. These partnerships enriched the project by fostering community engagement and promoting cultural dialogue throughout its execution. The overarching goal of "Feminine Frames" was to raise awareness about these abandoned places and inspire collective action towards their preservation. By showcasing their stories through art, the project sought to evoke a sense of responsibility among viewers to appreciate and protect these cultural landmarks. The film ultimately serves as a call to action, encouraging audiences to reflect on their connections to these spaces and consider their potential for revival. In conclusion, "Feminine Frames: Poetic Justice for the Adriatic's Abandoned Places" not only sheds light on forgotten histories but also revitalizes them through artistic expression. The project demonstrates how abandoned sites can resonate with contemporary audiences, inviting them to engage with their cultural heritage in meaningful ways. Through initiatives like this, we can ensure that the stories embedded in these spaces are not lost to time but rather celebrated and preserved for future generations.