



# The Making of School Houses in the 90s and the School House Museum

*The Making of School Houses in the 90s and the School House Museum* by Jeta Rexha forms part of the *Changing the Story* Blog Series. Jeta Rexha is a Research Assistant on the Phase 2 Early Career Research Project [\*The Making of the Museum of Education\*](#) (Kosovo).

The 'house-school' that marked the 1990s in Kosova was run by teachers, activists, and parents, and served as an autonomous educational system, surviving the closure of all institutions and public administrations of Kosova for its population.



Photo Credit: Jeta Rexha

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announced that one house that saw the graduation of ten generations of high-school students between 1991 and 1999, would transform into The School House Museum. This house, as well as 3000 other spaces around Kosova, were the backbone of Kosova's parallel state and a symbol of resistance to Milosevic's regime.

The [\*Making of the Museum of Education\*](#) project addresses new emerging practices of memory within and between state institutions, using digital media and a remediation of memory through youth engagement, and spatial and territorialized discourses of violence. The project provides the space for converging and connective acts of remembrance across temporal and generational experiences. By producing a digital media platform, the research looks at the ways such spaces and platforms contribute to the production of multilayered, intersecting, and occasionally competing narratives. Furthermore, by paying attention to a range of media, from film to literary texts to archives, the project interrogates the mobilizing potential of public remembrance, a catalyzing and re-mediating force in activist projects.

The cornerstone of this research is co-production, education, a critical review of the narratives of cultural and educational institutions on memories, knowledge, and representations of socio-political contestations to past structural exclusion and discrimination in Kosovo. We hope the Museum content will inspire those who visit, with the aim of producing educational tools and spaces that will achieve inclusive and quality education for all. Furthermore, the story of House School Museum is a story of discrimination and seclusion based on ethnic discrimination and racism. Learning from the resilience, perseverance, and mobilization that continued education during the Milosevic regime (that banned education in Albanian language from 1990-1999), this parallel educational system serves as an inspiration and learning ground for Kosovo youth.

The project has strengthened the skills of students, researchers, and artists by conducting social science and arts-based research and providing training in critical reflection of ethnographic, oral history, and archival methodologies. It has influenced critical education and memory practices and has encouraged youth to take participatory and inclusive social action and hold cultural institutions responsive and accountable. Another goal of the project, is to indirectly address the centrality of effective and equitable democratic governance in Kosovo. In this regard, it aims to improve efficiency of the central and local institutions and address corruption by providing models of inclusive, transparent, and reflective community participation in co-creation of public memory sites.

The research project began in the early months of 2019 at University of Prishtina, where 18 students from University of Prishtina gathered as part of the research project led by Dr. [Linda Gusia](#).

### Site visit

The workshops aimed to connect the participants with participants who could share their experience of the parallel education system. The site visit to the school-house of Hertica family in Kodra e Trimave was the students first introduction to how the schools were organized when all Albanian institutions were shut down. The students met the daughter of the owner of the house, Azemine Aliu, who told the story of how the house began working as a school on the instruction of her father. The idea developed at the time when the students were being removed from schools. A friend of her father's had called him and told him about the students. He made the call on the spot to find houses to continue teaching.



Photo Credit: Jeta Rexha

at University of Prishtina gathered all the student participants in discussions and lecturers from relevant fields. Dr. [Nita Luci](#) spoke about the importance of oral history as a methodology used in documenting marginalized voices and memorabilia. [Dr. Paula Callus](#)

spoke about the importance of archives as a tool in recognizing agency and shared history. [Dr. Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers](#) gave her insight in the crucial role of ethics in social research. Sali Shoshi spoke about the work of Culture Heritage Without Borders in Kosova. Cultural Heritage without the Borders (CHWB) works on the topics of cultural heritage (tangible and intangible) dealing with the past and restoration is central in influencing the policy makers in Kosova.



Photo Credit: Jeta Rexha

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mata, one of the local partners of the project, operates as a collective of artists and manages the cinema located in the old Army House in Prishtina, which serves as a hub for public events and artistic performances. The students had an interactive session involving exchanging their ideas, experiences, and learning how to document with the phone or camera by Lum Çitaku (who filmed the process and all the workshops, to produce a short documentary). As a visual ethnographer, Çitaku provided a setlist of dos and don'ts of what an ethnographic film constitutes and the importance of visual representations. Students also learned about video diaries and produced video diaries that reflect their experience and exposure to the house schools system.

