

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE:

UNFOLDING THE CITY.

ART AS AN AGENT OF TRANSFORMATION

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UNFOLDING THE CITY.
ART AS AN AGENT OF TRANSFORMATION

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PREFACE / FOREWORD

Unfolding the City. Art as an Agent of Transformation is the first international conference organized by the Center for the Arts of the Albanian Academy of Sciences. The event addresses the ongoing transformations of the urban image, with particular attention to the profound changes currently reshaping Albanian cities. More specifically, the conference aims to investigate these processes by examining the impact of contemporary art on the city and on its transformations at social, political, and urban levels.

What is the impact of art on the transformation of the city? What tools and methodologies does art employ when engaging with public space? Which spaces can art claim within the contemporary urban condition? In a society increasingly controlled and divided between physical and digital realms, does art in public space still have a meaningful role? And how can interventions in the physical fabric of our ever-changing cities contribute to the creation of new perspectives and alternative approaches to reality?

Albania's modern history is deeply marked by its fifty-year communist dictatorship, during which all forms of artistic and cultural expression were strictly regulated by state propaganda. This control extended to the development of the urban and architectural landscape and to public art, which functioned primarily as an instrument of ideological dissemination.

Today, Albanian society is engaged in a complex process of redefining its identity as it navigates political and economic transition. In recent decades, the country has attempted to absorb rapid and substantial shifts within a remarkably short time. In this context, art has increasingly come to occupy a significant position within theoretical discourse concerning the evolution of cities: one trajectory aligned with dominant political ideologies, the other articulating forms of counter-narration and critical resistance.

The conference **Unfolding the City. Art as an Agent of Transformation** seeks to intensify this debate and broaden the scope of inquiry into the relationship between art and the city in Albania, while also examining how similar dynamics unfold across other European and Balkan contexts. The event aims to deepen our understanding of the perception of public art and its capacity to generate dialogue, by foregrounding the conceptual, political, and social dimensions of artistic practices alongside the aesthetic experiences they produce.

CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

History has shown that a work of art may be embraced or rejected by the community, and that it can play a crucial role in urban activism, in “right to the city” movements, and in the shaping and expansion of urban environments. A critical examination of the role that public art can, and perhaps should, play within the policies that govern the development of cities is now more necessary than ever.

This need becomes even more pressing in a context such as Albania, which has transitioned from fifty years of a communist-style dictatorial regime (Albania was the last country of the former Eastern Bloc to see the fall of its regime) to a capitalist democracy, where a neoliberal approach is increasingly shaping social practices and redefining the physical and symbolic form of the city.

The conference **Unfolding the City. Art as an Agent of Transformation** is structured into four thematic sessions and two practitioner-focused sections, distributed across two days of work.

Day 1 – Morning Session

The Non-Univocal Image of the City

To describe the image of the city as “non-univocal” is to recognize that the city is an organism that cannot be reduced to a single, coherent representation whether architectural, urbanistic, or experiential. As Kevin Lynch noted, the city can be understood as a time machine; walking through it means traversing layers of time sedimented in buildings, infrastructures, and spatial practices.

This session explores the inherently multifaceted and dynamic nature of the city’s image, emphasizing its capacity to generate new meanings and new modes of perception.

Day 1 – Afternoon Session

Public Space as a Space of Non-Representation

This session examines, from both artistic and architectural perspectives, the different positions regarding the possibility of being “represented” within public space.

At the core of this discussion lies the question of how to remain non-aligned with the implicit narrative constructed by neoliberalism a narrative that operates subtly, often by concealing itself, and that risks codifying and categorizing every intervention enacted within urban space.

Contributors address the political and aesthetic tensions that emerge

when public space becomes a site of negotiation between visibility, representation, and refusal.

Practitioners Session — End of Day 1

The first practitioner-focused session gathers artists and curators directly engaged in the production of public space interventions.

The presentations explore the city through the eyes of artists, encouraging a radical rethinking of the conception, design, and experience of public spaces. The city is considered as a model, a paradigm, and an indispensable framework through which to understand the evolution of sociocultural dynamics both in their present configurations and their future developments.

The session also engages with psychogeographic and *dérive* practices inspired by Situationism, and with the notion of the counter-monument as an alternative mode of inhabiting and signifying the city.

