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Urban Heritage and Place-making: Preservation through mobility enhancement in the Historic Centre of Prizren

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Abstract. Since the armed conflict ended and during a decade of state building Kosovo has gone through substantial reforms required for its European Union integration. This was reflected into its built environment including the historic areas and cultural heritage preservation. Legislation, plans, policy documents and strategies foresee an all-inclusive and a balanced way of development. Practice, however, informs the opposite as the drafted documents are hardly implemented. This paper discusses and examines the mobility in a public space in the Historic Centre of Prizren in relation to the preservation of urban heritage. The paper reveals how the institutional (non)action and, the socio-cultural and political dynamics largely affect the implementation of preservation and planning documentation. Furthermore, the paper provides spatial analysis and suggests a mobility enhancement option aiming for a car-free area as basis for further research towards a sustainable solution for the implementation in practice.

Keywords: Historic Centre, Urban heritage, Place-making, Mobility, Preservation, Kosovo, Transition, European Union, International good practices.

Introduction

The end of the armed conflict in the South East Europe, Western Balkans, marked the beginning of a new era for the state building processes of newly emerged countries after the collapse of Yugoslavia. The path is made clear for the Western Balkans countries; integration into the European Union (EU) structures. The reforms and transformations of the transitional period introducing new legislation, policies and practices, plans and projects reflected into the built environment as well and affected cultural heritage preservation.

Architecture, and urban design and planning are interconnected and function in relation to one another. A building cannot be imagined as an independent structure on its own or 'egotistical', even if it represents an architectural value if it's not well thought in the context of a previously developed urban fabric. Alongside with the building the development of a space around it is important, in order that the new structure is well interconnected, and is in cohesion and harmony with the existing urban setting.

It is equally important that the same principle applies to inherited urban environments. Cultural heritage, looking at historic areas, tends to be often understood as architectural heritage only, which of course has its own significance as a value and representation, however, the inherited urban layout, public spaces, streets and squares, configuration of a terrain, proportions and functions of buildings in relation to the outdoor world – the urban heritage, is often neglected.

This paper will examine and discuss the preservation of a historic centre in the town of Prizren

in Kosovo in the context of urban heritage, in post-conflict and during the state building socio-cultural and political circumstances. It will discuss how mobility enhancement and a place-making approach for people-friendly environments can contribute to its preservation. Furthermore, it will analyse the current mobility situation in the town with effects to the historic centre and suggest a mobility enhancement option as basis for further research towards a sustainable implementation in practice.

Historic areas' preservation in the context of urban heritage: the role of place-making and mobility

Cultural heritage conservation and revitalization often only applies to the physical structure of the building with lack of attention to how the building will interact with the space around it in the current socio-cultural, economic and political circumstances. In transitional countries such as Kosovo, urban development dynamics of a modern world often fail to correspond to the heritage buildings' preservation in the sense of the harmony or disharmony they might create between the building and the ongoing activities in their surrounding area. This can also impact the preservation and revitalization of a heritage building itself increasing or decreasing their unique architectural value.

UNESCO (2011) has recognised for the urban heritage to be for humanity a social, cultural and economic asset, ... suggesting a historic urban landscape approach for identifying, conserving and managing historic areas within their broader urban contexts, by considering the interrelationships of their physical forms, their spatial organization and connection, their natural features and settings, and their social, cultural and economic values, ... and ensuring that contemporary interventions are harmoniously integrated with heritage in a historic setting. In the frame and the spirit of this UNESCO Recommendation (2011) place-making is recognised to be a valuable approach not only for the creation of places for people but also for the urban heritage preservation in order to meet its purpose.

The Future of Places (a global forum about public space) I, II and III conferences organised in Stockholm (2013), Buenos Aires (2014) and Stockholm (2015), focused on key issues of public space as a fundamental component of sustainable urban development. The work during three conferences resulted with seven Key Messages as a contribution and integral part of the New Urban Agenda for HABITAT III (Quito, 2016). One out of seven Key Messages addresses Culture and Context in place-making. It states that 'Public space is made unique and meaningful through cultural and contextual elements that complement and enrich its identity. Spaces should be place-based, adaptable and responsive to geography, climate, culture and heritage' (Future of Places, 2015).