### KOSOVO 2.0 Workshop

[Kosovo 2.0](#), another partner to the project, is an independent media outlet that engages in critical debates through its multimedia website, print magazine and public events. They closely cooperate with the project team, who relied on their expertise in production of multimedia content through training. The students had the opportunity to receive a lecture by Besa Luci, the editor-in chief, about the importance of media and framing narration. Dafina Halili, a journalist and editor, also spoke to the students and provided practical skills on how to do blogging. Shkumbin Brestovci, an independent researcher, presented his in-depth research on the political state of Kosova during the 90s with a focus on civil resistance. The students were given the chance to write their own blogs to reflect upon what the lectures were about. They had individual guidance by a prominent journalist Dafina Halili.

### Archival work: houses of the 90s unlocked

#### National Library

The students visited the National Library and were introduced to the archives, which include newspapers like Rilindja, Bujku, KOHA, Bota e Re, Shkendija. The participating students identified and researched articles and published texts related to the education system during the 90s. Depending on the period of publishing, most of the articles were about the political events of 1980s, such as the student



Group conversation with the project leader, Linda Gusia, after viewing video archives, ways of seeing and importance of visuals. Credit: Jeta Rexha.

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les were on the disruption of the state and disbanding of the institutions. A focal point of the visit was digging through the archives related to the so-called ‘parallel system’ of the 90s.

### Municipal Archive

The Archives of the Municipality was the second field visit for researching the archives and events related to the 90s. The participating students looked at the personal archives of Zijadin Gashi who wholeheartedly donated all his personal notes and documents from that time to the Public Archives of the Municipality of Prishtina. The researched documents included Regulations and parts of notes from the school registries.

### The importance of plural stories: Interviews with key people who set up the system,

Interviews with some of the key people of the ‘parallel’ institutions clarified many conceptions as to whether the education system was actually ‘parallel’. Interviews with Zijadin Gashi, Munish Hyseni, and Abdyl Gashi who were teachers and principals of institutions of the time, included sharing moments of how much work, passion and commitment was put into functionalizing an entire education system whilst living under an oppressive regime. The effort everybody so tirelessly gave can be seen in Zijadin Gashi’s simple words “The school isn’t made only of buildings, if students and teachers weren’t present, there would be no school”. An interview with Shyhrete Matoshi also emphasized the role of teachers of primary schools who quickly initiated the process of organizing their classes in nearby neighborhoods. Parents got involved by offering free rooms in their homes for teachers like Shyhrete to continue with their teaching.

Many questions arose among the students about the events of the 90s, leading to ongoing discussions. The students would think about what they were told about events of the 90s and reflect on the new information they were receiving. With the site visit, the students were exposed to the Hertica school house where “Sami Frasheri” high school was situated and their idea of a classroom was vividly contextualized. To the students of the 90s the house represents an entire decade of resisting the political and social state of the time and



it symbolizes the fight for freedom. To the students of today who visited the site in a different context, it opened up room for questions for what the future holds for them but also how solidarities could resist the erasure of their communities.

Incorporating their knowledge and examples from different post conflict countries to the project has highlighted the processes of remediation that museums can undertake. Sites need not only be a space of remembrance and commemoration but also a space dedicated to learning, education, knowledge and active citizenship. Additionally, in the process of including young people and communities in the process it was essential to engage with digital technologies and social media platforms. Digital media has not only re-imagined the ways in which knowledge gets communicated, or represented, but has also altered remembrance practices by aiding their transmission across time and space, allowing for the adoption and negotiation of these practices. Digital remembrance creates new examples and practices that direct us to adopt a more hybrid understanding of remembrance as practiced both offline and online and therefore, consider mediatized – transformed memory.

TAGS: CO-PRODUCTION EDUCATION ETHNOGRAPHY HERITAGE KOSOVO MEMORY MUSEUM NARRATIVES YOUTH









