

Brief analysis  
**Reading the city through urbanism**  
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## Introduction

The city of Prizren came into being without the planners' hand and shaped by being acclimatized to the daily lives of citizens. The skirmish between such (urban) acclimatization, of what is in advent with what is departing, fashions the actual outlook of the city.

This analysis comments on the chaotic dynamics of urbanism in Prizren in the past 15 years. The paper is built upon the reason that constructions during this period have been destructive and attacked the city's identity and spirit, features it was embodied with. This transformation has turned Prizren from a vernacular city into a featureless space.

## The absence of urban identity

Since after the war, the process the change of social structure and accelerated urban making pretty chaotic life in the city. From lack of political stability, the degradation of cultural values has opened the way society of extremes and urban transformations with a rampant pace, which as put by Vedran Mimica, "...during or after the war, nothing is impossible or unlawful, especially from the socio-cultural point of view..."<sup>1</sup> When referring to the Balkans in general, among other things, he notes that, "aside the excellent developmental potential, these countries have been ravaged by the lack of policies, knowledge and management, which comes from the lack of participation and transparency, lack of governing infrastructure and from uncertain land ownership. Lack of public land for developments of public interest

<sup>1</sup> Vedran Mimica – An architect and assistant dean of the Berlage Institute (Rotterdam, Netherlands). He had previously worked in different universities of the world, including the Columbia University, The Sorbonne, the University of Tokyo and University of Chile. He is active in the Balkan affairs.

and, in particular, the lack of a new urban identity...!"

## Today's "turbo-urbanism" social expression

Prizren's post-war architecture is deemed an off-the-cuff architecture that, as it is seen, is being created without a hand of a genuine architect. This occurrence has already obtained its style and seems to have become part of the civic culture which is affected particularly from the media images, TVs, commercials that convey a message about a "good life"... and this impersonation we encounter precisely in the centre of the city that never ceases from the process of adaptation to the novel forms of lifestyle. The building of Theranda Hotel, built after the demolition of the craft shops of Arasta Complex around the second half of the '50s, continued with further transformations.

And this transformation now appears from the shapes borrowed out of the media, combined with the use of kitschy decorative materials, structural façades such as duralumin, alucobond (ACP), reflective glass panes, etc., by creating almost a neoclassical, Victorian style or by creating a freestyle mix resembling a turbo-folk music sub-genre.<sup>2</sup> Therefore it is not accidental that this music genre, together with the turbo-architecture and turbo-urbanism, have found havens in Prizren, since both actually express the trend of detaching from the bonds that link them with traditions or rural values, by indicating the social status of those who have migrated to the city; as the city is now being shifted into a meeting point allowing integration of a local community into the global one.

<sup>2</sup> Besnik Aliaj, referred to the article "In search of identity! New architectural and urban phenomena in the Balkans", Edition of Polis University and Co-PLAN Institute, 2009



*Hotel Theranda – Former Arasta complex*



*Hotels in the city's historic centre*

### Building through destroying

Transformation of the city occurs not by building only but also by “destroying”.<sup>3</sup> There are cases when decisions for “destruction” of particular objects gain a swift consensus as those are motivated by certain political actions to destroy physical signs of the existence of a hybrid culture. What we are witnessing in the city is a result of concurrent interventions in a given moment. This is best described by the case of Jugobanka building!<sup>4</sup> It is what Michael

<sup>3</sup> Sotir Dharmo, referred to the article “Ndërtimi përmes shkatërrimit dhe shkatërrimi përmes ndërtimit: ndërhyrjet “antiqytet”, kontekstualizmi urban dhe transformimi evolutiv i kontekstit”, Edition of Polis University and Co-PLAN Institute, 2011

<sup>4</sup> Prizren Press, Police launches investigations on the demolition of former Jugobanka building in Prizren, at <http://prizrenpress.com/lajme/policia-nis->

Moorcock in 1963 has termed as “urbicide”<sup>5</sup> – “violence against urban body”, as matching up to the term genocide. Today, late though, we realize that this operation as well has not brought anything other than contributed in eradicating the memories; it has shaken relationship of a human with the city and the spiritual welfare of a settlement.



