

Spirit of Bosnia / Duh Bosne

An International, Interdisciplinary, Bilingual, Online Journal
Međunarodni, interdisciplinarni, dvojezični, online časopis

Art of Peace: The Role of Subcultures in Post-War Sarajevo

Nardina Zubanović za PUNKURU

Excerpts from a lecture at the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina

In post-war communities, urban spaces often become places where the past and the future intersect. Destroyed infrastructure, abandoned buildings, and neglected public spaces became blank canvases for subcultures that use them for creative and political expression. Graffiti, street art, skateboarding, and other forms of urban culture often occupy these spaces, creating new forms of life within the city.

The creation of free spaces resists the dominant economic and political models of urban renewal that often prioritize capitalist interests at the expense of social needs. Subcultures, with their ability to challenge the status quo and offer alternative social visions, are able to influence what the “recovery” of post-war communities will look like.

The Importance of Sarajevo's Subcultural Scene During the War

The *Rock Under Siege* concert, held on January 15, 1995, in Sloga, symbolized the indomitable spirit of youth amid chaos. More than 2,000 fans braved freezing temperatures to attend, illustrating their profound desire to celebrate life despite the ongoing terror of the Siege. Bands from the war-torn front lines arrived hungry and thirsty to perform.

Adi Sarajlić, concert host and presenter on Radio Zid, said the following about the night:

They are beautiful memories. I just got goosebumps... For me personally, it was one of the most cherished moments of my life. Yesterday, Šoba, who played in the band Sikter, reminded me of it. It was a wonderful moment, the energy of the people who gathered. It was a cult concert that will be remembered perhaps for fifty years because it was a historically significant moment for the survival of the spirit. In a way, it was the pinnacle of the scene. Now, there is a complete shift in values. Everything is filled with commercial music, while during the war, positions were

reversed—famous bands emerged from Sarajevo, while the others were the alternates who defended the city and played rock ‘n’ roll when they weren’t in the trenches.

Sarajevo has never had such a scene, and I firmly believe it will never have it again. Rock ‘n’ roll didn’t exist before or after the war.

Subcultures in Sarajevo took on a new dimension after the war. The war experiences, the traumas endured, and the daily challenges in a devastated city created a generation of young people who were searching for ways to cope with the new reality.

A prime example is the *Futura, Festival of Electronic Music* events, which took place in 1998 and 2000. Despite being ravaged by war, Sarajevo made its mark on the map of major world festivals. Some of the biggest DJs of the time, as well as the organizers of the Love Parade in Berlin, were part of Futura. Thousands of young people partied and enjoyed themselves in the destroyed *Sarajka* department store, now the ARIA Center, in the VMC Energoinvest factory, which was also destroyed, as well as in *Dom Mladih* and *Skenderija*.

The post-war subcultural scene provided Sarajevo’s youth with much-needed physical and symbolic spaces for self-expression. The city’s recovery was not just physical but also cultural and psychological, and subcultures played a crucial role in creating those spaces. Cultural centers like SARTR (Sarajevo War Theatre) and alternative venues like KUK, Barhana, Sloga, FIS, Kino Bosna and AG Club became platforms for holding concerts, exhibitions, performances, and gatherings of subcultural groups.

Through music, art, and street culture, subcultural movements became instruments of political critique and social cohesion, helping Sarajevo recover not only physically but also culturally and psychologically.

PUNKURA

Punkura is an independent art and culture publication and platform founded in 2021 in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and co-edited by Nardina Zubanović and Adrian Pecotić.

The project emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic as a response to the growing lack of accessible cultural spaces, independent media, and platforms dedicated to contemporary artistic production, youth culture, and critical social dialogue in Bosnia and Herzegovina. At a moment when cultural participation was becoming increasingly digitalised, Punkura chose to create a freely distributed physical publication that could directly reach people through everyday urban life.

Published in a pocket-sized A5 format and distributed free of charge, Punkura circulates through cultural venues, cafés, galleries, festivals, public spaces, and locations where the social and cultural life of Sarajevo takes place. Its mission is to make contemporary culture accessible beyond traditional institutional frameworks and to create opportunities for participation, visibility, and dialogue.

Punkura focuses on contemporary art, public and private space, skateboarding culture, youth participation, feminism, LGBTQ+ communities, minority voices, poetry, visual arts, independent publishing, and socially engaged cultural practices.

The publication is particularly committed to connecting institutional and independent cultural scenes, supporting emerging artists and cultural workers, documenting contemporary artistic and subcultural practices, and building international cultural networks through grassroots collaboration.

Since its founding, Punkura has published five editions, including a special pilot issue. Contributors have included artists, writers, photographers, curators, skaters, designers, and cultural workers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Austria, France, and other European contexts.

Punkura grew out of the informal cultural initiative *Kolektiv Kreativa*, a community of artists and cultural workers active in Sarajevo's independent cultural scene. This intergenerational background continues to shape the publication's collaborative and community-oriented approach, bringing together both emerging and established cultural practitioners.

In addition to publishing activities, Punkura has organised and participated in exhibitions, discussions, presentations, festivals, and public programmes. Recent activities have included participation in BLART Festival in Banja Luka, *Art for Peace* at the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo, *PitchWise Festival*, events at Boris Smoje Gallery, and various collaborations with independent cultural initiatives and institutions.

The publication has travelled and developed connections across Sarajevo, Vienna, Paris, Avignon, Arles, Marseille, Douarnenez, and other European cities, creating opportunities for exchange between local and international cultural communities.

Punkura's key institutional partners have included the Austrian Cultural Forum and the French Institute in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 2025, Punkura received the Best Project Award within the Kreativni Elan programme organised by the French Institute and IMPAKT Foundation, leading to the production of the first French-Bosnian edition of Punkura and the development of new cultural collaborations between Bosnia and Herzegovina and France.

Today, Punkura functions as both a publication and a cultural platform, reaching an audience of approximately 3,000 readers and followers through print publishing, public events, artistic collaborations, and international cultural exchange.

PUNKURA online

<https://punkura.xyz/the-content/>

<https://linktr.ee/punkurazine>

Translated by Adela Jušić.

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