

PLACE-MAKING IN A TRANSITIONAL SOCIETY: Production of 'Contradicted' Spaces

Keywords: Place-making, Public Space, Transition, People, Urban Planning Culture, Governance, Politics, Western Balkans, Kosovo, European Union.

This paper seeks to raise critical points of place-making in a post-socialist, post-conflict built environment in the Republic of Kosovo in the period of transition, faced with political, economic, social and cultural dynamics towards a new system of values, legislation, policies, practices and trends of the European developed countries. This will be viewed in perspectives of 'local institutional ownership, responsibility and willingness' rather than of international community driven initiatives and efforts, which relates to the matter of sustainability. The point will be made in the context of the 'right to the city' and the relation between places and people, and in light of a critical gap between the drafted plans, guidelines, policies and legislation, and their implementation in practice or in other words when 'one is planned and another implemented' having continuous negative consequences to ordinary citizens and the public life. Two case studies from the recent past – vicinal public spaces in the Historic urban environment in Prizren (a car park and pedestrian area) and a process of place-making from an unprotected to a privatised public space around a cultural heritage monument in Vushtrri - reveal that the created culture of urban planning reflects into place-making continuing to be politically, business and personally oriented by imposing urban solutions accordingly to the people of Kosovo. This paper will suggest that delivering spatial justice and creating people-friendly places will require both new socio-cultural dynamics of local capacities and political willingness and active engagement of local government institutions, to bring positive changes into life.

Do people make places?

Wide range of literature discusses and provides analyses and opinions that aim to conclude that considering the different dimensions of urban design and purposes of urban planning, their interaction and mutual influences, place-making is more than transforming spaces and creating visual physical settings. It is a broader and a deeper social and cultural relation between spaces and society or people.

People Place is often used rather than *Public Place*.

People experience different feelings about a place, something that is beyond just a visual aspect of the physical structure. It's something that the spirit of the place offers, a sense of a place, the *genius loci* that has been 'long understood to be a key element of place-making' (Depriest-Hricko and Prytherch, 2013).

Six dimensions of urban design concept are presented by Carmona *et al.* (2010): the Morphological, the Perceptual, the Social, the Visual, the Functional and the Temporal dimensions. They all work in interaction and make a concept of a place.

Since the early days of when the terminology of urban design is used (early 1960s) the aesthetic, visual and structural aspects were more in focus. The contemporary urban design however, tends to have a wider approach primarily thinking about creation of places that people can use and enjoy. The visual aspect is seen as a narrower understanding of urban design while the social usage tradition is a more deep and essential.

'Understanding the relationship between people ('society') and their environment ('space') is an essential component of urban design' (Carmona *et al.*, 2010, p133).

Jacobs (1961) argued that bringing people onto the street created animation and vitality, and likened street life to an intricate street ballet' (cited in Carmona *et al.*, 2010, p205).

Shaftoe (2008) uses the term 'convivial spaces' while discussing about successful public spaces. Convivial is defined as 'festive, sociable, jovial and fond of merry-making' (p5). He calls 'Places where people can be 'sociable and festive' are the essence of urbanity' (p5) and draws attention to his photos taken randomly in various public spaces that have many people in them. The author calls this a 'litmus test' of conviviality – as he calls successful spaces the ones that have people 'lingering in them' (p9) and firmly states that

public spaces are about people.

Various authors have provided different qualities that sustainable urban places should have. Vitality and livability, identity and control, access, mixed uses, an environment for all, fit, human scale, safety and security (Lynch *et al.*, cited in Carmona *et al.*, 2010). Further, seven objectives were identified relating to a concept of a place: Character, Continuity and enclosure, Quality of the public realm, Ease of movement, Legibility, Adaptability and Diversity.

With these objectives as a focus the transformation of the above criteria into a local socio-cultural context is inevitably important, involving an area broader than a development site and considering the global context impacts in terms of sustainability (the economic, social and environmental balance).

Moreover, related to a local context, the special character and the identity of a place have a particular significance. The character is something that makes a place unique and distinguishes one place from another and that was not created with an intention or by purpose but because of the vernacular processes that have produced the buildings (Butina-Watson and Bentley, 2007). These places have an economic impact, as having a unique context they are touristic destinations. As Hough states 'looking for what is distinctive and different is what tourism is all about' (cited in Butina-Watson and Bentley, 2007, p1).