Day 2 — Morning Session

The Monument: A Repeating Failure

This session investigates the impact of transformations in public space on symbolic and aesthetic realms, particularly those related to collective memory, public assembly, and monumentality.

It examines the notion of the monument across different historical moments, with a specific focus on its instrumentalization during the communist regime in Albania. A historical excursus through the work of several key Albanian artists illuminates how the monument has repeatedly failed to stabilize meaning, identity, and collective narratives, yet continues to reappear as a contested and powerful device.

Day 2 — Afternoon Session

Public Space as a Space of Independence

This session explores the idea of public space as a potential space of independence. But independence from what? From which systems do artists operate, and how do these systems influence the codification of their artistic production?

What does it mean today for an artist to be responsible for their actions, for the places they choose to activate, and for the institutional or ideological frameworks within which (or against which) they position themselves?

Finally, the question is raised whether public space can ever truly be independent, or whether it is itself a deeply codified arena. These reflections aim to open a broader debate on the spaces and temporalities of artistic

production and exhibition, and on the shifting value and public reception of work produced outside institutional frameworks.

Practitioners Session — Closing the Conference

The final practitioner-focused session is dedicated to the use of the body in public space, addressing notions of the ephemeral artwork, collective participation, acceptance, and the accidental encounter between the artwork and the public.

The session also discusses the challenges of documenting and preserving the memory of such works within the contexts in which they unfolded, raising questions about visibility, legacy, and the afterlife of public interventions.



***Naming the Bridge: Procedural Feminism and the Politics of Visibility
in Post-Socialist Skopje***
Melody Robine

Introduction

This paper explores the intersection of public and participatory art, urban space, and feminist practice through the case of Hristina Ivanoska's ongoing project *Naming the Bridge: Rosa Plaveva and Nakie Bajram*. Initiated in 2004, the project addresses the marginalization of women in Skopje's symbolic and physical landscape¹ and questions the role of contemporary art in redefining the city's urban environment. By proposing to name a newly constructed bridge [figure 1] uniting the Muslim and Orthodox parts of the city after Rosa Plaveva and Nakie Bajram, two early advocates of women's rights and literacy, of Macedonian and Turkish descent respectively, Ivanoska challenges dominant narratives of urban development and the patriarchal logic underlying the naming of public spaces.

In reinvesting these historical figures, Ivanoska engages a complex nexus of memory, identity, and civic participation. Her proposal to the municipal authorities of Skopje to name the new bridge after these two women becomes the basis of a long-term research-based artistic process that combines historical inquiry, bureaucratic documentation, and performative gesture. Conceived in the aftermath of the 2001 conflict that divided the city and the country along ethnic and religious lines, the project speaks directly to the need for re-establishing a silenced dialogue between communities separated by the river Vardar.

As such, *Naming the Bridge* offers a telling example of an individual artistic initiative that approaches the question of women's emancipation with historical sensitivity rather than ideological antagonism. It proposes to build, both metaphorically and materially, a bridge between conflicting cultural and intellectual positions. Through this act, Ivanoska's work foregrounds the political and emancipatory force of often-dismissed and disavowed twentieth-century histories, to confront the rise of nationalism and inter-ethnic conflict in post-socialist North Macedonia and, more broadly, across the former Yugoslav space.

Through this lens, the paper examines how public art can act as an agent of urban transformation—rewriting collective memory, producing alternative narratives, and creating spaces for marginalized voices. Using *Naming the Bridge* as a case study, it aims to reflect on the complex entanglement between political and cultural processes of renaming and the broader dynamics of identity formation and destabilization in North Macedonia since the fall of Yugoslavia. It also situates this case within a wider implication of renaming as both a symbolic and political act

¹ See Sofia Grigoriadou, « Heroes On Pedestals And "Heroines Of Our Time" At The Woman Fighter Park », *EthnoAnthropoZoom/ЕтноАнтропоЗум* 21, no 21 (2022): 21, <https://doi.org/10.37620/EAZ2121157g/>, Biljana Volchevska, « Gendered Heritage in the Material Culture of Post-Socialist Skopje », *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 27, no 7 (2021): 752-63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2020.1858141>.

— one that not only reconfigures visual culture but also reshapes collective and individual subjectivities², specifically in times of political transformation³.