In place-making, special character and the identity of a place are also recognised to have a particular significance. According to Butina-Watson and Bentley (2007) the character is something that makes a place unique and distinguishes one place from another and that was created not with an intention or by purpose but because of the vernacular processes that have produced the buildings.

One of the key elements for creating places for people is by mobility enhancement measures. Car-free people-friendly environments are the new and expanding trends in the Western European countries and wider with number of international good practices including in the United Kingdom, Spain, Sweden as well as in the Balkans region: e.g. in the town of Split in Croatia, *Riva*, a popular public space in the Split harbor, located in the Historical Complex of Split with the Palace of Diocletian, listed as UNESCO World Heritage Site was a left over space partially used for parking and its urban regeneration in 2005 transformed it into a car-free pedestrian area for a day and night public life, respecting its historic and cultural context. The project was seen as a 'progressive design' (Rupnik, 2010, p216). Tirana, a capital city of Albania, won the European Award for Urban Public Space 2018, for the renovation of a Skanderbeg Square. The square has a central location in the city and was previously dominated by vehicles. The project

has turned it into a pedestrian area which is surrounded by mainly socialist heritage iconic buildings, offering opportunities for different public activities for the citizens and visitors.

Kosovo as a case study

Socio-cultural and political phenomena during post-conflict and state building period: Influences into the built environment

The European perspective for Kosovo requires number of reforms for the alignment with the EU *acquis*. It was stated for the Western Balkans in particular 'that it is crucial that the countries remain firmly on the path of reform, leaving the legacy of the past behind and investing in their European future' (European Commission, 2012, p11).

The international standards and good practices have served as basis to develop and draft legislation, planning, development and preservation documents, policies and strategies. Although the legislation framework is in place and the spatial and urban plans mostly drafted, the implementation remains a real issue. The Kosovo Law on Spatial Planning (2013), drafted in line with European standards gives competency to the local authorities for drafting their spatial and urban plans with the aim to also comply with what has been identified as a general challenge of the EU countries, a sustainable land use and development as a balanced social, ecological and economic change (Maier, 2012). The Law on Cultural Heritage (2008) requires the establishment of *protective zones* around the architectural and archaeological heritage with the aim for a controlled and harmonious development in the heritage sites for their better preservation. This process has not yet been initiated, creating opportunities for uncontrolled development in these protective areas.

An important factor during the Kosovo's post conflict period of consolidation and reforms was the involvement of the international community, at various stages and different time-frame. After the 1990s war the international presence varied depending on the political circumstances, its status and the state building at a later stage. It started with UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) administration in 1999, EU and USA presence and the International Civilian Office (ICO) for the supervision of its independence, declared on 17 February 2008. ICO ended its mission in September 2012.

This has largely influenced the creation of a culture of an overall 'dependence' from the international community during the process of reforms in Kosovo, without having much 'space' for struggling and trying to find solutions on their own. Its implications are serious for the 'ownership matter' which relates to the implementation of the reforms at a later stage; same as for the implementation of spatial and urban plans including for the cultural heritage preservation.

The historic socialist background, the conflict and the war discontinuity left traces for being 'extremely suspicious to any collective and collaborative action reasoned by better futures' (Maier, 2012, p148). This is fundamental and critical and can be explained in terms of collective and collaborative action in the circles of civil society and citizens, institutions of municipal and national level as well as the professionals and experts.

In this kind of atmosphere, the political influences and personal interests prevailed and 'coalitions between politicians and business became frequent practice to adjust plans to the interests of business groups and individual developers. Residents and environment groups are treated rather as nuisance than as partners'. The developers were rather aggressive with an intention for 'speculative profits' and without a community well-being oriented vision (Maier, 2012, p149).

Instead of the efforts for implementing international good practices 'in practice', Kosovo I suggest, started developing a culture of almost a 'formal' drafting of plans, often lacking substantial analyses and a comprehensive vision for sustainable development; and instead of the participatory planning approach to the consensus based negotiation between stakeholders, it was more a 'defeat' or a 'surrender' of architects and planners and majority of the civil society to the political and business personal interests. Moreover, a certain number of planners and architects contributed to the formation of such a culture, serving to the above mentioned profiteers.

