

PUBLIC ART THE CATALYST FOR THE CREATION AND REGENERATION OF PUBLIC SPACES – CASE STUDY PRISHTINA, KOSOVO

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Abstract. The city of Prishtina currently faces a significant identity fade. It is well-known that space attributes concerning continuity, coherence, and distinctiveness allow people to identify a place. The primary purpose of this paper is to critically research the current state of the various neighborhoods of Prishtina and the opportunities offered in them for re-establishment and regeneration. In particular, opportunities for the re-socialization of public spaces and abandoned spaces through public art are essential values for society's re-inclusion, awareness, and well-being

Keywords: *public space, public art, inclusive design, identity, creative design.*

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1. Introduction

Cities are a vibrant system, and we are constantly faced with unprecedented political, social, economic changes when detachments and imbalances are numerous and, above all, at a time that requires far-reaching transformations (Habitat, 2016). Innovatively using space and place can provide inspiration and impetus for formulating new concepts in a public area.

The primary purpose of this paper is to critically research the current state of the various neighborhoods of Prishtina and the opportunities offered in them for re-establishment and regeneration. In particular, options for the re-socialization of public spaces and abandoned spaces through public art, as essential values for society's re-inclusion, awareness, and well-being.

Our impressions of a city are formed mainly by the quality of public spaces. They fill urban gaps with life, are directly related to the construction of what we call the city, and affect the relationships created within them (Pacheco, 2017). So when we refer to the streets and other public spaces of a city, we are talking about the city's identity. Public art, being used as a "tool" of intervention, testifies to the diversity of use of public spaces, the impact on the quality of the urban environment, and the definition of our daily experience in cities (Remesar, 1997). Moreover, public art in the examples of international design experiences has highlighted its impact on environments increasingly limited by their use. Finally, the variety of public art used to create a greater urban vitality that encourages people to live together firmly argues the selection of the case studies under this research.

Research questions:

- How can neglected spaces in Prishtina be reformed to achieve intertwined social, cultural, and environmental benefits for its users?
- How can art in public space promote the sense of community, belonging, and well-being in neighborhoods of Prishtina?

This study aims to achieve the creation of creative space, defined as space that enables its users to apply their imagination: to generating ideas; questions; to evaluate their own and their city officials' statements; final products; and processes; to achieve the creation of a sense of belonging and individuality for the community and to encourage their active participation.

2. Research method

In this study, data collection was based on a mixed-methods approach using simultaneous procedures. According to Creswell, these procedures are a strategy where the researcher combines quantitative and qualitative data to analyze the research problem comprehensively. In this method, the researcher collects quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously during the study and then integrates the information into interpreting the overall results (Creswell, 2003). Thus, although the study was conducted in stages until the completion of the available research, the whole data analysis process had a repetitive and cyclical character, rather than sequential.

Data collection and analysis of the current situation were taken from different national and international institutions.* During the literature review, were analyzed in detail: various scientific sources for theoretical concepts for architectural space and public art; Urban development plan of Prishtina from the perspective of public space; Projects of international organizations for public spaces and development of urban sustainability in cooperation with the Municipality of Prishtina.

The self administered online questionnaire gathered the opinion of random citizens about the problem and understood their level of awareness and information on the topic. In addition, through interviews, professional and in-depth views of people from the artistic community were collected. Since the study focuses on public spaces in the observation phase, all public areas of Prishtina were visited, including all typologies such as squares, city and neighborhood parks, municipal markets, playgrounds, plateaus, landmarks, and streets. Data extraction and synthesis of the written material, field data, photographs, documents, and maps were analyzed and categorized. However, some of the contents seemed unnecessary for the research project. Thus, it was reduced intensively to form the text into functional categories.