Finally, this paper also interrogates the relationship between participatory art and policy-making, particularly in the context of citizen-led initiatives such as Ivanoska's. Can artists influence urban planning and decision-making processes? What happens when artistic procedures enter the domain of governance? By engaging these questions, the paper contributes to a broader understanding of how feminist art practices not only reshape public space but also intervene in the political, cultural, and historical narratives of the city. Situating *Naming the Bridge* within Ivanoska's broader practice in the urban space, this paper argues that the work articulates a form of what I call *procedural feminism*, a mode of artistic engagement that operates within institutional frameworks to expose their contradictions and to reclaim their capacity for civic meaning.

1. From Mapping to Naming: Feminist Investigations of Urban Invisibility

Ivanoska's engagement with naming and with women's visibility in the urban space is a long-standing concern. Indeed, before turning bureaucracy into an artistic medium, Ivanoska had already treated the city itself as an investigative field. Her early works laid the conceptual foundations for *Naming the Bridge*, identifying visibility — and its systemic absence — as a site of feminist struggle.

Mapping the Gendered City (2001)

Since the late 1990s, Hristina Ivanoska has developed an artistic practice that combines conceptual research, textual archives, and performative gestures to address questions of how public memory is created and controlled, how citizens participate in its making, and how women's presence is rendered (in)visible within the social and urban fabric of North Macedonia. Her work belongs to a generation of artists who emerged in the aftermath of Yugoslavia's dissolution and turned to interdisciplinary, research-based methods to confront the historical and ideological fractures that shape public space.

For Ivanoska, art functions as an investigative practice: a way to ask how knowledge about citizenship, gender, and history is produced, stored, and legitimized. Her early works already bear this investigative impulse.

2 Lawrence D. Berg et Jani Vuolteenaho, *Critical Toponymies: The Contested Politics of Place Naming* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009).

3 see Maoz Azaryahu, « German reunification and the politics of street names: the case of East Berlin », *Political Geography* 16, no 6 (1997): 479-93, for the question of the symbolic power of renaming in Berlin after the reunification ; or Duncan Light, « Street names in Bucharest, 1990–1997: exploring the modern historical geographies of post-socialist change », *Journal of Historical Geography* 30, no 1 (2004): 154-72, in the case of Romania ; or the important volume covering toponymic dynamics in the region cases de Rapper, Gilles, et Pierre Sintès, éd. *Nommer et classer dans les Balkans*. Athènes: École française d'Athènes, 2008.

One decisive example was her participation in the 2001 exhibition *Shining the site*, curated by Sonja Abadziewa⁴ [Figure 2 and 3]. The exhibition invited ten women artists to create interventions in Skopje's public space, introducing a gendered prism that was, at the time, largely unprecedented. Apart from Suzana Milevska's project *Capital and Gender*⁵, few initiatives had approached the city as a terrain where gender, representation, and civic identity intersected.

For this exhibition, Ivanoska undertook a quantitative mapping of Skopje's streets. Her research revealed that out of 1,078 streets, only twenty-four were named after women—including symbolic dedications such as International Women's Day and the Antifascist Women's Front (AFŽ). More tellingly, not a single boulevard, bridge, or principal axis of circulation bore a woman's name. In a 2005 text, Ivanoska identified this as "another example of the marginalization of women's significance and role as a crucial factor in building our country," comparing their absence in the city's onomastics to their marginalization in politics and public life⁶.

The artist presented her findings in the form of documentation displayed directly in the city: enlarged lists, statistics, and photographic fragments affixed in situ, turning empirical data into symbolic markers. These minimal, easily reproducible gestures functioned both as information and as critique. They made visible how naming structures collective perception: in Skopje, as in many (post-socialist) capitals, the urban lexicon itself partly delineates the limits of recognition. Names in the city are not descriptive; they are prescriptive—acts of ownership that define whose histories are commemorated and whose remain unspoken.

Naming as Artistic Method

That same year, Ivanoska extended her inquiry for the Fifth Biennial of Young Artists. To highlight what she termed "another example of the marginalization of women's significance," she created the first virtual "women's boulevard," ironically naming it after herself. She fabricated a street sign following official Macedonian standards and titled it *Boulevard Hristina Ivanoska - The Beast [svevot]*, borrowing the socialist convention of using nicknames for public figures. The sign was installed beside the main entrance of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje, an institution that, over the previous decade, had also been marginalized and stripped of influence. The gesture thus produced a double commentary: on the symbolic exclusion of women from the city's geography and on the cultural marginalization of contemporary art itself.

