
Preservation of the Historic Centre of Prizren through Integration into Modern Life

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1 ABSTRACT

The Historic Centre of Prizren is one of the most distinguished zones of urban heritage in Kosovo, with valuable traces of diverse historic and cultural heritage. Although it represents a major asset for social and economic development of the city, for a long time its immense potential, including cultural, historical, tourist and environmental, has not been treated with the appropriate approach that would preserve, promote and materialise those cultural riches. The laws and regulations for the Historic Centre of Prizren mainly envisage measures that freeze development, not allowing for possibilities to develop the city and integrate the heritage into modern daily life.

This paper attempts to present how can the Historic Centre of Prizren with its historic and cultural heritage and urban archaeological resources integrated into modern city and city life; how can be fulfilled today's needs without completely destroying the traditional ways of living? In this respect, it will attempt to argue that the preservation planning should contain not only spatial and physical aspects but also social, economic, and institutional approaches. Preservation of the Historic Centre of Prizren should not be realized at the cost of further new development, as it is intended to be with laws and regulations. The intention should be to balance both, historic preservation and new urban development. This approach will encourage the urban development itself to highlight and promote historic preservation. The preservation of urban heritage should be an integrated process, and an integral part of the comprehensive planning policy for the whole city and urban heritage cannot be separated from the overall environment. Also, in whole this process, citizens and all other stakeholders should be actively involved. Finally, this mixture of history and everyday life will produce a unique feeling in the area, making Prizren a large living city museum.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Overall Aim of the Paper

This paper attempts to identify new approach in preservation of Historic Centre of Prizren through integration into modern life, it will attempt to present how can the Historic Centre of Prizren with its historic and cultural heritage and urban archaeological resources integrated into modern city and city life; how can be fulfilled today's needs without completely destroying the traditional ways of living? In this respect, it will attempt to argue that the preservation planning should contain not only spatial and physical aspects but also social, economic and institutional approaches.

2.2 Background

The city of Prizren is one of the oldest settlements in Kosovo and in the Eastern Europe, which has always been a crossroad of culture and trade throughout history. During the history it is recognized as an important cultural, economic and diplomatic centre. Located in the middle of the ancient Istanbul-Venice route, this city holds memories of all time.

Since the antiquity, it is recognized as a unique place in Balkans for its historic and cultural heritage values, civilization and various religions. Thanks to its favourable geographic position, harmonic merge of these cultures during the history and enviable number of monuments of all times, city of Prizen with a full right holds the epithet of the "City Museum", "Museum under the open sky", up to ranging as one of most beautiful cities of Kosova.¹

Prizren with around 110,000 inhabitants is situated on the slopes of the Sharr Mountains and on the banks of the river Bistrica. This town with houses built under the Kalaja (Fortress) is a special curiosity. It is rich in dwelling quarters and houses with balconies facing gardens full of foliage. Numerous narrow, winding streets

¹ <http://www.zeriyt.com/prizreni-qytet-i-trashegimise-kulturore-t69066.0.html>

cut the whole town up, giving the town an oriental physiognomy. The craftsmen of Prizren are well known for their beautiful gold and silver articles, embroidery, the Prizren cloth, knives, and other folk handcrafts, trades which Prizrenians have preserved throughout the centuries.²



Fig. 1: A view towards the Stone Bridge, River Bistrica, Sinan Pasha Mosque and Kalaja of Prizren.



Fig. 2: Prizren in Kosovo Map.(Source: Statistical Office of Kosovo, 2007)

² <http://kk.rks-gov.net/prizren/City-guide/Geography.aspx>

The city of Prizren is comprised of a historic core (Protective Zones 1 and 2), surrounded by a buffer Zone 3 that mediates between the city's sprawling periphery and its compact urban centre.³ Its narrow and winding streets and side-passages reflect the mosaic of private compounds that shaped the organic growth and increasing urbanisation that accompanied the Ottoman Empire's spread, and reflects the city's importance as the craft centre for metalwork and leather that supplied the Ottoman army. The physical profile of the natural terrain in the Historic Centre of Prizren is another element that together with an organic pattern and the flow of the river gives a unique value to Prizren's urban heritage.⁴ The Historic Centre of Prizren has a unique urban character and exceptional cultural and religious diversity.