*Demolition of former Jugobanka building in 2013*



*Former Jugobanka during ‘restoration’ process*



*The old house of Shehu family in Tabakhane quarter*

[hetimet-per-rrenimin-objektit-te-ish-jugobankes-ne-prizren/](http://hetimet-per-rrenimin-objektit-te-ish-jugobankes-ne-prizren/)

<sup>5</sup> The term was borrowed by Bill Millard, Violence against architecture, in Koolhaas Rem, “Content”

Then again, a new phenomena or “construction” trend – emergency intervention under the guise of restoration and conservation of traditional urban houses through an effortless project and with a meek funding by the municipality – that of “façade painting” as a temporary act of architectural superficial lipstick-type performance (as its duration) is capable of solving the real problem: THE CITY’S NUCLEUS!



*The house of Bajmaku family*

How and why the city got the shape it has today? Why some public spaces create social coexistence and other do not? For example, if one refers to the case of Kej (*Quay or man-made river bank*)<sup>6</sup>, social cohabitation is cut as

<sup>6</sup> Kej (*quay, bank*), a public space which stretches within the historic zone of the city (the first protected zone). More concretely, along the course of Lumëbardhi River, starting from “Topokli” drinking sources (at Marashi complex) and down to Ura e Gurit (*The Stone bridge*). This zone still reflects historical, socio-cultural, environmental and urban values of the city and is functional to the needs of citizens but lacking traditional spirit. At present, it has suffered many changes while keeping hardly any elements of urban worth. As such, it is necessary to be treated in order to establish a more structured harmony in terms of physical and visual aspect of this zone as a whole.

with a knife. On the left side of Arasta Bridge<sup>7</sup> we see an organic social continuity stemming from the cafes above, whereas on the right side of the same bridge, below the Sinan Pasha’s Mosque, it extends so aloof against the urban context that it keeps on causing a strong effect on further alienation of public space.



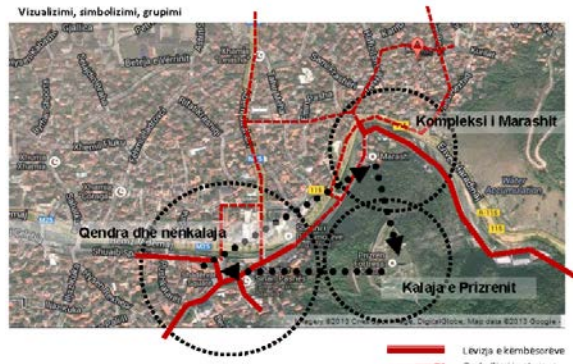
*Kej’s public space, at the background Prizren Fortress*

### Soul of the city

By contemplating the city as an organic continuity of the territory which influences the outer and inner shape of the city, the shape itself is not sufficient. More we understand the culture and the structure of the society in different epochs and in different countries of the world, the more we’ll be capable of comprehending their built environment.<sup>8</sup> Kalaja e Prizrenit (Prizren fortress) and its blending with Nënkalaja quarter, the city centre and Marash distinct quarter set up an unyielding urban element preserving continuity and bestowing shape to the city all at once.

<sup>7</sup> “Ura, Çarshia, Xhamia dhe Lagjja Arasta”, Chapter “Ura e mbuluar (e Arastës)”, published by Professor Dr Esat Haskuka, Prizren (1999), p. 13–16.

<sup>8</sup> “City Shaping”, S. Kostov, chapter “The city as an artifact”, translated and adapted by Sotir Dharmo, “Analiza e territorit dhe e vendbanimeve”, 2012–2013.



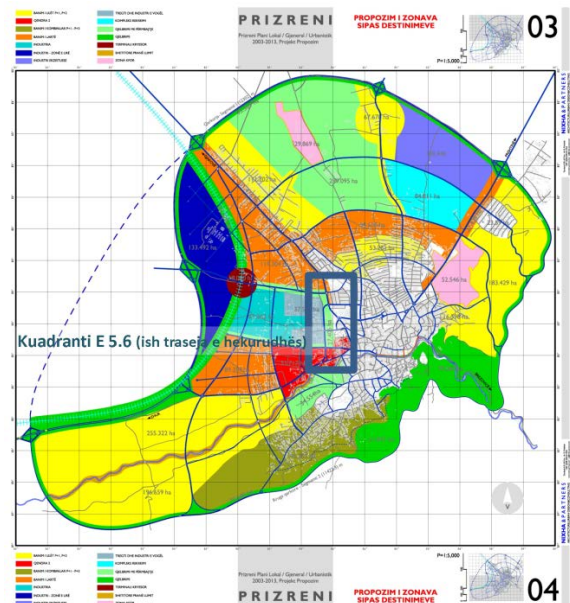
*Integration of three basic units of the city*