4 Abadziewa, Sonja. Cat. exp. *Shining the Site* [Ozaruvanje na mestoto]. Skopje, 2001.

5 Milevska, Suzana. *Capital and gender : international project for art and theory*, Skopje, 24-27 January 2001 / [Kapital i pol : međunaroden proekt za umetnosti i teorija]. Musée de la ville de Skopje [Музеј на град Скопје], 2001.

6 Ivanoska, Hristina. « Rosa Plaveva and Nakie Bajrami [Роса Плавева и Накие Бајрами] | Архива ЗаУм ». Forum [Форум] (Skopje), July 2005.

By producing and installing an official-looking street sign, Ivanoska temporarily assumed the role of the absent state. She enacted, through artistic initiative, what the administration had failed to accomplish: recognizing women as civic subjects and contributors to national history.

These early projects already articulated the questions that would shape Naming the Bridge: How do names operate as instruments of power and exclusion? What forms of agency remain available to citizens, and especially to women, within such symbolic networks? And how can artistic intervention activate naming as both method and critique?

II. Bureaucracy as Medium: The Bridge Proposal and the Fiction of Participation

This second stage of Ivanoska's investigation marked a shift from mapping invisibility to directly engaging with the city's mechanisms of governance. She decided to enter the administrative sphere itself — testing how far a citizen, and more specifically an artist, could act within the official procedures that produce (or refuse) visibility.

The Bridge Proposal (2004–2005)

The project began when the Municipality of Skopje published a call (without any expiry date) in the daily newspaper *Utrinski Vesnik* (The Morning newspaper) inviting citizens to propose names for streets, squares, and bridges. After a year of research, Ivanoska submitted her application on 28 April 2005, complying with every formal requirement: she completed the official forms, attached biographical documentation, and wrote a letter proposing that two early twentieth-century feminists, Rosa Plaveva (1878–1956) and Nakie Bajram (1889–1957), lend their names to a new bridge over the Vardar River. [figure 1].

Both figures were central to early socialist feminism in Macedonia. Rosa Plaveva [figure 4], born in 1878 in Veles (a city 50 km from Skopje), was deeply involved with the Turkish community and, together with her husband, co-founded the first socialist association in Macedonia. She also established an association of Muslim women, where around fifty women, mostly officers' wives, met weekly. Her home became a significant center where several hundred women learned to read and write, as well as a forum for debates on women's rights at the turn of the century. In 1908, she organized the first public demonstration against the compulsory veiling of Muslim women, which was violently repressed. Nakie Bajram [figure 5] was considerably younger than Plaveva. Born in 1889, she joined Plaveva's association, initially through her husband, a friend and comrade of Iljev Plavev, Rosa Plaveva's spouse. She in turn led literacy campaigns, particularly after the Second World War. In 1947, the two women organized and took part in a gathering at which more than 400 Muslim women removed their veils in public—an action that was again severely repressed. Although a 1951 law ultimately prohibited the veil in socialist Yugoslavia, its fraught reception among Muslim communities, who perceived it as an imposition by the state, led Bajram to regard the initiative as a failure and to

withdraw from public life.

Together they embodied a female solidarity that crossed class, ethnic, and religious divisions⁷.

Ivanoska's proposal thus reintroduced these figures into the public debate, situating their memory within the very geography of the cityan archetype of connection—. Tellingly, only a small side street in Skopje bore the name of Rosa Plaveva; Bajram had vanished altogether from collective memory. Ivanoska's approach brought these absences back into view. In her submission, Ivanoska explained that she wished to honour "two exceptionally brave and self-sacrificing fellow citizens [...] who actively participated in the emancipation of women in this part of the Balkans during the early 20th century"⁸.

The timing was not incidental. The echoes of the 2001 conflict between the Macedonian army and Albanian forces were still tangible in the city — a crisis that had entrenched ethnic divisions and accelerated the re-ethnicisation of public space ; the Vardar continued to symbolize an ethnic and spatial divide⁹. Distrust between communities lingered, and public discourse around identity, religion, and women's roles had grown more conservative. The resurgence of veiling among young Muslim women had become a recurrent media topic, often framed in moralizing or nationalist terms. Against this backdrop, Ivanoska's proposal was profoundly political. By invoking two women, one Christian Macedonian, one Muslim Turk, who had collaborated across difference a century earlier, she offered a counter-narrative of coexistence rooted in local history. Very tellingly, her proposal not only focus on a major axis of communication, but on a bridge — a particularly eloquent archetype of connection—linking the two parts of the divided city. Her gesture re-connected contemporary debates on gender and visibility with the region's longer emancipatory traditions.