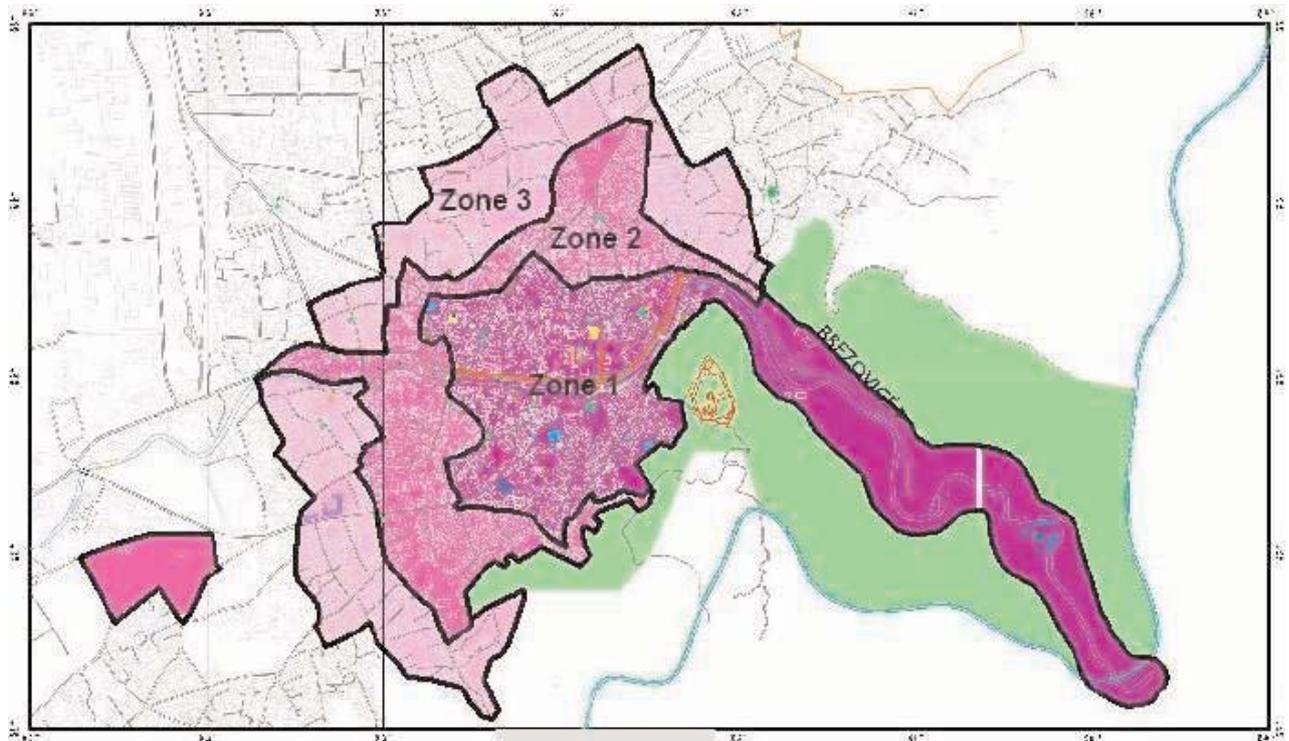


Fig. 3: The Historic Zones of Prizren (Source: CHWB and Politecnico di Torino, PPDP Prizren, August 2005)

The Historic Centre of Prizren covers the administrative boundaries of the historic centre as set by the municipal Conservation and Development Plan, included the Fortress area and an additional part west of the historic centre. It covers about 1/3 of the area of the whole city. It places a total of 104 buildings and four architectural complexes, including 40 private houses, under legal protection. These include seven Orthodox churches, a cathedral, an Orthodox school, and the Orthodox Bishop's residence. Eleven mosques, about a dozen mills and fountains, ten other public objects and four educational institutions also fall inside the protected area.