By giving the example of an Old Bridge in Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina which was destroyed during the civil war between Croats and Bosniak Muslims, Butina-Watson and Bentley (2007) showed that people's identities are not about the structural aspect of buildings, streets and green spaces but about what these *mean* to people, as the 'true Mostarians' felt they lost a part of their body when the bridge was destroyed.

The spaces - places in the context of place-making can also be seen in a broader picture of a city and by understanding the city today, how it develops and is being transformed and the principles that apply, the space and place relation in the public realm, can be seen as a 'puzzle' of the city 'mosaic'.

Amin and Thrift (2002) call on understanding the city from a new kind of urbanism point of view. In the essence it is about understanding a city in the context of its continuous change and transformation. Their focus starts with legibility in the city and the new

urbanism of everyday in the context of their extraordinary variety and vitality, the propinquity and the flow in the city and it continues with the economic, political and the aspect of a power including the technological innovations which have changed the perception of 'near and far'.

Public places can also be seen in the context of urban neighborhood. This issue is drawn for a particular reason that public open spaces in urban neighborhoods can remain unused and many times unmaintained which has an impact on the focus of movement mainly towards the urban centers as areas where people can go, stay and enjoy by meeting other people, walk or seat, for leisure, recreational or entertainment purposes.

Madanipour (2010) talks about public spaces and everyday life in urban neighborhoods by mentioning the importance of the participation of people in the process of creating the public spaces that 'in a contrary might result with the creation of the gap between the abstract ideas of designers and the diverse patterns of life of the people' (p107).

This makes the all-inclusive approach and community participation essential in place-making, in identifying what is in a benefit of all, in terms of the use and the location of a place. It's about engaging all who are part of the everyday life in the urban areas starting from the local and central authorities, local and business communities, developers and users (Carmon *et al.*, 2010) and different social categories in age, (dis)ability, gender, race, ethnicity and class in design and planning (Southworth *et al.*, 2012) for successful and more sustainable places.

Kosovo and the post-conflict socio-cultural and political phenomena: Reflection of urban planning culture into place-making

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 European perspective 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).

In this frame, Kosovo political leaders and the established institutions tended building a '0' reference point for the state building with efforts to completely erase the past. I argue that necessarily all from the past is 'negative', in the context of built environment planning and development. Its review and building on what was already created and evaluated as 'positive', and potentially 'beneficial', could have I suggest provided a different course for planning culture and development than what is currently the case. Starting from '0' reference created socio-cultural and political circumstances for professional capacities and knowledge ('of the past') to become 'marginalized' and provided a suitable climate for business only, political and personal oriented planning, 'installing' a new planning culture.

The problems of urban planning have been very similar in the Balkan region countries over the past years as they continue to be. Although the legislation framework is in place and the spatial and urban plans mostly drafted, the implementation of both 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 newly introduced legislation also foresees public participation and the review before the plans are adopted; however a 'community-based, people-friendly planning is still rather wishful thinking' (Maier, 2012, p149).

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 1999s 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 its 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.

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, between institutions of municipal and national level, and between institutions and civil society.

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 best 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 and 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 with serving to the above mentioned profiteers.

Krajnčević (2005) states that the conditions for EU integrations would be easy to fulfill if EU would have required only a formal homework, however, the integration negotiations are first of all based on the conditions how the candidate member will do on implementation.

The creation of Kosovo Association of Architects and Kosovo Association of Planners did not bring the expected changes. A feeling of hesitation for the real impact of these

professional organizations is present in the community. With internal professional fractions, also politically influenced, a real and healthy platform for a professional and effective critical debate is still largely missing.

The created political and socio-cultural circumstances and the installed urban planning culture inevitably shaped the attitude towards a public space and its appearance in both physical and socio-cultural dimension. As much as miss-treated public spaces in Kosovo are rather un-treated with a created approach that 'whatever is not mine or I have no interest with I don't need to care about'. As it was stated by UN-Habitat Kosovo (2014):

'Public urban spaces in Kosovo are typically uncared for, unloved, unvalued and unused or underused, typically seen only as places to move through and valued only as an informal car park or somewhere to dump rubbish. A space becomes a place when it has significance to the people that experience it, and when it extends beyond these basic uses'.