Equally significant was her decision to work on almost forgotten foundational feminist figures of the twentieth century, therefore also representing the absence of women from historiography — treating these documents as both archive and argument. Her proposal thus functioned on two levels: as an official submission and as an artistic act. It was, as she described it, "a continuation of the same project initiated in 2001"¹⁰, extending her investigation of women's names from documentation to institutional procedure.

By inserting an artistic proposal into a municipal procedure, Ivanoska blurred the

7 Veskovic-Vangeli, Vera. « Rosa Plaveva ». In *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms*, édité par Francisca De Haan, Krassimira Daskalova, et Anna Loutfi. Central European University Press, 2006.

8 Ibid.

9 Irena Avirovic Bundalevska et Ivana Dragovic, « Implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement: Trends in Tolerance Among the Youth in the Republic of North Macedonia », *Religious dialogue and cooperation* 1 (2020): 11-27

10 Hristina Ivanoska, « Rosa Plaveva and Nakie Bajrami [Роса Плавева и Накие Бајрами] », *Forum [Форум]* (Skopje), July 2005.

line between civic participation and artistic performance—turning administrative space into both medium and subject.

Formal Inclusion, Structural Exclusion: A Fiction of Participation

What followed was less an open discussion than a formal dead end. Inside the municipality, no office seemed to know who was competent; the file was redirected repeatedly. Months later, Ivanoska located the proposal, effectively buried without action. Subsequent conversations clarified the paradox: the commission for naming streets, squares, bridges, and other infrastructure had been formed and had operated without legal status; de facto, it did not exist. The Constitutional Court subsequently annulled its “decisions” as invalid. Meanwhile, the bridge was built and opened without a name¹¹.

This discovery became the conceptual hinge of the work. *Naming the Bridge* exposes the gap between the rhetoric of participation and the institutional structures that render it inoperative.

Her project thus became a mirror of systemic dysfunction—a documentation of the symbolic and administrative processes through which invisibility is maintained. In this sense, while seeking inclusion into the existing symbolic order, Ivanoska exposes the procedural void through which visibility is selectively granted or denied. Her use of bureaucratic forms is not mimetic but agonistic¹², revealing how the public sphere is always shaped by exclusions that masquerade as neutrality.

The artist’s experience confirms that institutions continued to regard citizens primarily as voters, not interlocutors or collaborators. In this light, the work functions as a diagnostic: starting from a genuine desire to participate, it exposes both the fragility of participatory practices and the tight coupling between naming, place-making, and power. It speaks to the change (or absence of..), between socialist and current neoliberal administrative procedures regarding processes of urban transformation¹³, and of patterns where formal inclusion coexists with structural exclusion.

At stake was not merely the absence of women’s names on street signs, but the broader mechanisms through which the city’s symbolic order is maintained. The act of naming is, in this sense, not symbolic but juridical and epistemological.

11 Conversation with the artist, 2024.

12 Mouffe, Chantal. *On the Political*. Routledge, 2005.

13 Adaptation of post socialist country to neoliberalism, and to democratic modes of participation is always tied to specific trajectories, specifically in the very particular case of post-Yugoslav spaces. As stated by Zoltán Bajmócy in the case of Hungary: « The post-socialist legacy may have some indirect influence on the identified factors. But most of them [...] have accumulated since the regime change. It suggests that the post-socialist legacy allows for multiple paths [...]. » In « Participation in Urban Planning and the Post-Socialist Legacy. Revisiting Maier’s Hypothesis Through the Case of Hungary », *DETUROPE - The Central European Journal of Tourism and Regional Development* 13, no 1 (2021): 4-23, <https://doi.org/10.32725/det.2021.001>.

To name is to confer existence within the legal and spatial fabric of the city. It determines what is remembered, who is counted, and who belongs. Ivanoska's proposal performs precisely this threshold operation between inscription and erasure. The bureaucratic apparatus that prevents the bridge from being named after Plaveva and Bajram is the same mechanism that excludes them from history. The artist's insistence — her submission, patient correspondence, her retrieval of the file — constitutes a feminist practice of persistence, what Sara Ahmed calls "the willfulness of the complaint": a refusal to let silence and contempt have the last word¹⁴.