³ General Plan of Prizren 2003-2013

⁴ Portraits of Historic Districts in Kosovo and Balkan Region 2011



Fig. 4: The Historic Centre of Prizren.(Source: *Law on the Historic Centre of Prizren, 2011*)

Within the Conservation and Development Plan for the Historic Zone of Prizren made by CHWB in corporation with Istanbul Technical University in Turkey in year 2008, the Historic Zone is divided into eight sub zones, but the Fortress area and an additional part west of the historic centre is not included, as shown in fig. 5.

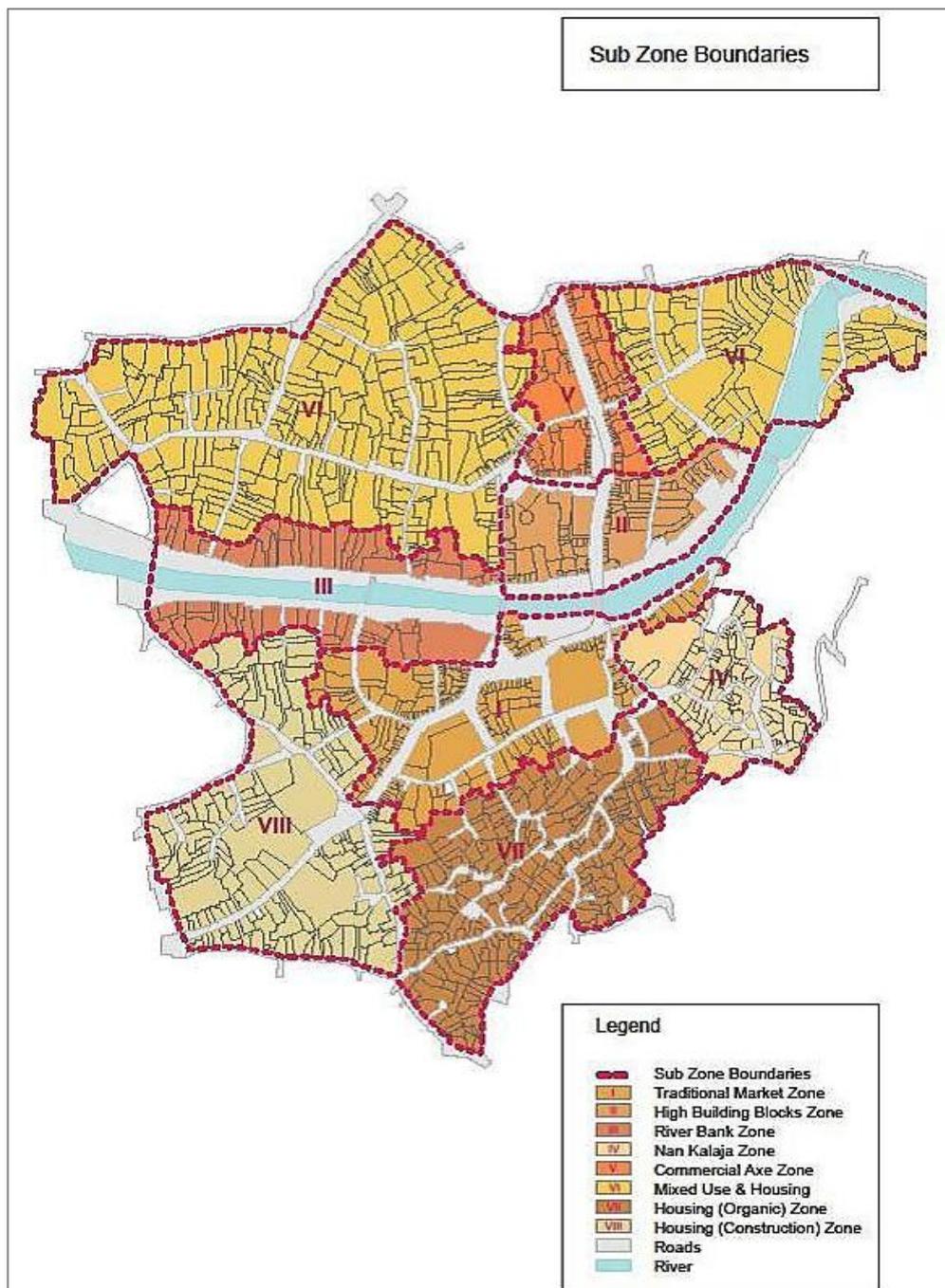


Fig. 5: The Sub Zones of the Historic Zone of Prizren. (Source: *Conservation and Development Plan, 2008*)

The fortress of Prizren heart – shaped, which is dominating the city, is one of the most important cultural and historical monuments of the city of Prizren. It is one of the most ancient of forts and is considered to have extraordinary archaeological, architectural, historical and cultural heritage value for Kosovo in particular and South-East Europe in general. Located on the south-east side of the city, it is considered to be the city’s symbol and an important element in Kosovo’s cultural identity. Built on a high hill, in a picturesque environment, and having an extraordinary strategic location, the Fortress dominates the city as well as the impressive, deep Bistrica valley and the big Dukagjini area. The Fortress has its beginnings in the first period of civilisation in this region, in prehistory, with a continuing development through the Byzantine and Ottoman periods. It was used exclusively as a fortress until 1912.⁵ The process of deterioration started in 1912 and continues today.

⁵ Preliminary Technical Assessment – The Prizren Fortress 2009



Fig. 6: Fortress (Kalaja) of Prizren

(Source: <http://www.albanian.com/main/countries/kosova/prizren/index.html>)

An august 2011 was finalized the draft law on the Historic Centre of Prizren. It is drafted in a closed process, hidden from the public, leaving civil society outside the process, and it is not held any public consultations with the citizens of Prizren.

The draft law on the Historic Centre of Prizren covers 1.377 cadastral areas in the centre of Prizren and 141 cadastral areas around the Fortress area. 104 buildings and four architectural complexes are included within this area.

