Emergence of Cultural Heritage Civil Society in Georgia - Successes and Challenges of grass roots initiatives in heritage sector

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Contents

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• Civil Society and heritage in the early years of Georgia’s independence
• Recent developments:
  - Campaign Groups;
  - Grass roots youth initiatives;
  - Successes and Challenges.
Background

Georgia – few relevant facts:

• Country in transition
• Population of 4.5 million
• Has undergone armed conflict and civil war in early 1990s and again in 2008;
• 20% of territories occupied;
• Has undergone huge economic sprout in the past 10 years;
• Has achieved significant progress in the establishment of the rule of law, fight against corruption;
• Still a young democracy...
Context

• CH agency’s budget tripled since 2005;
• Economic development;
• Creation of tourism infrastructure;
• State financed urban rehabilitation projects in 8 historic towns;
• Increase in development funding;
• Increase in heritage conservation funding.

Keywords

• Rights holders;
• Rights-based heritage management;
• Heritage as a human right;
• Right to partake in decision-making;
• Community participation;
• Heritage community (CoE Faro 2005 Convention)
Historical Overview of Civil Society and Heritage Sector (Pre-Soviet and Soviet Era)

- 18th and 19th c. so called “Hamkari”s – craftsmen unions
- Georgia’s first republic (1918-1921)
- Soviet regime
- signs of civil sector 1980s - public protest campaign for heritage was the one opposing the Soviet Army’s shooting practice near the historic David Gareji Monastery,
- Gareji protest laid serious basis for the emergence of the national movement which led to the public protests in 1989 and proclamation of independence in 1992;
- From 1992– emergence of heritage NGOs.
Civil Society and Heritage Sector in Georgia
The early stage (from 1990s to 2010) of NGO activism

Early 1990s to 2009
- Donor driven & top down

2009 till present
- Emergence of grass roots CSOs
- Campaign cases → bottom up
The most recent state of heritage civil society activism (2009-2016)
Activation of heritage NGOs in response to inappropriate and illegal decisions on behalf of authorities;
Emergence of campaign groups;
ენების მოღვანება!
Gudiaishvili Square campaign – Minifest/Manifest
Guerilla gardening organized protest against “Panorama Tbilisi” project
Civil Society and Heritage Sector in Georgia (2009-2016)

- Newly emerged NGOs:
  - Monument’s Friend,
  - Civil Initiative,
  - Non-governmental Monitoring of Cultural Heritage,
  - Eastern Partnership Arts and Culture Council

Grass-roots initiatives and Campaign Groups:
- Save Bagrati Cathedral,
- Green Fist,
- Save Gudiaashvili Square,
- Save Sakdrisi Ancient Gold Mine
- Guerilla Gardening,
- Batomi.
Civil Society and World Heritage Sites of Georgia

• Case of Bagrati Cathedral
Bagrati Cathedral timeline

11th c. Construction

17-18th c. Destruction

Partial reconstruction 1940-80ies

UNESCO WH Listing 1994

WH Danger list 2009

Complete reconstruction 2009-2012

2013 – WHC decision “authenticity irreversibly compromised”

?
Reconstruction works (2009-2012)
Reconstruction works (2009-2012)
Inauguration in 2012
Campaign “Save Bagrati Cathedral”

• Public Campaign “Save Bagrati Cathedral” started in 2009
• Appeal to stop the works addressed local state and church authorities, international heritage community
• Reconstruction works stopped by the request of the head of the Orthodox Church as a result of the campaign which succeeded in a strong media campaign
• Campaign Groups;

• Grass roots youth initiatives;
Save Sakdrisi Gold Mine

Before

After
Public Initiative – Guerilla Gardening protesting against a development project in Tbilisi Historic and Landscape protection zone
Panorama Tbilisi Project
Sakdrisi and Panorama campaigns – Strengths and Weaknesses

- Substantial media attention;
- Involvement of diverse groups of people;
- Enthusiasm of activists.

- Poor communication with the local community and wider stakeholder groups;
- Isolation of the campaign group;
- Disagreement within the activists’ groups and lack of a coherent strategy.
Current developments in heritage civil society coordinated by the Blue Shield

1. Cultural Heritage Civil Society Platform,
2. Youth Activists’ Camp
3. Heritage Club
Cultural Heritage Civil Society Platform

• CHSP created as a continuation of Sakdrisi campaign to unite cultural and natural heritage CSOs and initiatives to continue to actively campaign and advocate for C&N heritage protection;
Youth Activists’ Camp

- 25 young activists from all over Georgia with experience in heritage and environmental protection campaigns
- 12 new campaigns planned together
- A network & support group created
Heritage Club

• 125 participants by the end of the year 2016;
• Training received in topics such as “Intangible Cultural Heritage Management”, “Heritage and Law”, “Cultural Heritage Conservation and Management” offered for free to all interested individuals
Other current heritage grass roots initiatives

- Groups advocating for the protection of industrial and socialist period heritage in towns Chiatura and Tskaltubo;
- Batomi – group advocating for the protection of cultural heritage in Adjara region and mainly historic Batumi;
- Svaneti intangible heritage group;
Civil Society and Heritage

**Outcomes**

Each campaign, albeit not successful in achieving its direct goal, has led to:

- better coordinated civil society,
- the diversification and emergence of new groups,
- the emergence of heritage issue on the agenda of wider NGO platform and most importantly,
- the refining of the law enforcement system in heritage sector.
Heritage Civil Society of Georgia

Challenges:

• Current socio-economic environment as well as the political past – lack of civic activism skills from during the Soviet past still preconditions the extent of civic activism;
• Civic education level very low;
• Challenge to the success of civil society in heritage sector is also the neglect of the role of civil society by the state;
• lack of recognition by the society of heritage as a resource of social and economic development.

Threats:

• Lack of funds;
• Loss of enthusiasm, frustration;
• Black PR;
Civil Society and Heritage of Georgia

How to proceed?
- Better communication strategy;
- Advocacy works;
- Networking;
- Integrity and Persistence.

The sector could strongly benefit from an increased support and recognition from international donors for the activity of grassroots CSOs and from the recommendations on behalf of the international community/donors to the state to consider the civil society sector more.