3. Analysis in the theoretical context

Public art is a part of our shared history, our evolving culture, and our collective memory. It reflects and reveals our society and adds meaning to our cities (Bach, 1992). Remembering how we see the world is the artist's response to our time and place

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combined with our sense of who we are (Gorichanaz, 2020). Public art is not an "art form" (Gorichanaz, 2020), and what distinguishes it is the unique way it is done (Davies 2005), where it is and what it means. Art is for everyone in a public space as a form of collective community expression (Januchta-Szostak, 2010). But, in a diverse society, all art cannot attract all people, nor should it be expected. The purpose of public art is not to be liked by everyone but to attract everyone's attention. It can express community values, improve our environment, transform a landscape, raise awareness, or question our assumptions (Finkelpearl, 2000).

Over different periods, public spaces' spatial view and purpose have changed (Mandeli, 2019; Siláči & Vitkova, 2017). Depending on how society has perceived space at one time, its design features are based. For example, from a historical point of view, art has had a much more visible and accessible area of action (Kwon, 2002). Therefore, art must be open and offer a space of interaction to a broader audience. In this way, public art is placed into a new public space that unites many people around a common desire, idea, or project. At the same time, to serve for a suitable identification of the city's urban space, the symbolism of which should be an essential and determining component of social welfare (Molina & Guinard, 2017; Januchta-Szostak, 2010).

With the changes in social conditions and opportunities in public life, the concept of public art has progressed and extended its forms and functions, both in the fields it performs and in the possible settings. In the relationship between art and people, in the end, it is the people that have the final say in the story, giving the work and the artist their place in history. The education of taste by artists conveys the desire to create new habits since art provides certain kinds of tools for self-reflection, critical thinking, and social change (Rendell, 2006). According to Emile Zola, what pleases people is always what is most common, what they are accustomed to seeing every year. Public art claims a necessary connection to what surrounds it, from architecture to urban modeling, from society to the needs of residents, to continue the above argument.

Localization of the matter - Prishtina, as the capital of Kosovo, is its administrative and educational center. For this, it has the largest number of inhabitants and the most significant influx of movements. As a result, even though the census has around 200 000 inhabitants, its number may triple on weekdays (KAS, 2018).

The urban journey of Prishtina began in the 13th century from the time it was identified as a settlement, developed further into a specific urban-architecture style concerning the time and the influences of the regimes (covered inns and bazaars, ottoman architecture). In contrast, in 1953, the communist regime in its city plan decided to remodel the city by diminishing the old system and parts of traditional architecture. It meant destroying the nucleus of the old city and rebuilding the new urban structure similar to other urban centers of the former Yugoslavia. Thus, everything that belonged to the past had to go with the dust of the revolution. In this way, the expression of the city of Prishtina began to take on a universal character (Hoxha, 2008). Similarly, after 1999 the reconstruction of the city of Prishtina just after the conflict was euphoric, the whole population acting as if it were in a state of emergency, with no time to plan. Moreover, the lack of any legislative framework enabled different actors to plan or instead not plan their actions (Basha-Jakupi & Nushi, 2017).

The urban landscape of Prishtina is a reflection of various cultural and political influences. Services are concentrated in the city center, within the inner ring of

Prishtina, while the surroundings are primarily residential. However, there are three distinct urban patterns (MoP 2013) that characterize the city:

The historic area of Prishtina - One of the remaining features of the old part of the city is the urban fabric of narrow streets and small districts composed of irregular plots of different sizes. The remaining cultural heritage consists of several monuments such as residential units, sacred buildings, and other public buildings. The concentration of these monuments is in the historic center, which is constantly being replaced by new structures, losing this area's historical character and identity. Also, the minimal interaction with today's city center makes this area remain very isolated.

The modern area - represents the main urban area, including the center and southern part of Prishtina, which developed from the mid-50s to the late 90s. The site consists of planned functions such as administrative services, sports and recreation, residential neighborhoods, and public service infrastructure.