According to this draft law, the construction, recreational activities, municipal services and advertising spaces, shall be governed in a particular manner, by a new body formed by the municipality, but consists of religious communities, ethnic communities and civil society. This body will be named the Committee for Cultural Heritage of Prizren, and will consist of seven members. Six members will be selected from the civil society and religious communities, as follows: One member of Islamic community, one of the Serbian Orthodox Church and one of the Catholic Church and three members from civil society. The seventh member will be selected by the municipal structures, specifically by the Community Office.

Bases on the terminology used in the draft laws, the Orthodox religious sites, are treated as Serbian, while religious sites of two other religions are not associated with any other community. Also, according to this draft law, members of religious communities are not distinguished from the civil society members.

The draft law, prohibits merging of two or more cadastral land parcels into a single unit or transforming and construction activities that result in establishing of a single object in two or more cadastral parcels; construction of buildings over two floors (ground + 2 floors), construction of basic buildings of more than 150m²; activities that will result in permanent changes to the natural morphology of the terrain, etc.

Also, under the Article 18 paragraph 4, the Committee shall require the consent of the Serbian Orthodox Church for any activity, which affects the properties of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Historic Centre of Prizren. Although at first sight one gets the impression that this law considers all religious communities equally, the article 18.4, gives an additional voice to the Orthodox Church.

The fact that in this draft law the Orthodox churches and other facilities are considered as a historical heritage of the Serb entity and as such for any intervention in this area prior must be obtained the permission from the Serbian church authorities, is against the best practices worldwide for preserving the cultural and historical heritage of the cities, where historical heritage can't be considered as property of an entity, but it belongs to all citizens, city and all country. The historic centre should be considered as a whole and to be preserved with integrated approach.