The Historic Centre of Prizren – a unique cultural and natural heritage

The Historic Centre of Prizren is recognized locally and internationally for its unique cultural and natural heritage – the historic urban landscape. Despite a multi-layered diverse heritage of monuments and sites dated since ancient times, distinguished for their architectural and environmental values, the urban heritage at its organic pattern and terrain topography form a specific value, all together making a cityscape as an identity for the city. It is the most popular area in the city for residents and visitors, for gathering, socializing, site seeing, festivals, fairs, protests.

The Historic Centre is an urban area defined by a protective zone and protected by a special law, the Law on Historic Centre of Prizren (2012). In 2008 Municipality of Prizren approved a plan for its preservation and development, a Prizren Historic Area Conservation and Development Plan (CDP). The plan clearly defines the vision, goal and objectives providing planning decisions in functional, physical, cultural and transportation aspects.

Both the law and the CDP require special regime for vehicle transport encouraging non-motorized means and pedestrian only movement in the Historic Centre.

The socio-cultural and political dynamics in the transition period in Kosovo largely influenced the heritage preservation as well, specifically in the urban historic areas. In these circumstances the legislation and plans face serious challenges and are hardly implemented in practice. As regarding the mobility regime, despite the clear legal and planning requirements, the Historic Centre of Prizren remains ‘threatened’ by free vehicle access, movement and parking throughout the zone. A local non-governmental organisation EC Ma Ndryshe in Prizren has identified 34 parking lots within and in the vicinity of the Historic Centre out of which over 90% are private and informal parking with around 25 parking lots created over the demolished traditional houses. Sub-zone analyses: the bridge for vehicle access and the parking

The study area for this case is a public space, a continuation of a *traditional market zone* in the historic centre, along the river *Lumbardhi* and below the Fortress hill. In discussion with two of the first experts in the city, with over 40 years of working experience that also includes the socialist period, an architect and an urban planner, it was explained that initially as of 1960s, there was a concrete structure (as an *aqueduct*) shaping the water supply tube for the city, that citizens had used as an informal bridge to pass from one to another river bank (nr.1 in Fig.2). Almost attached to this ‘bridge’ around 20 years ago was built a pedestrian bridge (nr.2 in Fig2). During the transition period with the support of the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning a new bridge of a large reinforced concrete structure was built close to the two previous bridges, that exclusively provides free access for vehicles in a most authentic part of the historic centre, below the hill where the Fortress is located (nr.3 in Fig2 and Fig.3).

Number of cars pass the river and park in this picturesque place of the historic centre (Fig.4). The pedestrian movement is not the same anymore and the visual and environmental aspects, and the spirit of the place are affected. People do not feel comfortable to go and sit along this route as today it is dominated by cars



Fig. 1. Historic Centre of Prizren. **Fig. 2.** Map of Historic Centre, location of the bridge for vehicle access and parking.



Fig. 3. Three bridges.



Fig. 4. Bridge for vehicle access.



Fig. 5. The space is designed to clearly mark the vehicle road and a side walk dividing the two by vehicle barriers. Pedestrians naturally walk at a wider space and the conflict of use with vehicles is evident.

Mobility analyses and the enhancement option

With the aim to improve the current situation as regarding the vehicle access and mobility in the Prizren Historic Centre the situation is examined in a wider picture of an urban zone of Prizren town. There are four main entry points for motorised vehicles in the town of Prizren (as presented in Fig.6). In the wider spatial analyses, the town has good road infrastructure connection at national level and through the R7 Dr. Ibrahim Rugova Highway also at regional level with Albania, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro. This is an advantage for the historic town as it increases the number of tourists and visitors especially during the summer time. However, there is a lack of vehicle regime during this period, especially for the public parking and the access to town and the same issue is especially reflected in the most attractive place for the visitors, the historic centre.