'Places for people' remains yet an unknown and a not popular concept, primarily to the government institutions and policy makers, and to a large extent professionals but also to ordinary citizens who are hardly familiar with their 'the right to the city'.

Reflection into practice: Production of 'contradicted' spaces, a car park and pedestrian area

The Historic Center, Prizren

The culture of place-making in terms of an uncoordinated efforts and lack of communication and collaboration has produced spaces that appear in contradiction to one another, as concepts and aims. This phenomenon is most evident in the Historic Center of Prizren, recognized locally and internationally for its unique cultural and natural heritage. Despite a multi-layered diverse heritage 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 Center is an urban area defined by a protective zone and protected by law (Law on Historic Center of Prizren). 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 Center.

The study area for this case composes of two public spaces, naturally divided by river *Lumbardhi* and physically connected by 'bridges'. In discussion with two of the first experts of 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 (in form of 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. Almost attached to this 'bridge' around 20 years ago was built a pedestrian bridge. The 'un-normality' of a planning decision will take place during the transition period when the national government planning authority, the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning decided to build a brand new bridge, a third one in a row, a large reinforced concrete structure that exclusively provides free access to vehicles, in the most authentic parts of the Historic Center, below the hill where the Fortress is located (Fig. 1).

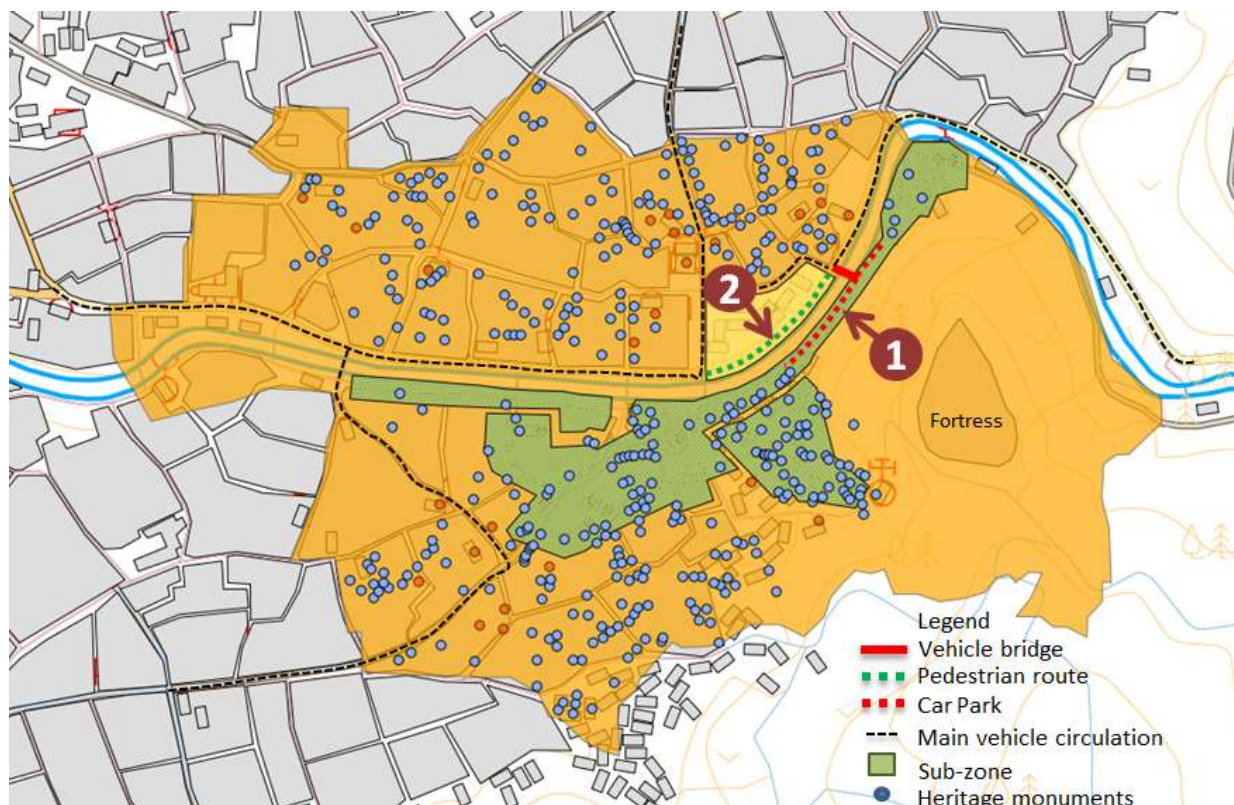


Fig. 1: Map of the Historic Center Protective Zone - 1. Public space Car Park; 2. Public space Pedestrian
Sources: Kosovo Cadastral Agency; Law on Historic Center of Prizren and CDP – geo-referenced and elaborated in QGIS by the author.

