



## FARO CONVENTION LAB – MISSION HIGHLIGHTS

Tbilisi, Kvemo Machkhaani (Sighnaghi), Georgia

2-5 October 2017

### Introduction:

The Faro Lab - Georgia “*Faro Convention approach and democratic socio-economic models for community engagement*” took place in Tbilisi and Machkhaani on 2-5 October 2017 with the participation of 40 persons from 10 countries, including the experts and local community members (40%). Examples from Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine and Belarus were discussed among participants in order to share similar community-based initiatives in their respective countries. While all these initiatives were invited to further their Faro Convention process, a specific observation and rapid assessment was carried out in Kvemo Machkhaani in line with the Faro Convention criteria.

The Faro Lab in Georgia is considered rather a rich experience, as it reached out to all stakeholders including the Ministry of Culture, regional governor, municipality officials, civil society representatives and community members. The constructive cooperation between the local organisation Civic Initiative (CI) and the Ministry of Culture was well noted, which also made the Faro Lab very effective. The opportunity to meet the authorities at ministerial level and community members in the context of the same event is not usual, and provides participants with a wider perspective on the same issue.

The specific focus on

- Dialogue to foster collaboration between local and central government, local people and local business and other local actors
- Democratic Socio-Economic models (including business community) for community engagement

was addressed through two separate workshops, as well as specific examples from the community members and examples from other parts of Georgia, including Dusheti and Chiatura.

Having recently finalised a regional COMUS project with five countries, the event also drew the linkages between the COMUS conclusions and follow up actions in line with the Faro Convention Process. While innovative community-based initiatives were introduced by the local organisation CI, a number of challenges were discussed among participants, including a significant number of female participants from the local community. Each participant had the opportunity to reflect on these challenges and draft a list of actions to take place for their respective areas of concern.

During the workshops, visits and discussions in Tibaani and Machkhaani, particular attention was given to the local situation in Machkhaani, which represents characteristics of a rural settlement with limited resources in a classical sense.

The purpose of this note is to:

- Share some observations on the situation in Machkhaani, as an example of a rural settlement with significant narratives, heritage assets and potentials for sustainable local development based on local heritage resources;
- Offer recommendations for possible uses of the Faro Convention approach in Machkhaani and surrounding areas;
- Further examine the role of women and heritage in local development and quality of life, which could be discussed with other CoE identified practices to develop the good practices and possible workshop models to be used in the Faro Convention Action Plan.

### Findings:

- Inhabitants in Machkhaani express their financial concerns for basic needs, therefore may not see the heritage assets as resources to improve their quality of life at this time. This calls for a constructive dialogue to identify their common interests (e.g. norms for quality of life in the

area) and gradually a shared vision that could channel all the efforts with limited resources in a more systematic manner.

- The community enjoys and participates in the local events, sharing an inspirational story of the Machkhaani Theatre that was built by the community for the community. Although there has been degradation of the building over the years, it remains a significant site for the community members, also recognised by the national authorities.
- Theatrical and musical events organised at the Theatre are a priority for the community members and could be a common point of interest for long lasting community engagement, if the unemployment and income generation, as number one concern, can be connected to this issue.
- A well-conceived and organically grown “knowledge café” (coordinated by Nana Bagalishvili) presents a number of opportunities for community involvement and could play a facilitator role in the development of a community based local development plan.
- The staff of the Ministry of Culture has a good grasp of the Faro Convention and expresses an interest in working with Machkhaani and the surrounding area, to promote it as a good practice for the implementation of the Convention.
- Machkhaani is very close to Signagi and Tibaani, which are already well known and offer a number of attractions to visitors.
- Wine from the region has a positive reputation.
- The concept of the village with its unique theatre and history of mobilisation is a resource to be further explored in an innovative manner.
- There seems to be a strong and interested presence of female community members who have expressed their concerns, and who could be potential agents for change.
- The Signaghi municipality and the governor of the Kakheti region are familiar with the theatre and have expressed their willingness to support the rehabilitation process.
- There might be challenges of required human resources at local level if a planned development process is put into action. Although the CI organisation exhibits great enthusiasm and efforts to lead some of the actions, it may not be adequate.
- Existing heritage and its importance for the communities varies and it may require some work to come to terms with what exists and what can be done with local resources.
- The idea of offering hospitality services including bed and breakfast, guidance, gastronomy, etc. is present, although this calls for further reflection based on a plan.

### **Recommendations:**

- With its distinctive history of community involvement and community mobilisation, the village of Kvemo Machkhaani can use its assets to its advantage, beginning **a structured dialogue process** between all the stakeholders (inhabitants, the municipality, business community, the Kakheti region, etc.) in order to reconsider their heritage and its value to communities. This dialogue process could take place at various levels, working towards a shared vision.
- The initial engagement of stakeholders in the dialogue process does not need to follow a traditional path. Theatre and music could be a strong point to **bring communities together** to begin the dialogue process among community members. The use of nature and landscape, as well as the Theatre premises, could be considered as a stage. An example of this can be located at <http://breadandpuppet.org/>. In addition, there are similar examples in many European countries. The area could become home to artists, workshops, performers of such productions where the combination of heritage sites, theatre and music, wine and food could be brought together in a comprehensive programme following a comprehensive dialogue process.
- As Machkhaani is a small village, **a regional strategy** would be more useful for future development activities. As a result of a dialogue process, a social contract document (a regional heritage plan) could be introduced, where planned actions and projects are aligned with this plan. The Marseilles and Viscri experiences could be useful in working towards this goal. It would be good to initiate an external overview or diagnostic, an appreciation visit and more detailed analysis for the consideration of community members.
- **A study visit or exchange** with the village of Viscri, Romania where use of local heritage resources and developing pride in what they have, rehabilitation of the town, as well as improvement of hospitality services could be a good starting point. The NGO CI could play a facilitator role in this process, assisting with the consolidation of ideas and presenting to all stakeholders. An example of a regional heritage plan (an Irish model, adapted to a Balkan

case) could be found at <https://rm.coe.int/16806ae6b4>. It is essential that community members play an active role in the development of this plan, and do not merely participate in a decision or plan that has already been elaborated. A simulation activity was conducted during the workshop and the results can be seen in Annex 1.

