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CIVIC ECOSYSTEMS INITIATIVE COLLABORATION

**DOCUMENTATION AND
DIGITIZATION:
STRATEGIES
FOR CATALYSING
MEMORY & JUSTICE
ECOSYSTEMS**

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RATIONALE

Memory activism directed both towards the past and the future is one response to the resurgence of historical revisionism about war, repression, and mass atrocity in many parts of the world. In transitional countries and established democracies, memory activists are experimenting with new forms of knowledge production and social mobilisation to challenge revisionist narratives, create memory for the future and ensure non-repetition.

In some cases, memory activism can build on justice activism and prior transitional justice processes – e.g., criminal prosecutions and truth commissions – that have investigated and documented human rights violations. In such situations, civic ecosystems focused on memory and justice often emerge organically as diverse social actors, agendas and approaches become intertwined and interdependent.

This collaboration aims to develop documentation and digitization strategies for catalysing memory and justice ecosystems in one region – the Balkans – where transitional justice has generated extensive archives and records of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

SCOPE

Our current work on documentation and digitization in the Balkans affords opportunities to develop practical strategies for resourcing and catalysing memory and justice ecosystems.

As in other global regions, the resurgence of historical revisionism in the Balkans has prompted some civic actors to push back by creating new spaces and resources for memory activism. One initiative we are involved in is the ongoing campaign of the Humanitarian Law Center (HLC) in Belgrade to establish a Research and Documentation Center – both digital and physical. We are involved in the campaign in a variety of leadership and strategic roles, which allows us to steer and shape the campaign and to generate insights and lessons from its implementation.

The vision for the Documentation Center is facts-based memory activism to change the narratives about the past. The aim is to use judicially established facts – especially those established by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) – to push back on revisionist narratives about the wars and atrocities in Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo in the 1990s, and to foster more inclusive, civic memory for the future.

The strategy involves creating new spaces and resources for memory activism by empowering social actors, creating an infrastructure for change, and catalysing movement-building in the memory space. The main building blocks of the Documentation Center are already in place:

- **Justice Archive** comprising the archive of the ICTY – including more than 115,000 records and a video archive of 9,750 trial days – and the records of war crimes trials in Serbia and Kosovo.
- **War Crimes Database** with 130,000 coded and searchable records about 38,000 victims and 2,800 perpetrators of war crimes and other human rights abuses, including 26,000 victim and witness statements taken by HLC researchers.
- **Media Archive** including media clipping, TV programmes, documentary and feature films related to the wars and atrocities in the former Yugoslavia.

From an ecosystem perspective, creating the Documentation Center is about leveraging documentation and digitization to catalyse the civic ecosystems for memory and justice in the region – providing critical resources and infrastructure for activists, researchers, artists, and other social actors. It is about the dual meaning of justice, using documentation-based memory practices to turn the outputs of legal justice into inputs for symbolic, social justice.

INSIGHTS

This collaboration will generate empirically grounded, practically focused insights about catalysing civic ecosystems for memory and justice. It will help us understand how documentation and digitization can be used to resource and empower different types of civic actors, strengthen their complementarities, and reduce denial and polarisation in society by helping to shift debates about the past from questions about the facts (whether the crimes occurred or not, how many victims etc.) towards questions about their significance or interpretation. In other words, fostering civic memory cultures for the future.

We expect that the insights will have broader relevance and application. They will feed into our ongoing work on strategies for resourcing civic ecosystems and catalysing the complementarities between diverse actors, approaches, and theories of change.

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