Formalized informal postmodern area - The post-war period of 1999 was accompanied by large idiomatic constructions within the urban area and an uncontrolled spread of the city in all directions, contributing to the degradation of suburban agricultural land. It consists of mainly combined structures of residential character with economic destinations initiated by the private sector. The variability of the architecture of the buildings, the lack of the necessary infrastructure, including the technical, public, and social infrastructure, and the public space limit the technical and financial capacities for proper development (MoP 2013).

3. The conception of the proposal

The urban structure of Prishtina has layers of identities, replacements, and disappearance of collective memory, where, as soon as a new identity is acquired, it is to be overturned by another "new." Thus, those recognizing areas are the subject of treatment for this research on reconstructing the urban pattern to preserve the image created over the years. In this regard, it is crucial to try returning citizens to the urban practice. So that no longer one-acts solely based on current needs, it is not a matter of rebuilding what has been removed, but instead of the process of rehabilitating and restoring a lasting sense of public space.

The general data on the development of the urban structure over the years has revealed the three distinctive urban designs of Prishtina, which experience identity crises and specific concerns related to their typology. Consequently, this study has chosen three possible locations for art intervention.

Placing a work of art seems to be just as important as the content. For this reason, to connect the content with the location, the selection was made based on the division of three urban areas: the historical area, the modern space, and the formalized informal area. Then, depending on the context, a proposal for intervention is given, separately for each case, yet interlinked by its common concept of developing the Prishtina urban pattern.

The three proposals are based on the three essential elements of architecture (Fig.1). The first element is shelter, which is considered the genesis of the formation of architecture. The second element is the stairs, as an essential element for connecting two spaces at different levels. The third element is the cube that symbolizes space, and taking possession of the space is the first gesture of the living being.

In addition to connecting the three urban areas through the shape of the geometric structure, the concept relates them also through color (Fig. 1). Therefore, the three proposals are presented through the three primary colors - yellow, red, green - as long as all three lies under the open blue sky.



Figure 1. The three proposals are presented through the three primary colours

From a philosophical point of view, we consider man's position concerning the three propositions. First, the person takes the observation position at the shelter, which moves from point A to B. Through his movement to the chosen site (Fig. 2a), he aims to experiences the feeling of a place that can offer a historical area. Second, on the stairs/watchtower, the man assumes the observation position, which is static at a high point. From this, s/he looks at the 360 ° angle at the surrounding area by having the possibility to assess the current situation (Fig. 2b). Finally, unlike the first two propositions, the third detaches man from reality through the optical illusion offered by the images displayed inside the cube. Here man is placed in the imaginary position (Fig. 2c) from which reflection is expected when facing the urban space around the cube and realizes that green space remains only a "virtual reality."



Figure 2. Observation positions of the three proposals: a) movement, b) static, c) imaginary

Through reflection, the urban elements and public art come together daily to form not new but discovered forgotten relationships between man and nature, occurring against the alien experience of the urban landscape. Therefore, the three proposals' symbolic act is 1 - call for intervention, 2 - call for evaluation, 3 – awakening.

Therefore, the treatment of the three urban areas tends to give different perspectives on applying public art in an urban space (Fig.3).

The first location lies in the historic area -The area contains old structures gradually being replaced by new designs (Fig. 4).



Figure 3. Historical nucleus-Prishtina (1958 and 2007)

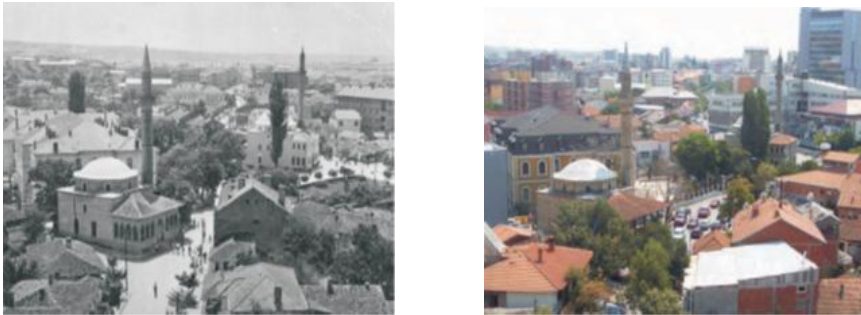


Figure 4. Locations selected for the three urban structures (author: K. Osmani)