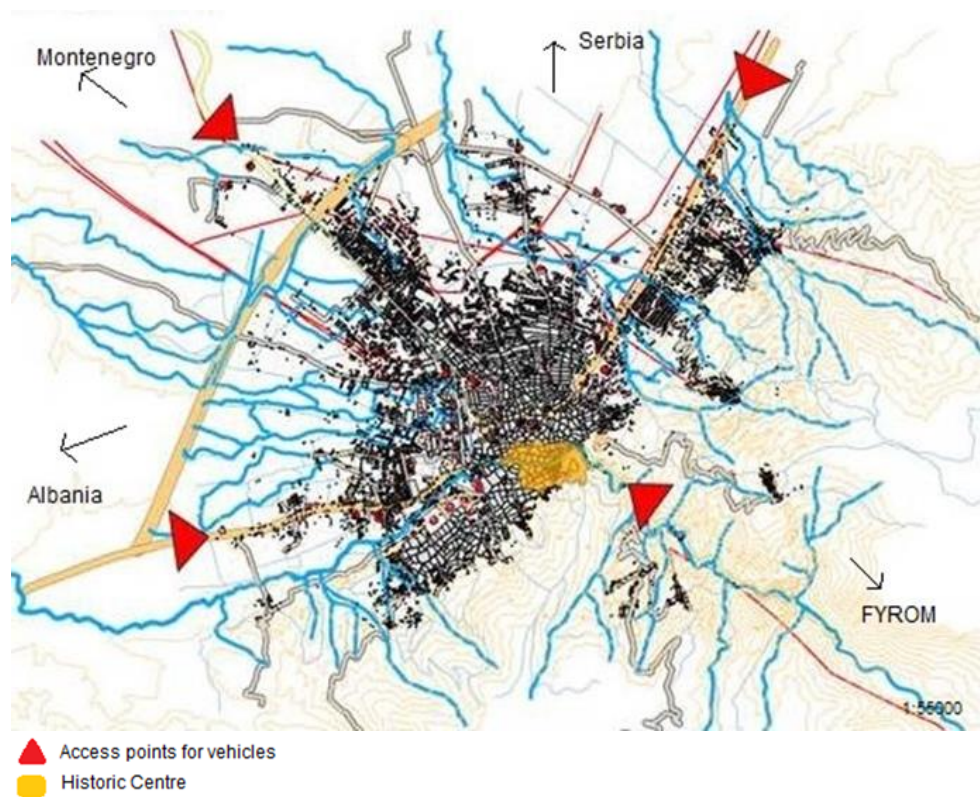


Fig. 6. Prizren urban zone - the historic centre and four main access points for vehicles.

The analyses in Fig.7 map show the vehicle movement in town in relation to the historic centre marking the regional access roads that 'attack' the historic centre as well as urban and local roads within the centre. Furthermore, in the map are highlighted the location of the only bus station in town and the higher density commercial area at the western side. All the vehicle entries access

freely up to 70% of the historic protective zone in the centre and through the newly constructed bridge mentioned above enter and park their cars in a public space subject of this research paper.

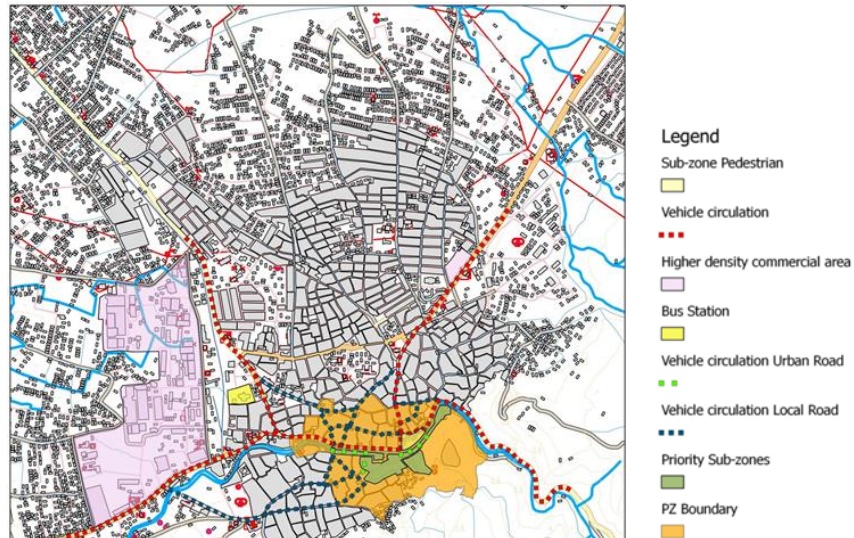


Fig. 7. The analyses of vehicle movement in the Historic Centre of Prizren.

Looking at the road infrastructure and the spatial analyses with the intention to reduce the vehicle access and movement in the historic centre this research paper suggests the option for the creation of public parking at entry points in town and applying of the *feeding bus routs* model (Fig.8). With the analyses of the topography at all four access points it suggests that the north-west, south-west and north-east directions are considered for the public parking. Due to a high degree of slope-terrain and in order to preserve the specific natural landscape at the south-east entry to the historic centre, this point is not recommended for any parking.

