

FROH!



Vibrant Spaces of Svaneti

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Svaneti is a space in which the history of the Caucasus is visibly inscribed and lively enacted in the Svan culture and tradition. However, this spectacular space is increasingly showing traces of fatigue as tourists from all over the world come to the region.

Svaneti is searching for a new identity in a continuous field of tension between an emerging local economy and the region's rich traditions. This project intends to collect and archive the local narratives, document the region's rich culture, local practices and usage of space. In close cooperation with the Svans we aim to create a public sphere for the region's concerns to discover the benefits of both: tradition and the emergent economy.

Culture & Space

Upper Svaneti is a world cultural heritage because of its outstanding mountain landscape with its preserved medieval-style villages and the characteristic fortified towers. These towers, churches and shrines, houses and agricultural areas are the materialized heritage of Svaneti. Social and religious social practices are profoundly intermingled with space; they are structuring space and spatial use. But this material cultural heritage is endangered: Churches, houses and towers suffer dramatically from their massive exposure to tourism. Besides, the social and cultural landscape is threatened by extensive new construction. How do the Svans conceive their region's future and fate and what are the measures they want to undertake to conserve their region?

Environment & Space

The mountains of Shkhara, Tetnuldi and Ushba frame the area of Upper Svaneti, which leaves tourists breathless. The incredible beauty of the high mountain area with glaciers, lakes, rivers, forests, and typical wildlife characterizes Svaneti. But beauty and disaster often come together: In the late 1980s, weeks of massive snowfall led to the destruction of villages and infrastructure. Large parts of the Svan population had to be resettled to other parts of Georgia. Since the 1970s, construction plans and first construction works on hydroelectric dams have advanced. They will lead to entire villages being relocated and irrecoverable change in the landscape. The impact of human exploitation is visible as well in the two fastly conceived skiing resorts in Mestia and near the Tetnuldi.

Tourism & Space

Svaneti's emerging tourism is characterized by narratives of originality, nature, hospitality and Svan traditions that are shared by locals with tourists and by tourists themselves. Tourists coming to Svaneti are interested in nature and culture,



Abandoned in house, built in Soviet style, located in Adishi
(Photo by Stefan Applis)

Front: During summer, a surge of tourists reaches Ushguli.
(Photo by Stefan Applis)

seeking authenticity and individuality whereas financially strong players market the region as ‚Switzerland in the Caucasus‘ and invest in hotels with considerable land consumption, resulting in less space for farming and subsistence economy. All the factors together lead to an increasing ecological burden on the region.

Goals and Outcome

- at bringing together the relevant players in the region and creating a discourse on a sustainable form of tourism in the region.
- at creating a public forum for the region’s concerns and a public archive for documenting and safeguarding Svaneti’s rich material culture as well as local practices and usage of space
- at promoting a sustainable tourism that is interested in the local history and culture
- at creating a participative platform with Svans in order to collect and archive local narratives.

Measures: A Transmedia Archive

At the interface between journalistic storytelling and museal representation, transmedia offers an open approach to storytelling. It allows one to present different types of material and offers space for diverse interpretations. Our long-term goal is to create a transmedia archive that provides access to personal narratives and biographic content like family pictures and objects for religious and cultural purposes, maps, and flat-plans to document the architectural layers of usage, etc. We’re addressing tourists who want to take a deeper look into the region’s history and culture as well as the local public. The archive is presented as a mobile-ready website with CMS-backend allowing the editorial team to store and organize archival content during the project. The stories can be accessed through various topics as well as location-based content on a map. As an extension, we’re planning to have selected material as Augmented Reality content, so Tourists are able to access relevant content on-site.

The content is collected in a series of on-site workshops(ca. 10 days) which engage locals in collaboration with students of ethnography, geography, architecture, and journalism. The following topics are conceivable:

Narratives of Future and Fate: Svan Biographies

Oral history of Svan traditions during and after Soviet times are at the core of this event. The goal is to conduct structured interviews with Svans and collect video and audio material. In cooperation with German and Georgian faculties of ethnography and journalism.

Material Culture: Objects and Images

This workshop is focused on the use and of material culture. We conduct structured interviews with Svans and digitalize cultural objects and personal inventories. In cooperation with German and Georgian faculties of ethnography and journalism.

Mapping the Past: The Usage of Space

Together with the Svan population this workshop asks how the future usage of tradition and culture in space has to be conceived. In cooperation with German and Georgian faculties of ethnography and architecture.



Editorial Workshop by FROH! in Ukraine, 2018 (Photo by Ira Yeroshoko)

Contact

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Froh! e.V. is a non-profit association that has made its goal to stir the processes of social formation and develop journalistic formats that open discourses about human values. We organize an international workshop-series addressing journalists and self-publishers, develop international transmedia projects and publish magazines and websites. We collaborated with partners like German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Goethe Institute Georgia, DVV international and many others.

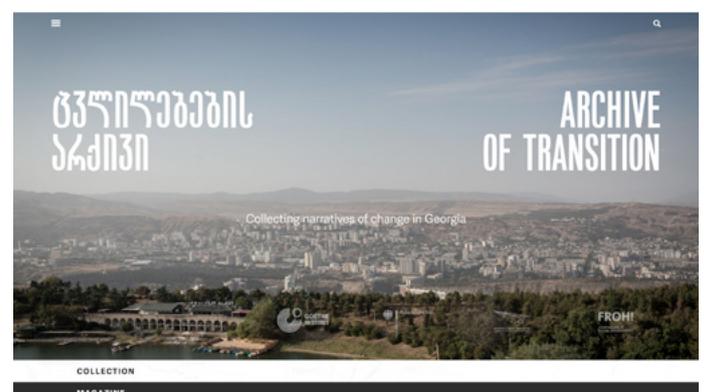
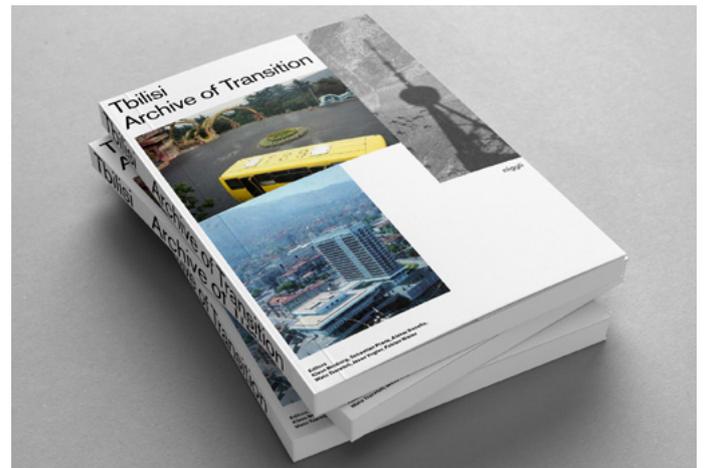
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The transmedia project **Tbilisi Archive of Transition** collects narratives of change in Tbilisi and was realized from 2015-2018 by an international team under the lead of German NGO FROH!