As such this draft law considered only the physical aspect of the preservation, without considering social and economic aspect. It suffocates the city's economic development - the development within the law is very deficient, and imposed many obstacles, prohibitions, bureaucracies, penalties, and no compensation provided. The law is more restrictive than regulatory. It does not provide a sustainable system of urban management for the historic centre of city, which represents one of the basic potentials for the development of the whole city.

This also violates the fundamental principles of the constitution of Kosovo: secularism, neutrality in matters of religious beliefs, discrimination and property rights. This law encourages more religious and ethnic hatred and conflict, taking into account that Prizren is known throughout history as a city of cultural, ethnic, religious and language diversity.



Fig. 7: The Illustration of the Law on the Historic Centre of Prizren.

3 PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC CENTRES

What is it about historic centres that attract us? What qualities do they have that make us want to walk along their streets and linger in their squares?

“Historic city centres are made up of a web of buildings and streets from different periods that create various cultural and urban strata. Over the centuries, they have finely honed their urban character and now offer quality urban culture.”⁶

Historic centres present the past – possessing buildings, monuments, lanes, and parks that resonate with memory and tradition. The scale of their elements is inviting, and walking through them, one can discover history in the smallest of details. They give us a vision of another time.

But unlike museums, where the past is displayed but not touched, historic centres are places where life continues to be lived, where cultural heritage is not protected behind glass cases or barriers, where it is, instead, a part of a populated community making its living and generating sounds, scents, and scenes. Historic centres display the tempo of life in the community and epitomize the expression that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts."⁷

Historic centres were built to serve people to live, work and play. In many historic centres, it is a meeting place, a shopping place, and an open landmark for its residents. Historic preservation can only be sustainable if it is a part of a people-oriented approach.

What typically set a historic centre apart from other settlements are qualities associated with architectural age, rarity, character, and authenticity. The social value of these places exists in the diversity of daily life and the traditions of its people. A community inherits its heritage, and it stands to reason that the community is its most appropriate guardian. Local landmarks are cultural and emotional reference points for a community, which may be small or large, man-made or naturally occurring. These are landmarks because they are held in people's memories as important. For pride to exist in historic centres, an emotional attachment on the part of the community is needed. When this exists, there is an interest to maintain and preserve historic centres.

Preservation of historic centres is about seeking ways to ensure that the full range of qualities that give a place its particular character, its history, buildings, open spaces, traditions, culture, and social life are kept alive for the inhabitants of those communities and for future generations.

When historic centres as we know them today were created, lifestyles and habits were vastly different. The ways that people work, shop, travel, and play have changed. The population of urban centres also have changed in size and makeup. That's why the preservation planning must focus on improving the living conditions of the inhabitants and meeting the requests of this modern life.

Planning for the preservation of historic centres starts with an understanding of the cultural values of the place. Historic preservation cannot succeed without community support. It is therefore important to mobilize a wide range of actors and stakeholders including, national, regional and local governments, citizens and local communities, NGOs, corporate business, investors and construction companies, property owners, real estate investors, financial and economic organizations, social and environmental organizations, teaching, innovative and research institutions.

Safeguarding historic centres is most effective when there is a partnership among the community, the local government, and the business sector. This partnership needs to be nurtured with programs for the building of awareness of the value of preservation, including its economic, social, and cultural benefits. But when we think about those who control the future of historic centres, property owners, political leaders, bankers, real estate brokers, and taxpayers the issue is most commonly one of economic, not cultural, values. Can historic preservation process strengthen economic development and stimulate new investment? Certainly, there are numerous examples of this around the world. In almost all instances, the process is gradual, collaborative, and visionary.

