

Art Practices and Urban Promenades: Belgrade's Knez Mihailova Street vs. Dionysius the Areopagite Promenade in Athens. Roundtable Held at the Institute of Ethnography SASA

The year 2017 marked the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Institute of Ethnography of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Among many successful celebratory activities organized throughout the year, the roundtable titled *Art practices and urban promenades: Belgrade's KnezMihailova Street vs. Dionysius the Areopagite Promenade in Athens* stands out. The roundtable was held on October 6th 2017 at the Institute of Ethnography SASA, its organization a cooperative effort between the Institute and the Laboratory for Folklore and Social Anthropology, of the Department of History and Ethnology of the Democritus University of Thrace (the Republic of Greece), respectively.

The aim of the roundtable was to present the results of the international research project "Art practices and urban promenades (pedestrian zones). A comparative ethnological and anthropological study of Belgrade's KnezMihailova Street and the Dionysius the Areopagite promenade in Athens" which is coordinated by the two institutions. This significant international research project was conceived by Dr. Gordana Blagojević, senior research associate at the Institute of Ethnography SASA, and its goal is to study artistic production and artistic products on offer in urban pedestrian zones. The project focuses on the narratives and life stories of street artists in Belgrade and Athens.

The assembly began in a celebratory manner - professor Dr. Manolis Varvounis was awarded the plaque of the Institute of Ethnography SASA for his contribution to the research of folklore in the Balkans. In turn, Dr. Varvounis awarded the plaque of the Department of History and Ethnology of the Democritus University of Thrace to the Institute of Ethnography SASA in honour of its 70th anniversary, to Dr. Gordana Blagojević for coordinating the international bilateral project and to Dr. Georgios Kouzas for establishing a successful scientific collaboration between the institutions.

The ceremony was followed by the roundtable proper. The colleagues from Greece presented their papers in the first session: professor Dr. Manolis F. Varvounis (Democritus University of Thrace) - *Folkloristics of Greek streets*, doc. Dr. Georgios Kouzas (University of Peloponnese) - *Street musicians, artistic practices and survival strategies: an ethnographic example (Dionysou Areopagitou street, Athens)*, and professor Dr. Nadia Macha-Bizoumi (Democritus University of Thrace) - *Street craftsmen: the social and economic dimension of their work*. After a lively discussion and coffee break, associates of the Institute of Ethnography SASA presented their papers in the second session: Dr. Petrija Jovičić - *Street art artefacts in the function of promoting cultural heritage*, Nina Aksić, MA - *Musical picture of Knez Mihailo's street as a part of Belgrade's identity. Musical diversity as Belgrade's brand*, Dr. Mileša Stefanović Banović - *From religious symbol to souvenir: Offer in the zone of Knez Mihailova street*, and Dr. Gordana Blagojević - *Spatial mobility of fine artists and local identity/identities: from Knez Mihailova Street to Aegean and vice versa*. The presentations in the second session were followed by a lively discussion as well, with all of the presenters from the roundtable and audience members taking part. The main focus of the discussion shifted to economic and legal strategies utilized by street artists in both

Belgrade and Athens, which resulted in a kind of comparative narrative about their experiences bolstered by input from audience members as well as participants. Another notable addition to the event was the presence of academic painter Dragiša Ćosić, one of the artists who participated in the research - and who designed the book of abstracts - in the audience. Ćosić's presence and input during the discussions was a novel and welcome way to include people whom anthropologists work with into the ethnographic process, and having the artist be present, as it were, served to facilitate the discussion and illuminate aspects of his lived experience to the assembled academics in a meaningful and productive way.

It should also be noted that, aside from being part of the celebrations marking 70 years of the Institute of Ethnography SASA and a way to promote the international project, the *Art practices and urban promenades: Belgrade's Knez Mihailova Street vs. Dionysius the Areopagite Promenade in Athens* roundtable was also a gift to the city of Belgrade, marking the 30th anniversary of Knez Mihailova street as a pedestrian zone.

Ultimately, the topics discussed at this roundtable dealt with important issues facing artists in urban environments, with the participants offering ethnographic accounts and analyses of the lived experiences and strategies utilized by artists living precariously, without formal employment in Greece and Serbia. This project is important for a number of reasons: not only does it establish a connection between research practices of anthropologists from Greece and the Institute of Ethnography SASA, it facilitates research which on topics which were largely absent from Serbian ethnology in the past. The project and the roundtable offered the possibility of initiating comparative ethnological and anthropological research of urban public spaces as well as artistic practices present in pedestrian zones in Belgrade and Athens. The research conducted in the two cities encompasses both the synchronic and diachronic aspects of these phenomena and consider the semantics of space, offering new insights in the fields of urban anthropology and the anthropology of art. Analyses of material aspects of the issue - the artefacts produced and sold, as well as the experiences of street vendors, who themselves aren't artists but are engaged in economic transactions involving artistic products and, thus, the shaping of what supply and demand look like in the context of what is on offer in pedestrian zones, helped shed much needed light on the mechanisms which are at work in shaping the identities of cities which are presented to both visitors and natives alike.

The excellent organization of the roundtable was largely due to the efforts of Gordana Blagojević, as well as a number of younger associates of the Institute of Ethnography SASA. In that regard, Sonja Žakula and Milan Tomašević especially distinguished themselves, the former by actively participating in the discussions, and the latter by filming the event so that a video recording of the roundtable is available in the archives of the Institute. It should also be noted that the video materials will be supplemented by photographs taken by professional photographer Jelena Ćosić during the event.

In summation, it can be concluded that the roundtable was a complete success and a step forward in the anthropological study of urban environments and the people who shape them.

Sonja Žakula
Jadranka Đorđević Crnobrnja