

Dozens of clubs or cinema theaters in rural areas in Southern Tajikistan, where people used to watch movies and concerts after finishing work on the farms, fell into disrepair after the Soviet Union collapse. Many of them were remodeled; others were almost destroyed. However, the authorities promise that the clubs will resume their work soon.

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This is the club in Qabodiyon district 180 kilometers south from Dushanbe. Hundreds of residents once lined up in front of it to watch a movie or a concert. However, after the Soviet Union collapse, it fell into disrepair; parts of the club building walls was destroyed.



*The club in Qabodiyon district. Photo: CABAR.asia*

Sharifjon Nozimov, inspector at the Khatlon branch of the Tajik State Film Studio in Qabodiyon district, says that district's club did not function for over 20 years. Once he ran this club, which now has nothing but the empty walls inside.



*The hall of the club in Qabodiyon district. Photo: CABAR.asia*

During the past five years, an international organization rented the club, renovated part of the building and turned it into a center for the foreign languages classes. Nozimov told CABAR.asia:

“This organization had a temporary contract with local authorities and was engaged in foreign languages training. When the clubs were allocated to Tajikfilm, we terminated their contract. The local executive branch of the district wanted to leave the building for them, claiming that they would renovate it and hand it over to the youth committee. However, we did not agree: it should function as a club or a House of Culture again.”

According to the branch of the State Film Studio Tajikfilm in Khatlon region, many clubs were allocated to local authorities and later remodeled.



*The shabby walls of the Qabodiyon district club. Photo: CABAR.asia*

There was also a district club in Navruz jamoat in Nosiri Khisrav district of Khatlon region. According to district resident Ahmad Kobilov, 54, people loved attending the club. Then, the residents waited for good movies and spent their time after work there. Every time he passes this building, he recalls his youth and the best years of his life.



*The former club in Nosiri Khisrav district was allocated to the local authorities. Photo: CABAR.asia*

Raisa Sharipova, deputy head of Navruz jamoat in Nosiri Khisrav district, whose office is located in the former club building now, told CABAR.asia that after the 1992 civil war, the club fell into disrepair, and later it was decided to create an administrative building of it.

“Ten years ago, we rented another building, since this building was taken away from us. The condition of the club was very poor. We renovated it and turned it into an administrative building. A conference room was created in the cinema theater, and some other places were remodeled. This is no longer a club, this is a local administration building,” said Raisa Sharipova.

Representatives of Tajikfilm in Khatlon region said that a number of clubs did not stop their activities, and continue to screen movies today. Although they lack modern equipment, furniture, and facilities, residents are happy about this and do not pay attention to their condition.

According to Sharifjon Nozimov, employee of Tajikfilm branch in the Shahrtuz district, the club resumed its activities in 2018 and already has its own audience. The contracts have been signed with educational institutions; the movies for children are screened there.



*The club in the center of Shahrtuz district. Photo: CABAR.asia*

He said that this place was abandoned and in poor condition for a long time. Most of the residents of the area did not even know what kind of building it was. Since 2007, employees of the district housing and communal services have been renting premises there due to the lack of office space. The wagons and trucks park at the entrance of the club, which distorts the building's image and distracts spectators.

“During many years, the clubs were self-financing, the state did not allocate money for their maintenance. Until 018, several people wanted to open this club, but could not do that due to lack of funds. When these buildings were allocated to Tajikfilm and funded from the state budget, we renovated the building's hall and installed new equipment. Now, the club functions as the movie theater,” Sharifjon Nozimov said.

Once the Shahrtuz district's club was a crowded place; its doors are still open, but residents rarely go there.



*Shahrtuz district club. Photo: CABAR.asia*

District resident Abdugafor Khojamkulov, 60, sadly recalls the time when he and his family went to watch movies, concerts and were waiting for popular artists' arrival.

"During Soviet times, the clubs' conditions were very good. People were interested in going there and intellectually enlightening. Then, finding movie tickets was a hard task for the villagers. I with my wife and children went there every night. It was nice to rest after work and get aesthetic pleasure. Now, there are no such conditions. The clubs do not function as they once did during Soviet times," Khojamkulov said.

Azamjon Murodali, head of Tajikfilm branch in Khatlon region, says that the condition of the buildings of most of the clubs and cinemas in the region is satisfactory; some of them continue to function.

According to him, he met with the heads of a number of city and regional administrations to solve the clubs' problems. It is necessary to jointly repair and relaunch them. However, in some areas, the authorities want to keep the clubs under their jurisdiction, repair and remodel them as they wish. Many officials already did that, turning the former clubs into cultural centers.

Azamjon Murodali says Tajikfilm decided to maintain the clubs' work, as it was during Soviet times, and now the working group intends to visit all the clubs in Khatlon region.



*The restored club in the Vakhsh district. Photo: CABAR.asia*

“The employees of the Department of Culture of the Vakhsh district rent the club’s building due to the lack of work space. The situation is similar in several other areas. However, we also started screening movies there. Most of the buildings are already renovated and operate now. Of course, there are problems, but they should be solved,” Azamjon Murodali said.

Boimurod Saidmurodov, a specialist at the Department of Culture of the Khatlon region, confirmed that the offices of the administration of cultural departments are located in most of the clubs in Khatlon’s cities and districts. He said that after the Soviet Union collapse, the clubs’ equipment was stolen and the buildings were completely empty.

According to him, when the conditions of the administrative buildings worsened, the city and regional cultural activists had nowhere to work and they were forced to continue their activities in the clubs’ buildings, which were better then.

The state of the clubs in the cities and administrative centers of the districts of the Khatlon

region is of concern. However, the conditions of rural clubs, which were located in almost every village during Soviet times, is even worse.

Small rural clubs, where villagers used to go to watch movies and concerts after working on the farms, almost disappeared. These were educational centers with libraries, cinema theaters and concert halls. Currently, no one knows exactly how many of such clubs were there. The residents built houses or shops on the locations of most of them.

According to Tajikfilm branch in Khatlon, in the Southern Tajikistan, there are currently more than 12 city and regional clubs, most of which are operating. However, there is no statistics on the number of clubs that were present in each jamoat previously. In some of the districts, the clubs were allocated to the local authorities and excluded from the Tajikfilm property lists already.

“99% of collective and state farm clubs, as well as trade union clubs operating in the Soviet Union, were sold. They were not subordinate to the departments of culture, they were the property of the collective and state farms,” said Boimurod Saidmurodov.



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