Yet *Naming the Bridge* is not limited to procedural critique. By mobilizing the instruments of bureaucracy, Ivanoska mirrors its form while displacing its function. The project's documentation (letters, forms, and (un)official replies) is presented not as evidence of failure but as a new archive of civic imagination: rather than rejecting the institutional frame, she occupies it from within, exposing its contradictions and reclaiming it as a site of contestation.

The city's procedural fabric thus becomes both the material and the metaphor of the artwork. To engage with its failures is to expose how post-socialist democracies manage participation through delay, deferral, and selective transparency. Her gesture does not resolve these contradictions; it holds them in suspension.

Performing Administration: From File to Choreography

But this democratic simulacra was not the end of the project, and Ivanoska deliberately sought a broader civic audience — beyond the administrative gaze, which had been the project's sole audience up to that point. First, she published a detailed article in the newspaper *Forum* in 2005¹⁵, including her letter and the complete dossier sent to the municipality [figure 6].

The project subsequently turned into an exhibition at the Museum of contemporary art in Skopje [figure 7], which presented the documentation of her exchanges with the municipality, photographic archives of the two protagonists and the envisioned bridge, as well as texts that she had written on the process — fully conferring to the civic project the status of an art work.

In a second time, a three-channel video was produced and presented in London at the Foundation for Women's Art (FWA), as part of the event "Art Under Construction: the Balkan in Context"¹⁶ curated by Suzana Milevska.

The work brings together in a visual form her historical findings on Plaveva and Bajram and the correspondence with the city, like in the previous occurrences. But this time, the filmic work links these materials to her physical experience of cross-

14 Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Duke University Press, 2017).

15 Hristina Ivanoska, « Rosa Plaveva and Nakie Bajrami [Роса Плавева и Накие Бајрами] », *Forum [Форум]* (Skopje), July 2005.

16 Organized by the School of Arts in collaboration with the School of Social Sciences at City University London.

ing the still-nameless bridge. Together these elements formed an archive that mirrors and subverts the original bureaucratic process. Through the video, the work also acquired a performative and personal dimension. The filmic installation shows us Ivanoska repeatedly walking and cycling across the unnamed bridge, linking her physical presence to the two historical figures, while the camera which accompanies her captures duration rather than destination. Her movement enacts what the administration failed to implement: the simple act of linking two sides. Each crossing becomes a quiet affirmation that connection, if not officially decreed, can still be performed.

III. Counter-Archives of Emancipation: Feminist Histories and Procedural Resistance

Emerging within what theoreticians have famously described as the *archival turn* in contemporary art¹⁷, *Naming the Bridge* engages the archive not as a static repository but as a living, procedural field. While artists of this generation have often turned to archival research to confront institutional amnesia and to construct counter-histories, Ivanoska extends this logic into the civic realm: she treats archival labour and bureaucratic process as parallel processes of (in)visibility.

Naming the Bridge thus also operates as a feminist re-writing of history: a counter-archive that reconnects forgotten figures, socialist legacies, and post-socialist conditions. By recovering forgotten figures and tracing their erasure, the artist enacts what can be described as a feminist archaeology — and re-enacting — of knowledge.

A(nother) tale of epistemic invisibility

The work's subsequent trajectory is revealing. From 2005 onward, the names of Nakie and Rosa began to recur in press coverage (especially each year around 8 March - International women's day) suggesting an indirect cultural effect ; while accounts on social media proved that city officials had in mind the proposal, without explicating its final destination¹⁸. Still, none of the names ended up implemented, and shortly afterward the city's symbolic agenda shifted toward other female figures (notably Mother Teresa). But Ivanoska's interest didn't stop there: she continued making her research and these figures visible, for example through a performance held in 2019 on the bridge, in the course of which she carried a street name sign in the official design, carrying both of their names in Macedonian and

17 Hal Foster, « An Archival Impulse », October 110 (2004): 3-22.

18 Conversation with the artist, 2024.

Albanian¹⁹.