‘People’s mobility requirements and limitations should be considered to ensure that most of the potential users can access the space. For social equity and environmental reasons this means ensuring that walking, cycling and public transport access is an important placemaking objective. Private car mobility must be recognised, but not at the expense of these other modes of transport’ (UN-Habitat Kosovo, 2014, p13).

The bridge, (dis)connects the two public spaces in two sides of the river in terms of natural flow of pedestrians to experience the whole area. In one side, a pedestrian area is turned into a car park (1), with a decision and financing of a national government and in the opposite side, a public space is turned into a pedestrian area (2), with decision of a municipality, supported and co-financed by UN-Habitat Kosovo (Fig. 1). Public space (1) has defined edges with river in one side and the natural hill in another and public space

(2) is defined by a river in one side and residential buildings in another with mainly cafes and restaurants at the ground floor.

The two spaces have not been developed to produce a harmonious integration of both and the lack of intention to reinforce the areas genius loci and its character is evident. Each of the spaces are developed in two different aims and concepts, producing spaces that contradict each other. Instead of optimising, this approach rather affected the connectivity and accesibility in terms of an integrated walkable area of the two spaces, their interaction in terms of use, maximising of a safety and of a comfort and offering a limited enjoyment for people (Fig. 2, 3 and 4).



Public space (1)



Public space (2)

Fig. 2, 3 and 4: Car Park (1), Pedestrian area (2) and the Vehicle Bridge (dis)connecting them

Photo: Author



Bridge(s)

The segregation of a vehicle road and a side walk with vehicle barriers at the public space (1) creates a psychological perception of a space where vehicles have an advantage and where pedestrians should take the side walk in order to be safe. This increases a potential for conflict between uses (Fig. 5 and 6).



Fig. 5 and 6: 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 uses with vehicles is evident.

Photo: Author

This example shows how people place can be transferred into only a space to pass through, as its composition and content do not offer other choices.

An attempt of a municipal government to show responsibility on this area was demonstrated with a temporary removal of cars at the time of municipal elections, in Nov 2013 (Fig. 7 and 8). After the elections ended the situation carried on with an old practice.

This shows the approach and the urban planning culture the local government authorities have developed and raises the question for sustainable development planning for this vital part of the city.

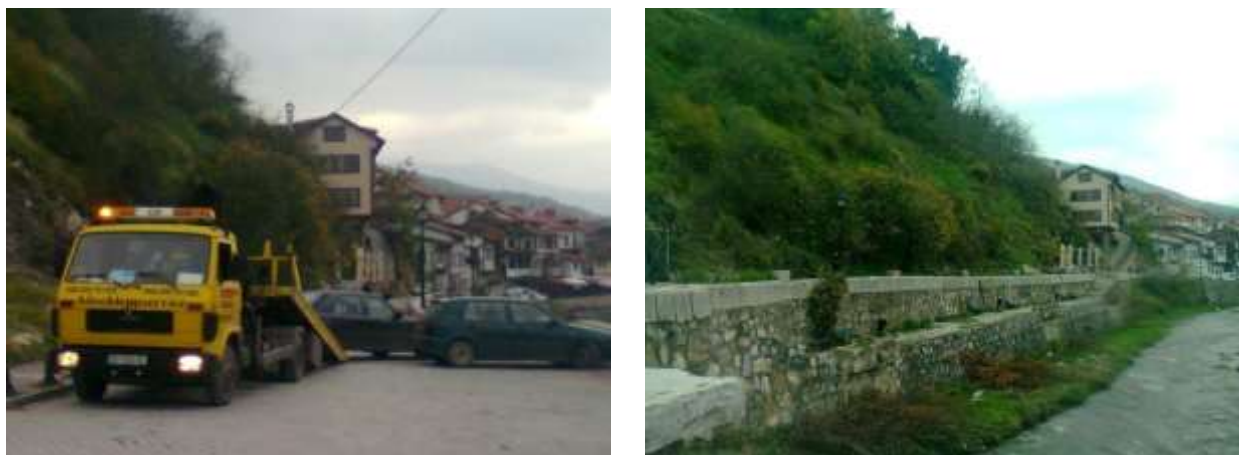


Fig. 7 and 8: Municipality action to temporary remove the vehicles and free the space for pedestrians.
Photo: Author