The "Historic Area," as defined by the detailed urban plan, was prepared for a small central part area. However, there is a significant building, the Ethnological Museum, left out of the conservation plan. The first proposal aims to restore a sense of belonging to the connecting streets and inclusion of this building through public art. It encompasses the concept of shelter, movement, and yellow color. As an area with diversity, it contains buildings with different functions and characters. The narrow streets around the blocks of the old city center declare the intimacy of family groups traditionally known as "mahalla" - neighborhoods—unfortunately, initiatives to repair the road network ended in losing the authentic "cobblestone" layer. In this context, the shelter intends to show a sense of security to the historical parts that are slowly disappearing (Fig. 5).

By moving from one place to another, one gains a sense of direction. Slowly moving under the shelter gives a sense of meaning to the street and the surrounding space. By placing importance and recalling set values, shelter cultivates a sense of place and becomes a symbol of well-being. Also, the creation of interactive arteries enlivens and gives meaning to public space.

The second location lies in the modern area - The area contains complex urbanized social structures (residential, public, and economic). According to Gjinolli and Kabashi, Kosovo maximized modernization, political and cultural autonomy, and social freedom in the seventies. The growth of towns and villages, the development of

industry, and tourism were so visible that the reflections of that time still dominate the landscape and free space of Kosovar cities. However, with the dissolution of the federal system of Yugoslavia, the possibilities of its development were limited. Moreover, it disabled the demand for symbiosis between inherited and contemporary architecture, which we still seek today (Gjinolli & Kabashi 2015).

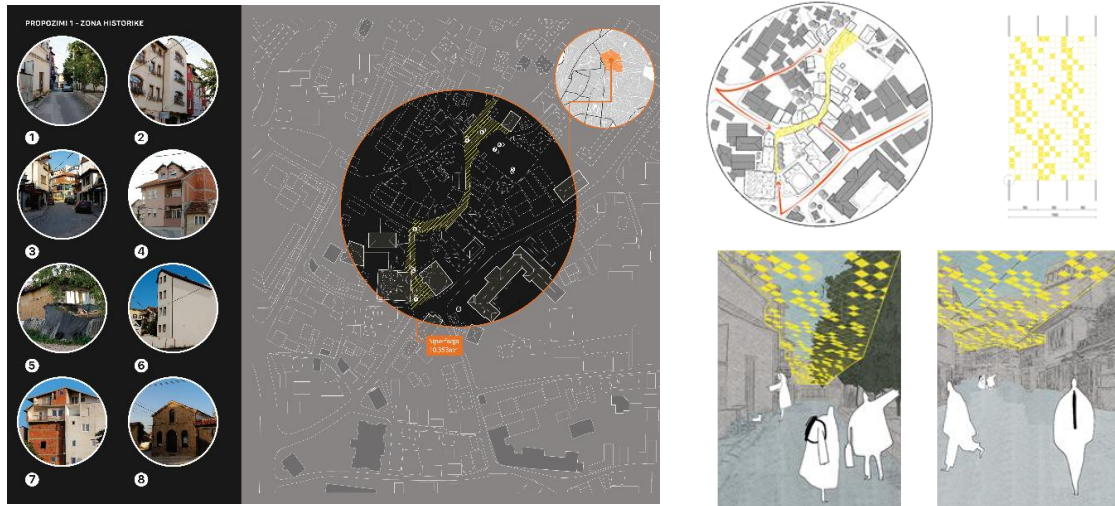


Figure 5. First intervention – historical zone within the city
(author: K. Osmani)

For the second proposal, the chosen location leads to the 'Ibrahim Rugova' memorial park area, which has a net area of 4.4 ha. According to the city plans, its historic cultural destination, the cemetery of martyrs, and President Ibrahim Rugova's grave need to be preserved. Therefore, the second proposal foresees a watchtower at the top of the park incline for an overall city view. In contrast, the aspiration for the tower is intertwined with the need to regenerate inactive public spaces.

