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(Re)collecting Mostar

This paper aims at discussing rationale and very first results of an ongoing project in the city of Mostar (B&H):

'(Re)collecting Mostar'.

The project started off in November 2010, when a group working within the OKC Abrašević (Youth Cultural Centre Abrašević), Abart, has been sponsored by MDG-F (Millennium Development Goals Fund) and Erste Stiftung to develop a collaborative project with willing students from the two universities of Mostar. The idea was that of engaging with the population in a collective exercise and, with the help of students, collect, analyse, and creatively assemble memories about the city in order to set up a depot/museum where the contested urban pasts and presents could be displayed, discussed, re-worked.

'(Re)collecting Mostar' wonders whether in a city where history has not yet been written, but it is contested and advocated to reinforce division, the re-collection of public and personal memories could proactively engage with the process of making sense of the past by critically offering a perspective other than a nationalist one. In fact, it is a possibility that due to the difficulties faced by those in charge of outlining the recent history of Mostar -namely the impossibility of agreeing on a common plot able to satisfy and acknowledge various versions of what happened in the 90s - the space of storytelling comes to the fore as the potential place where to sustain and support antagonistic factions and feed irresolvable diatribes transcending the capacity of history to systematise the past in order to move on towards the future. It could be argued that envisioning the future could bypass the normalisation of a common history in Mostar, yet the dialectical relation of memory and forgetting is difficult to pin down and its assessment has to deal with too many contingencies and specificities to be summed up in any operative chart. Whereas the past could be wiped out by a political decision in order to legally forget and move on, in Mostar it is clear that unless these many *pasts* find their own place in urban narratives there would be no step forward, but rather new and louder attempts to reinforce utterly hostile *histories*.

'(Re)collecting Mostar' feels as urgent the necessity of gathering memories from the recent history of the city not only to keep them alive, but more importantly to critically engage with the shared history of the city to produce spaces where to discuss the ongoing process of authorising and neglecting memories, conscious of the fact that remembrance is a political tool indispensable to re-crafting history. In the city of Mostar, where history is not yet one, remembrance could create the apt space where to recollect all that has gone lost in transferring material from imagined pre- and post-war urban-archives, and

critically engage with the unfolding of the information coming about.

The immaterial space of memories will be once again materialised, not by erecting monuments or validating one history over the other, but rather putting diverging and converging stories together in order to create an apt space that could contain them all, while symbolically re-attaching them to the city; the space of a depot/museum. As Clifford rightly pointed out, objects in a museum work as tools of the contact zone to "challenge and rework a relationship [...] They become tools for active collaboration and a sharing of authority" (Clifford, 1997: 210). This paper aims at presenting the results of the first three phases of the project and discuss the phase yet to come: the setting up of the depot/ museum space. In particular, this paper will critically engage with the idea of the museum as a space for exchange, negotiation, and communication in the peculiar context of Mostar as a divided city.