Reflection into practice: From unprotected to privatized public space Old Stone Bridge Protective Zone, Vushtrri

The case of Vushtrri town (the ancient Vicianum) is seen in a different context of place-making. As a result of the processes mentioned earlier here a contradiction appears between the ‘unprotection’ and ‘privatisation’ of a public space.

The old stone bridge in the center of town is protected by law and its protection expands from the physical structure of a monument to the protection of its surrounding by a protective zone. The Law on Special Protective Zones derived from a process of negotiations for the Kosovo status settlement – a Comprehensive Proposal known as *Ahtisaari Plan* applies certain prohibitions and limitations to the site (Fig. 9).

The surrounding area of the bridge was uncared, unmaintained and missused for a long time, serving mainly as informal car park and a dump area, vanishing the monumental value of a unique bridge. The specific spatial appearance due to a change of the *Sitnica* river flow makes the bridge lay on dry ground with a large area of an open space around (Fig. 10 and 11).



Fig. 9: Map of the Special Protective Zone of the Old Stone Bridge.

Source: Kosovo Cadastral Agency



Fig. 10 and 11: The view of the bridge and its surrounding as an uncared and a missused public space

Photo: Former ICO Office in Kosovo

Several drafted documents, organised workshops and forums have targeted the Bridge and its surrounding although in different contexts rather than as a public space or a space to be turned into a place. In one of the workshops of Cultural Heritage without Borders (CHwB) Kosovo Office organised in 2011, with community involvement and institutional representation, on 'Challenges and opportunities of the cultural heritage' of Vushtrri municipality, the Old Stone Bridge is one of the three most elaborated monuments. The *SWOT* analyses suggested the 'use of a Stone Bridge for artistic

activities' and 'Organising of cultural events in and around the cultural monuments' as *Opportunities*; the 'Area surrounding the Old Stone Bridge' as a *Strength* while the 'Strangulation of the Bridge by ambulant/mobile vendors' as a *Weakness* of the municipality.

This revealed the emotional relation and the desires the local community have for this bridge and the use of its surrounding.

The Council of Europe and European Commission Preliminary Technical Assessment (PTA) (2005) for the Old Stone Bridge prepared by local experts in cooperation with the PTA international expert group recommends for the proposals for a long term management of the monument or site to ensure sustainability, to be carried out by the local municipality. It further suggests an estimation of costs for a final project for multi-cultural activities including landscape design and regeneration of the site into a more environmentally friendly and sustainable open air space.

In 2009, a private developer expressed an interest to develop the site by building a new restaurant. With a letter sent by the former International Civilian Representative (ICR) to a municipal mayor in Sep 2009, the project was authorised given that it met the requirements of the Law on Special Protective Zones provided that applicable legislation is complied with, including the Law on Cultural Heritage, the Law on Spatial Planning and the Law on Construction, however under a specific condition as stated in the letter, for the municipality to further develop the project in form of a broader management plan in order to ensure longer term protection of the historical site and its integration into community life. UNESCO, Council of Europe and OSCE expressed readiness to support however up today municipality had not expressed any interest to initiate and take the process further.

The public space of a historical site is tremendously transformed in its visual appearance however 'privatised' in terms of a social dimension and choices for use. The fencing creates a perception of isolation instead of interaction with surroundings and instead of providing range of choices and an activity space it is turned into a restaurant terrace (Fig.12 and 13).