Most importantly, in 2021, sixteen years after Ivanoska's original work, another bridge, outside of the city center, was eventually named Rosa Plaveva and Nakie Bajram by the city council²⁰. The gesture increased visibility while again detaching recognition from women's labour and activism in the arts that had helped reintroduce these names to public debate — in this case, Hristina Ivanoska's, as well as the work of the historian she based her research on, and the curator that worked on the project.

Indeed, when Ivanoska began researching the biographies of Rosa Plaveva and Nakie Bajram, she was struck by the near absence of documentation on either woman in public archives, museums, or libraries. Their names appeared only in scattered references—brief mentions in local histories of the socialist movement, or as footnotes in academic essays. The very act of assembling their stories became, for the artist, a process of recovering not only individual memories but an entire (gendered) dimension of Macedonia's political history of the twentieth century that had been quasi-systematically erased from public consciousness. In this sense, her gesture resists what Čaušević calls oblivion: « a pre-constructed refusal to remember that suppresses and deletes the traces of life » and organizes invisibility at the level of institutions and discourse, against which artistic actions can work as « tactics of resistance » reinscribing events in time and space.²¹ In this light, the renaming of the bridge could be seen as a success, regardless of the erasing of the artist's work on these figures over almost two decades.

Yet, a feminist reading of toponymy suggests that the critical work lies less in “who is named” than in *how* naming is decided and legitimized. Procedural feminism, in this sense, insists on intervening in the decision-form itself. As Caili Forrest shows in post-apartheid Durban, the mere insertion of women's names does not in itself disrupt power: the bureaucratic renaming can depoliticize feminist commemoration, absorbing acts of historical repair into administrative neutrality that selects, authorizes, and implements those names depoliticizes debate²².

Referring to the Foucauldian reading of archives as institutions that maintain the

19 Jasmina Kantarjieva Dimkov, « Hristina Ivanoska : Dans mes performances, Rosa Plaveva est et reste mon homologue - Free Press », *Sloboden Pечат*, 2021, read the 10 December 2024, <https://www.slobodenpechat.mk/fr/hristina-ivanoska-vo-moite-performansi-rosa-plaveva-e-i-ostanuva-mojot-pandan/>. On the question of the representation of Albanian names in Skopje, see: Manjola Zaçellari et Lirim Shabani, « Albanian Odonyms in North Macedonia as Means for Preserving Linguistic and Cultural Heritage », *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 12, no 4 (2023): 170.

20 *Ibid.*

21 Čaušević, Jasmina, éd. *Women Documented: Women and Public Life in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 20th Century*. Sarajevski otvoreni centar, 2014.

22 Forrest, Caili. « What's in a Name? A Feminist Reflection on Street Name Changes in Durban ». *Agenda* 32, no 2 (2018): 53-61.

limits of what can be thought and said, or « the general system of the formation and transformation of statements », Callahan reminds us that

“In that sense, there is an important structural similarity between the operations of the theorized archive and the institutional art world: both function as institutions in a broad sense, determining and limiting what is known and knowable, or what is and can be art at a particular time.”²³

In this way, Ivanoska’s approach defines a feminist epistemology: a way of engaging with archives and histories that exposes the politics of knowledge production. In *Naming the Bridge*, the archival labour of reconstructing Plaveva’s and Bajram’s biographies parallels the procedural labour of navigating the municipal bureaucracy. Both reveal how institutional systems—whether political or administrative—shape what becomes visible or knowable. The artist’s role, in both cases, is to intervene within these systems to expose their blind spots.

On the Emancipatory potential of the past

The recovery of these figures also reopens the question of how the socialist legacy of women’s emancipation is remembered, or forgotten, in post-Yugoslav societies. Speaking about the former Museum of the Revolution in Sarajevo, Asja Mandić stressed the emancipatory potential of socialist narratives in the wave of the broader « delegitimization of socialist past and revisionist views of history of the post-socialist European subject [which] played a key role in the (re)emergence of nationalism and right-wing politics »²⁴. In this light, we argue that Ivanoska’s project underlines the emancipatory power of invoking such genealogies of intercultural and feminist collaboration and resistance within a post-socialist context, transforming historical memory into a resource for renewed feminist imagination.

This reactivation of history stands in sharp contrast to the state’s own uses of the past. In the years following the inception of *Naming the Bridge*, Skopje underwent a massive symbolic reconstruction under the government’s Skopje²⁵ 2014 project, through which the capital was transformed into a stage for nationalist spectacle: the riverbanks filled with neoclassical façades and oversized statues of male heroes, monarchs, and saints — relying on a set of non « democratic mechanisms

23 Callahan, Sara. « When the Dust Has Settled: What Was the Archival Turn, and Is It Still Turning?1 ». *Art Journal* 83, no 1 (2024): 74-88.