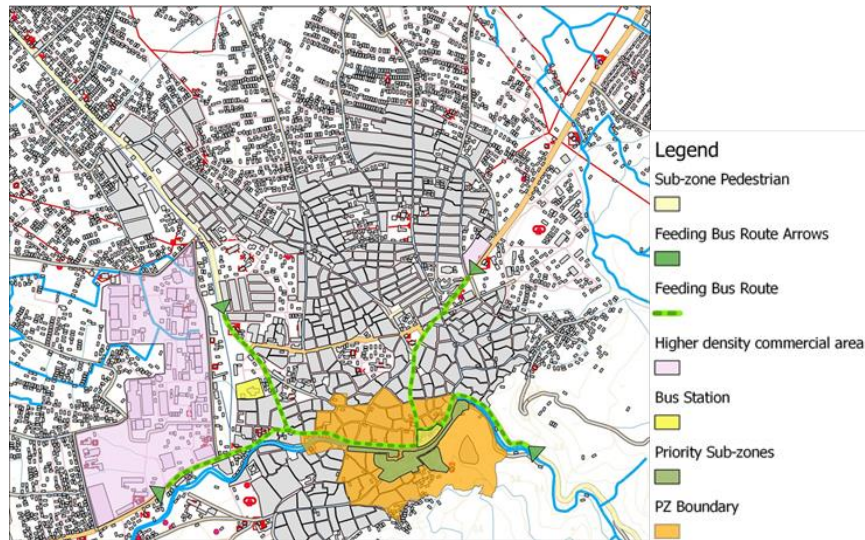


Fig. 8. Model of public parking and feeding bus routes.

The public parking at three entry points in the periphery of the town would collect all the vehicles mainly of the visitors and would reduce their presence in town and especially at the historic centre as step one of the suggested model. Step two is to provide a suitable public transport (i.e. minibuses) for people from the public parking to the historic centre and back through the feeding routes.

The analyses and the suggestion of this paper provide the basis for further collaborative research and examination with an all-inclusive approach with professionals, institutions, civil society and other stakeholders, towards a sustainable solution to make the international good practices not only remain informative but also implemented in practice.

Conclusion

Cultural heritage preservation especially in the urban historic centers often only associates with architectural heritage without enough attention for the activities and development in the surrounding area of the heritage buildings. International standards and good practices inform for the necessity of the preservation in a broader urban context - as an urban historic landscape, and recognise it to be a social, cultural and economic asset for the humanity. Place-making through the mobility enhancement is one of the methods to tackle this issue and contribute to the preservation of the urban heritage.

The purpose of this paper is to raise the issue and engage in the discussion about the importance and the role of urban heritage in the historic areas. In this context it engages critically and examines the preservation of the Historic Centre of Prizren in Kosovo in the post-conflict and during a state building social, cultural and political circumstances. It discusses how this phenomena affected the built environment and reflected into the cultural heritage preservation specifically at what is inherited as an urban space. The paper brings a practical example as a case study to demonstrate how these circumstances can affect the understanding and preservation of a historic centre in a broader context.

The paper further provides spatial analyses of the ongoing mobility situation in town and impacts on the historic centre. It suggests a model for its enhancement, public parking in three

main access points to the urban zone of Prizren and feeding bus routes within the historic centre. The model provides basis for further collaborative research for the sustainable solution for implementation in practice with the aim to set a vehicle regime and create a car-free urban environment in the historic centre. The reduction of vehicles will contribute to make the historic centre a more people-friendly place and preserve it by planning and designing its public spaces in a more harmonious way with the cultural heritage setting.

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Visual material

Hisari, L., (2014). Historic Centre of Prizren, Kosovo. Fig. 1. Photograph

Law on Historic Centre of Prizren 2012, annex 1. Kosovo Cadastral Agency. Conservation and Development Plan. Fig. 2. Map. Historic Centre, Prizren: Geo-referenced and elaborated by the author.

Hisari, L., (2017). Historic Center of Prizren, Kosovo. Fig. 3. Photograph

Hisari, L., (2014). Historic Center of Prizren, Kosovo. Fig. 4. Photograph

Hisari, L., (2018). Historic Center of Prizren, Kosovo. Fig. 5. Photograph

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