Fig. 12 and 13: The view of the bridge and its surrounding – after the private intervention, a new restaurant.
Photo: Former ICO Office in Kosovo

The CHwB Kosovo Office has in a recent past completed the drafting of Local Cultural Heritage Plans for seven municipalities in Kosovo including Vushtrri, with a purpose of involvement of all local stakeholders including the institutional representation of municipal and national level and the citizens of Vushtrri, civil society NGOs and local professionals for identifying their needs and potentials for a joint action. This is a positive approach to build a feeling of ownership and responsibility. For this purpose they have established Local Cultural Heritage Forums (LCHF). For the period of the project (2012-2015) there was commitment and productive work of the forums however a critical question can be raised if and how the LCHF will operate after the project ends speaking about its continuity and sustainability. CHwB is in the process of identifying the modalities for the future of LCHF what will require the further coordination by the municipality.

This creates that 'breaking moment' in an overall process, between the donor initiated and carried development in one side and the (lack of) demonstration of ownership, responsibility and willingness by local institutions and capacities in another, to carry on the process in a sustainable manner. It illustrates the creation of a culture of 'dependence' on the 'outside driving engines' for initiation and action.

Despite all the discussed drafted documents in this paper so far municipal institution had not yet shown a willingness or taken concrete steps to meet their recommendations and advises for this site/ a public space surrounding the Bridge; excluding here the potential projects for implementation that derive from LCHP, mainly for physical interventions to

cultural heritage buildings, awareness raising and education and research activities during the project period 2012-2015.

The conservation and development plan for a potential Vushtrri historic area, still to be determined, is a future plan to be implemented by local relevant institutions with support of CHwB Kosovo Office. This will eventually address the matter of a public space around the Old Stone Bridge in a context of a protective zone, however with grounded doubts for a beautiful plan to remain again only a piece of paper.

Conclusion

This paper engages critically in the discussion and examination of place-making in a post-socialist, post-conflict socio-cultural and political circumstances in Kosovo in order to address the key points for creation of 'places for people' in such environments. It is focused specifically at the public spaces located in the historic urban areas and included in protective zones, being part of a physical-aesthetic composition and of a socio-cultural context of architectural and urban heritage.

Creation of public places is viewed from the perspective of the 'right to the city', the right to a public place, for its creation and its free use and enjoyment by people. It argues that this is confronted by a lack of demonstration of 'local ownership' in terms of responsibility and willingness by institutional authorities for creating 'successful places'.

It discusses the urban planning culture embedded during the period of transition and it suggests that this culture is reflected as an approach towards the treatment of public spaces as well, continuing to have political, business and personal interests at the center of a subject.

The paper does not want to repudiate that some presence of positive dynamics for social and cultural change in Kosovo exist, however an attention is drawn here for processes and action to be mainly 'donor' initiated while bringing into question the sustainability of these efforts in longer term. It suggests that further expanding of the initiatives and processes particularly emanated from the inside local capacities is more than needed and essential; local capacities in form of a cooperation between independent

professionals and civil society NGOs with the community engagement, as a vital positive driving force in a transitional society. The independence from daily politics and personal interests with community oriented processes for people-friendly environments is more than required and crucial.

Being within historic urban areas these public spaces are unique and require careful treatment and urban enhancement. The existing plans, recommendations and actions in the context of rehabilitation and preservation of cultural heritage does not necessarily exclude but I suggest they rather focus on the physical structure interventions of the monuments and sites, lacking a more deeper approach for place-making in these urban spaces. This would also raise awareness that not only conservation and restoration of monuments is important but also a sensitive approach and treatment of public spaces around them is tremendously required to build on esthetics and social inclusion but also preserve the historic areas in a more holistic way.

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Visual Material

Law on Historic Centre of Prizren 2012, annex 1. Fig. 1. Map. Historic Center, Prizren: Geo-referenced and worked in Quantum GIS by the author (2015). [online] Available from: <<http://gzk.rks-gov.net>>.

Hisari, L., (2012). Historic Center of Prizren, Kosovo. Fig. 2. Photograph

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

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Hisari, L., (2014). Historic Center of Prizren, Kosovo. Fig. 6. Photograph

Hisari, L., (2013). Historic Center of Prizren, Kosovo. Fig. 7, 8. Photograph

Kosovo Cadastral Agency (2008). Fig. 9. Map. Special Protective Zone, Old Stone Bridge, Vushtrri Kosovo.

Former International Civilian Office, Kosovo (2009). Old Stone Bridge, Vushtrri Kosovo. Fig. 10 and 11. Photographs.

Former International Civilian Office, Kosovo (2010). Old Stone Bridge, Vushtrri, Kosovo. Fig. 12 and 13. Photographs