### Nothing comes from nothing

If we look the city from the standpoint of its shape uttered on space, we have converted urban land without a permit, without approval or without doing it in compliance to the urban regulatory plan. To what extent regulatory plans were followed by local government in total? To what extent those plans have been implemented? Why the permits are being rejected although the entire city possesses Urban Regulatory Plans, Municipal Development Plan, Urban Development Plan and Conservation Plan for the Historic Centre of Prizren? For 6 years now that the Light Industry Zone (Dardania 2) is vested with Regulatory Plans, plans the Directorate of Urbanism possesses, it still does not grants construction permits! That is because the local government has not yet made re-parcellation of the zone. If we refer to the Urban Local Master Plan 2003-2013, precisely in the E 5.6 quadrant (former railway track), the end-purpose of the area appears as “greenery with a content”, whereas this content is replaced by high-rise building blocks.

With such kind of constructions a man feels an “alien” in his own town. High-rise blocks erected are not capable of providing a new urban “face”. Worse more, those are adding to the spiritual and economic decline of the city. The

notion of social continuity and the effort to make constructions as much possible as part of the urban continuum – turn out a failure!



*New constructions in the Quadrant E 5.6*



### Transformation and the “loss” of a place

All of postmodern<sup>9</sup> cities have gone through phases of transformation and development of the city but this phase has been more stretched out in time, which means it offered more opportunity to adapt or to remedy developments caused by this change. The difference is that we are going through this phase in a fleeting period of time needed whereas the complexity we are facing is far greater.

For instance, whereas before the war we had neighbourhoods that were clearly residential quarters, now almost every residential neighbourhood, especially those along circulating streets, the ground floors were transformed into commercial spaces. On one hand it made the neighbourhood more dynamic, but on the other, it has increased the informality<sup>10</sup> by creating social-urban difficulties

<sup>9</sup> Postmodernism is a philosophical movement remote of modernism viewpoint. In more concrete terms, it is a trend in a contemporary culture characterized by the issue of objective truth *versus* global culture. When the capitalist industrialization brought to the transformation of cities in the 19th century, the need arose for coordination of main cities' plans with the neighbouring towns after which appeared the urban planning (Germany was the most advanced in this field). During the First World War, in most of the developed countries the planning turned into a science by tackling urban issues which then followed by an extensive energy and engineering development. While the urban centres began to multiply and decentralize, urban planning became increasingly important by stressing the urgent need for planning at the regional scale. Problems of planning expanded even further after the introduction of new construction and rehabilitation techniques of the city centres.

<sup>10</sup> Referred to Louise Donschen's film, *Archis Interventions Prishtina 2009*, Kai Vöckler, supported by ERSTE Foundation, accessed on 07-01-2014, <http://vimeo.com/7061675>

for the fact that now a lot more “aliens”, that are not directly related to the neighbourhood, enter the neighbourhood than they have entered before.

Neighbourhood as a moulding part of the city reflects that transformation the entire society has undergone thus carrying the pros and cons of such shift. The way of interchange of people and their relationship to the space is that part that has undergone the greatest change over these years. This shift has to do with the growth of density and this growth means not only increase in the number of residents, but that the level of interchange between residents it's been lost. Twice as harrowing is the fact that emotional relations that we had earlier to the garden or the tree or the wall or to those traditional elements that have identified us have lost and no longer exist for now we are made more “urban”!



*New constructions opposite the bus station*

Interventions continue further in existing residential buildings where each and everyone, in their own way, transform the balcony, create additional annexes, etc., and this is a general reflection of the citizens – it is an expression of individual values developed during the last few years. And not coincidentally these zones even today are in difficulty to be shaped and create urban lifestyle.