- The COMUS method in Georgia could also be applied to arrive at non-physical, non-monumental actions. Particularly, the reference plan as a means of assessing current situation, conditions in Machkhaani, developing a common vision and objectives, defining actions could be subject to the structured dialogue process.
- A **women's cooperative**, focusing on a number of issues could be conceived as a local organisation. The CI, inspired by the history of the theatre, plays a crucial role in mobilising the community and the knowledge café is an important place to initiate community based actions. A local organisation, possibly established and led by interested women in the community could be coached by CI and ensure the local ownership of the process. It should be noted that such an approach is significantly more challenging but more sustained, in line with the tradition in the village. By focusing on such an initiative, local dynamics and gender relations should be well analysed. While a gender and heritage synthesis would be interesting to explore, men by no means should be excluded from the process. A prototype project (a festival or summer camp) should be tested by this potential group/organisation to be established (recalling the Hotel du Nord experience).
- The Civic Initiatives goes through the Faro Convention process and self-assessment, introducing the **Knowledge Café** as a good practice. The CI should maintain its crucial role as facilitator, linking the region to national authorities and international actors.

### **Actions:**

- Set up a structured dialogue process in order to discuss multiple narratives, develop a shared vision and a programme with active community participation. Propose a programme for collaboration with the CI.
- Consult with the colleagues in Tibaani and Signagi on the potential synergies and complementarity.
- Organise exchange visits with Viscri in Romania. The Faro Convention Network (FCN) gathering in December 2017 could be an opportunity for a first meeting, and consultations could be carried out through skype discussions to start with.
- If not already done, consider including Machkhaani in the European Heritage Days programme of the government of Georgia.
- Continue to collect stories and record them over time through publications. It is essential to set up the itineraries to share community life and stories for the visitors.
- Review the concept of a regional heritage plan and reflect on the possibility with the local stakeholders. You may visit the following website for inspiration for a number of issues related to heritage governance <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/pcdk-publications> as well as films for promotion and understanding the processes <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/pcdk-publications>.
- For the rehabilitation process, discuss with COMUS pilot towns about the methodology, and use them as resources persons. COMUS related documentaries and publications can be located at <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/comus/outputs> and <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/comus/videos>.
- Explore the possibility of beginning a women's cooperative. Such an initiative should have multiple elements in improving the quality of community life, including access to fields to collect the fruits and crops (e.g. the production of organic juice to sell through restaurants in nearby towns, or starting a "from the farm to the table" programme for interested customers in Tbilisi), working with authorities on public transportation, rehabilitation of the theatre and surrounding area, development of bed and breakfast and hospitality services, as well as cleaning up the village. It is inevitable that they would need substantial help to be operational, and this is where Civic Initiative will be crucial in mobilising other stakeholders. Short-term summer programs would be useful to assess the situation and required changes and preparations to be made.
- Introduce good practices to the Faro Convention Network through the CoE Secretariat, including the use of social media and heritage, knowledge cafés and mind maps.

### Annex 1:

The participants of the Faro Lab, during a simulation activity, offered the following points of action if they moved to Machkhaani:

Collectively establish an action plan with an integrated approach for the rehabilitation of the town and theatre. While the theatre could be the centrepiece, it should not be considered alone. Some of the actions are clustered into four categories, as follows;

#### Data collection/sharing

- Collect local stories from families to share
- Value the history of the theatre through the writing of its history and photographic work
- Share experiences with other initiatives
- Collect heritage related information

#### Capacity development

- Training of 20 men and 20 women for hospitality (host school)
- English language courses for residents
- Develop local cooperation with other citizens' initiatives
- Develop guest houses and hospitality services

#### Fundraising / promotion

- Research investment opportunities and development of an "investment map"
- Organise a local theatre troupe and musicians to promote local heritage across the country and raise funds
- Set up a market with local products
- Promote local wine with artistic labels and use local stories for marketing
- Continue with theatre/music festivals by the increased involvement of community members (integrated approach)
- Set up a tourist route (heritage walks) with community members

#### Public Space / Infrastructure

- Beautification of public squares, theatre and school
- Making the Theatre a community/cultural centre
- Improve public transport
- Have a holistic view for visitors, including public hygiene, waste management, animal care
- Organise walks to clean up the village
- Create dialogue spaces for community consultation
- Develop community gardens in the village as a public space

Some memorable quotes from the participants:

“Someone or some trigger is needed to instigate change in perceptions and ways of working”

“Revive forgotten stories”

“Recognise the existence of multiple identities and multiple narratives”

“Be careful of the risk that you might succeed”

“Identify the assets and their potentials”

“Create a heritage committee”

“Reveal the hidden city”

“Be aware of the value of self-documenting methods”

“Need to train the trainers”