

Sofia theatre group explores 'invisible hands' of recycling

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Environmentalists have joined forces with a theatre group to explore the untold stories of Sofia's army of unofficial refuse collectors who eke out a living in the Bulgarian capital's ever-growing rag-and-bone trade

In a neighbourhood in downtown Sofia, theatregoers are looking for

entertainment among the city's rubbish—quite literally.

As night falls, spectators are led from one garbage bin to another, listening to the untold stories of the Bulgarian capital's army of unofficial refuse collectors.

"You can tell a home by its rubbish. Show me people's rubbish and I can tell you who they are," says one actor dragging a cart, while another describes a collector's daily routine while sitting on top of a full garbage container.

The unusual joint performance by environmental pressure group Za Zemiata and the Vox Populi documentary theatre group presents verbatim some of the accounts of the 5,000 or so people who eke out a living in Sofia's ever-growing rag-and-bone trade.

Za Zemiata, in addition to combating the stigma that brands them "vagrants", also wants to highlight the crucial role these unofficial collectors play in helping Sofia meet an EU target of recycling 50 percent of its rubbish by 2020.

Indeed, according to field studies by Za Zemiata, they handle between 70,000 and 100,000 tonnes of recyclables every year, accounting for between 41 and 57 percent of such material collected in the capital.

Most of the collectors are middle-aged or elderly, with two-thirds of them working seven days a week, carrying huge loads on foot or with small makeshift carts, and earning less than 10 leva (\$6/5 euros) a day.

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