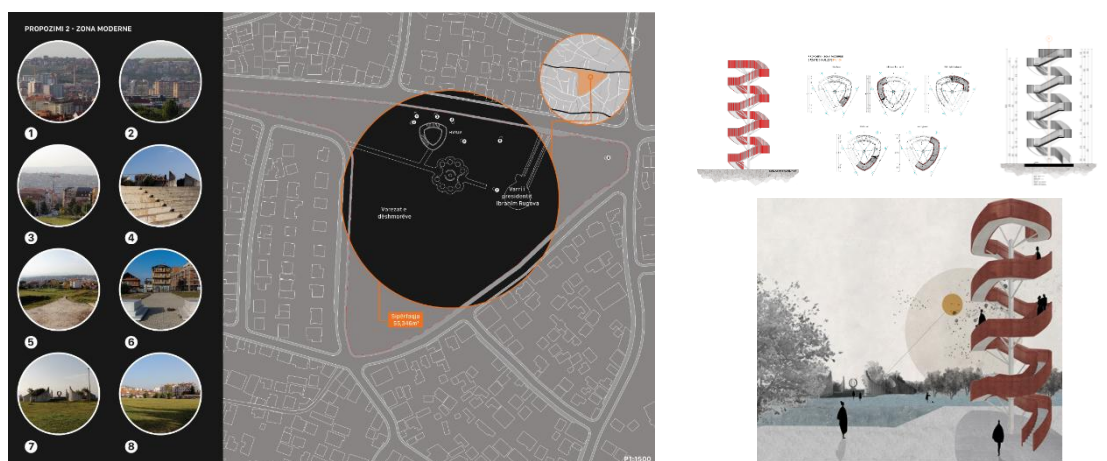


Figure 6. Second intervention – modern zone within the city
(author: K. Osmani)

According to the urban spatial development, topography and landscape are some of the main physical elements of the overall concept of Prishtina. Therefore, the watchtower's position (Fig.6) aims to go beyond providing a beautiful view, but it indeed offers the most suitable location for reflection. Perhaps when citizens are offered a view of the park choked with the surrounding buildings, they realize that public spaces are centers of value. They attract or repel the gathering of people.

The third location lies in the informal formalized area - The area contains mixed residential-business destinations. The proposal is located within the neighborhood "Block B," in the narrow public space between the buildings.

The 1999 war brought significant economic damage. Many residents of other cities in Kosovo migrated to the capital in search of a better life. It caused Prishtina to experience a substantial increase in population, which increased the demand for houses and commercial buildings. The rampant urban expansion of settlements mainly affected the outskirts of the city. The unplanned increase of settlements continues to harm the urban structure of Prishtina. In the context of this research, based on information on the development of the twentieth century, the area of "Mat" in the first half of this century was mainly agricultural land (Municipality of Prishtina, 2013).

Since 1999, development dynamics have increased, with many houses built in the southeast, north, and northwest of the "Mat" area. Even though all these houses have been constructed without proper roads and proper technical infrastructure, i.e., sewerage or water, many investors bought these lands from residents to build multi-apartment and local buildings in the last decade. Unfortunately, by not respecting professional ethics and using the land to the maximum for construction, accessible green areas remained bypassed by projects.

The Municipal Assembly approved the strategic plan for urban development of Prishtina in 2004 (Fig. 7 a). Urban profile goals of the area were supposed to develop in a healthy neighborhood that is suitable and attractive for a living (Fig. 7a).