24 Asja Mandić, « The Emancipatory Potential of the Yugoslav Socialist Narratives of the Second World War », *Memory Studies* 15, no 3 (2022): 563-78.

25 The project has been extensively studied by scholar, but we will cite here Andrew Graan, « Counterfeiting the Nation?: Skopje 2014 and the Politics of Nation Branding in Macedonia », *Cultural Anthropology* 28, no 1 (2013): 161-79, And Janev, Goran. “Narrating the nation, narrating the city.” *Cultural Analysis* 10 (2011): 3-21

and involvements »²⁶. In this hyper-visual environment, *Naming the Bridge* appears as a counter-monument to these a work that insists on absence rather than presence, procedure rather than spectacle.

Conclusion

Naming the Bridge encapsulates over two decades of Ivanoska's inquiry into visibility, history, and civic agency. Beginning with her 2001 mapping of women's names and culminating in the ongoing investigation of a missing file, the project continuously reimagines participation as both research and performance. Its force lies in its capacity to translate the abstractions of bureaucracy into lived experience and to turn invisibility into method. Against the visual inflation of Skopje 2014, the work operates as a counter-monument of civic engagement and endurance.

Her project provides a framework for rethinking the role of feminist public art as a form of urban activism. It raises essential questions about the power relations that govern public space and about how artistic practice can intervene in these relations by transforming bureaucratic processes into acts of civic imagination. In the context of Skopje's ongoing urban transformations and its history of ethno-national fragmentation, *Naming the Bridge* invites reflection on whether participatory art can transcend symbolic representation and become a genuine instrument of social change.

Open questions remain. One of them regards the artist's self-positioning as a Macedonian addressing the city's symbolic order, highlighting the risk of under-addressing ethnic dimensions beyond the emblematic union of Plaveva and Bajram — and leaving us with the question of the way Albanian and Turkish women artists figure within the same public sphere.

In the end, the work offers not resolution but practice. Ultimately, *Naming the Bridge* challenges us to reconsider the very grammar of participation in post-socialist democracies. By inhabiting the procedures that promise inclusion while reproducing exclusion, Ivanoska transforms bureaucracy into a field of feminist epistemology, where knowing, naming, and crossing become — artistic — acts of critique and performativity.

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1. Naming the bridge, Hristina Ivanoska, 2004



2. Shining the site, cur. Sonja Abadziewa, exhibition catalogue, April 2001



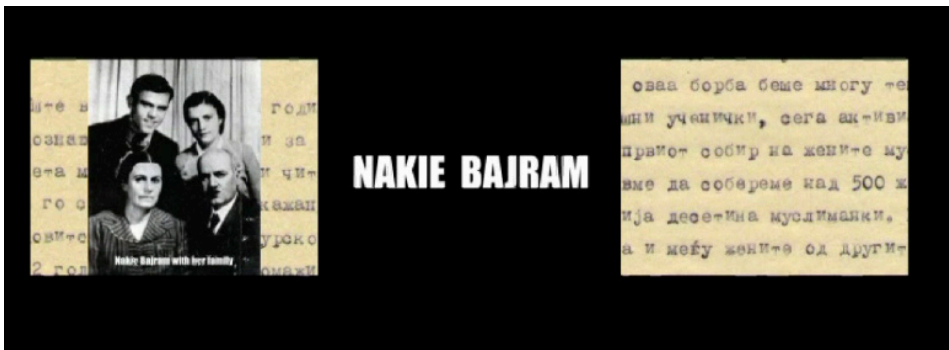
3. Hristina Ivanoska, exhibition view for the Shining site, cur. Sonja Abadziewa, 21 April 2001.



4. Naming the bridge,
Hristina Ivanoska, 2004



5. Naming the Bridge, Nakie Bajram



6. Extract, Hristina Ivanoska, « Rosa Plaveva and Nakie Bajrami [Роса Плавева и Накие Бајрами] », Forum [Форум], July 2005.



7. Hristina Ivanoska, Naming the bridge: Rosa Plaveva i Nakie Bajram, exhibition view, Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje, 2006.

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