Interventions which are taking place in the city are also due to the education of new generations of architects and urban planners in schools. The challenge in this case is that through the urban design solutions to transform it into a more conscious urban setting, starting from a profound comprehension of urban space and by creating opportunities of designing and construction of the city, through innovative design strategies and urban planning.<sup>11</sup>



<sup>11</sup> Referred to urban design developments New Urbanism (1980), at “The Smart Growth Manual”, published by Duany A., Speck J. and Lydon M. (2009)

### From a vernacular city into a featureless space

All of this thorny architectural, social and economic issue, either improvised without an architect or be it with the amateurish one, besides the “bad taste”, which is the last in the chain issue, generates more disturbing urban issues such as the overload of public infrastructure, creation of social and legal property conflicts and other issues that go to the environmental domain such are dust, waste, noise, etc. It should therefore take urgent initiatives to soothe the deranged urban developments that are taking life in the city as well as to “adjust” such disorientated new architecture in this hectic situation.

Uncontrolled urban planning is more a result of the social and political crisis. It is crucial therefore in this situation to combine the control of public authorities and the society in order to set up a positive aura of urban regulation.

One thing we have to correctly understand and accept in regard to our own urban visions is that solving the problems of the city is a lengthy process and belongs to all those who live in it. So, the approach to the process of the city’s renewal and inclusion of citizens in this process is a proven experience and must be understood as such, especially when the city has numerous needs which require to be answered to all at once.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Marcel Musch from BVR Adviseurs Ruimtelijke Ontëikking, at his presentation in Prishtina

### EC Ma Ndryshe

Non-governmental organization “Emancipimi Civil Ma Ndryshe” (EC Ma Ndryshe) was established in March 2006. The main goals of the organization are to promote participatory and active citizenship and raising public awareness for the protection and cultivation of cultural heritage. EC Ma Ndryshe is among the founding members, representing Kosova in the South East European Network of organizations working in cultural heritage – SEE Heritage Network. It is also the founder and leader of the Prizren Cultural Heritage Forum and the Network of Culture Organizations of Prizren. Recently EC Ma Ndryshe was among the founding members of the Cultural Forum – Network of Independent Culture Organizations in Kosova. Since its establishment, EC Ma Ndryshe has continuously exercising direct pressure on local government in Prizren to enable the access of the civil society and the citizens for joint decision-making. Apart from the direct participation in public consultation, EC Ma Ndryshe has been advocating on regular basis about the need to respect legal obligations for public consultation, wider inclusion of communities in public consultation and the need to include concerns and necessities of the community in the public policy documents.

*Main projects of the organization:* Urbanism Watch – Urbanism of Prizren under Constant Watch (2014 – 2015), Public participation through social media in Prizren and Gjilan (2013 – 2014), Inclusive city – participatory urban planning for sustainable urban development in Prizren (2013 – 2015), Cultural Heritage, the central pillar of sustainable local and regional development in Prizren (2013 – 2014), Culture Volunteers (2012 – 2013), Public participation in devising and enforcing local cultural policies in Prizren (2012 – 2013), Online transparency of Prizren, Mamusha and Prishtina municipalities (2013 – 2015), The civil society’s role in promoting cultural heritage (regional project, 2011 – 2013), A Balkan tale, the Ottoman heritage in the Balkans (regional project, 2011 – 2013), Raising the cultural awareness among the young people through documentaries (2010), Strengthening of civic activity in promoting and protecting the Cultural Heritage (2009), the “Culture 2013” Platform (2008-2009), Restoration Camps (2007, 2008 & 2009), Open citizens’ Forums (2007), Days of European Heritage in Kosova (2006, 2007 & 2008), Zambaku i Prizrenit Song Festival (2006).

*Publications:* Who guards the guardians – accountability of civil society in Kosova (2013), Youth and Transparency – excluded or ignored? (2013), Urban planning for citizens (2013), Public participation on drafting of cultural policies in Prizren (2013), “Prizren, cultural city”, documentary film (2013), Erroneous – an analysis of numerous and continuous faults in cultural heritage (2013), Five analyses of the project “Online Transparency”: 1. A year of monitoring for greater transparency, 2. Natural and Urban Degradation, 3. Adherence to the law in local governance, 4. Good governance is not a buzzword (2012), 5. Transparency of local governance in Prizren (2012), Silent Balkans, documentary film (2012), Cultural Life in Prizren Municipality (in cooperation with the ODA Theatre, 2010-2011), Prizren in Retrospect (comparative photocatalogue of Prizren, 2009), Voluntarism and Cultural Heritage (2009), Low Cost Intervention (2009), Strategic document on Organizing the Days of European Heritage in Kosova (2008), Cultural Heritage and Culturism in Prizren (2008), Cultural Spaces in Kosovo (in cooperation with ODA Theatre – 2008).