Figure 7. a) Development Plan of Prishtina, b) Mati location, c) Actual situation

But, unfortunately, peripheral urban and rural areas have developed into dense neighborhoods (Fig. 7c) and settlements without municipal technical infrastructure. As such, they have created obstacles, which hit the further structured growth of the city. Moreover, traffic congestion and lack of green space make the foot experience seem impossible to neighborhood residents, especially for sensitive cases such as people with disabilities and mothers with children.

The third proposal, the cube (Fig. 8) placed between the buildings of this area, is the symbol of the lost space, which is experienced only within our imagination. The concept is to confront people with the idea of immediately changing the area they live

from an environment laden with buildings to an imaginary green and forested setting. The proposal is based on a relatively easily disassembled steel frame structure, in which reflective glass panels are placed to make the three-dimensional experience possible. Space is related to the sense of space that the cube symbolizes. A sense of space, according to Tuan, is connected to feelings of freedom, while immobility is related to feelings of closure and construction. Human beings always require space and place (Tuan 1979). Therefore, the cube symbolizes the desires and lacks we feel. The concept foresees the time to time structure relocation. It will temporarily appear in a new place of informal character, inviting people to seek an explanation actively.

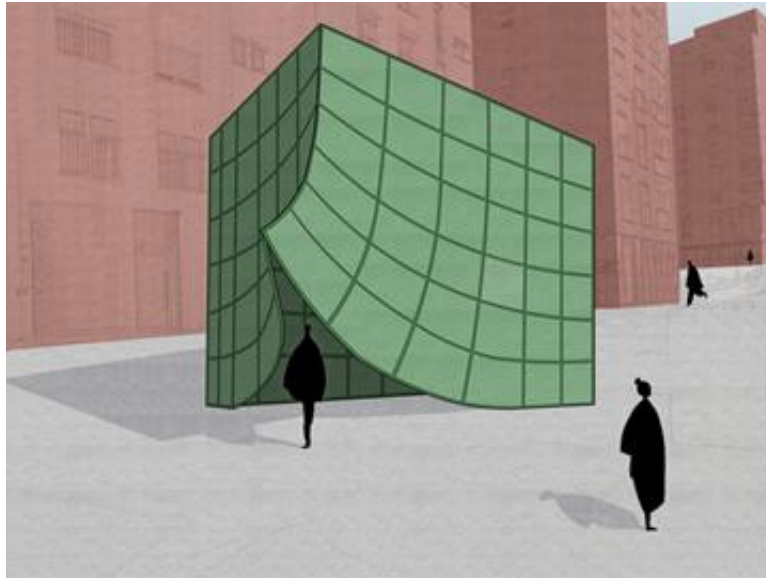


Figure 8. 3D views – open cube, AR&VR environment
(author: K. Osmani)

4. Conclusion

Regeneration and expansion of functional capacities, based on the application of public art in the environment, is considered a successful solution for preserving and increasing the value of public spaces. Furthermore, emphasizing these values through public art would positively impact the revitalization of public spaces and the area's attractiveness.

Kosovo public art is not easy to encounter on the ground, and it will be thought-provoking to the citizens since this study tackles the public space in a new format of alertness. For the success of the project and the public spaces in general, the community's cooperation and the relevant institutions are necessary. Only in this form is it possible to reinforce the identity of shared areas essential for all. The scope of public art is broad and different according to contexts, and it is vital to elaborate on it from different perspectives within the city of Prishtina. Therefore this study highlights the importance of inclusion, with is no central concentration; the importance of diverse places; preservation of existing spaces and their enhancement with regeneration; the value of innovation; promotion of new materials; and new ways to use the old ones; the importance of art in the surroundings, to support creative expression and the idea of creation of works in public art; the value of social satisfaction, work and active

participation of the community, but most importantly as in the urban setting of Prishtina, the self-value of the city, in a city where public space was never considered to belong to its citizens.

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