⁶ Cohen 2001

⁷ Anglin 1997

4 RECOMANDATIONS FOR PRESERVATION OF THE HISTORIC CENTRE OF PRIZREN

The preservation of the Historic Centre of Prizren should contain not only spatial and physical aspects but also social, economic, and institutional approaches. Preservation should not be realized at the cost of further new development, as it is intended to be with laws and regulations. The intention should be to balance both, historic preservation and new urban development. This approach will encourage the urban development itself to highlight and promote historic preservation. The preservation of urban heritage should be an integrated process, and an integral part of the comprehensive planning policy for the whole city and urban heritage cannot be separated from the overall environment.

There are quite a number of positive examples in European cities, as well as in developing countries that can be considered as best-practice techniques and certain elements of these initiatives can be applicable also for the Historic Centre of Prizren.

In the process of historic preservation the crucial is the institutional approaches and political will. In order to achieve the successful preservation of the Historic Centre of Prizren the strategies of spatial, physical, social and economic aspects should be applied.

4.1. Spatial and Physical Aspect

The preservation of the Historic Centre of Prizren should embrace all the crucial economic, social, cultural, urban, technological and environmental questions of the modern world. That means that the preservation of the Historic Centre has not to be merely a matter of preservation of the cultural and historical heritage, but has to represent the highly significant economic, social and environmental issues as well.

The preservation of the Historic Centre of Prizren should be properly integrated with the policies of sustainable economic and social development, and with urban and regional planning as well.

The cultural and historical heritage of the Historic Centre should represent an integral part of the human environment and their integration into the life pattern of the modern society is of the fundamental importance for the planning and spatial organization of the city.

For preservation of the Historic Centre of Prizren these strategies should be taken:

- Preservation of the cultural and historical heritage of the Historic Centre of Prizren should be done through integrated approach with the policies of sustainable economic, social and environmental development and in harmonious adaptation to the modern life, oriented to culture and tourism;
- The historic, cultural and religious monuments in the Historic Centre of Prizren which have lost their functions or abandoned and also have not been used for their main purpose should be adapted and transformed functionally into the modern products, in accordance with needs and requirements of existing and future generations, which is suggested being oriented to culture and tourism;
- The burned, destroyed and abandoned housing in Nënkalaja neighbourhood and Fortress of Prizren should be reconstruct and to be used for cultural, tourist and recreational activities;
- The lateral parts of the river Bistrica should be regulated for pedestrians and recreational activities;

4.2. Social Aspect

In the process of historic preservation the crucial role has the participation of different actors and stakeholders. Also building the capacities, education and training are very important in this complex realization.

For preservation of the Historic Centre of Prizren these actions should be taken in social aspect:

- The Municipality of Prizren should prepare the management plan for the Historic Centre of Prizren and organize public consultation with all community groups in Prizren, to incorporate their needs and suggestions on formalizing and managing the Historic Centre of Prizren;
- At the practical level, the Prizren municipality should establish an inter-sectoral working group, composed of which will be the central government representatives and other relevant institutions;

Prizren civil society should be part of this group and has a significant number of members, to ensure proper representation of all community groups;

- Participation of wide range of actors and stakeholders including, national, regional and local governments, citizens and local communities, NGOs, corporate business, investors and construction companies, property owners, real estate investors, financial and economic organizations, social and environmental organizations, teaching, innovative and research institutions is essential, where the contribution of all these stakeholders should be obtained;
- Raising awareness of citizens for the values of historic, cultural, religious, architecture heritage of the Historic Centre of Prizren and the preservation of these reach values;
- Building the capacities – Human resource development, the process of equipping individuals with the understanding, skills and access to information, knowledge and training that enables them to perform effectively. For successful process of the preservation of the Historic Centre there is need of increasing of human and professional capacities of local administration, improving the education and training by exposure to best practices and exchange of knowledge;
- The institutions should provide information and educational resources to property owners, occupants and the community at large about all aspects and implications of historic district designation and historic preservation. In these respect should develop an informational brochure for property owners and occupants describing the Historic Centre designation and how it affects physical modifications. Education of people affected by historic district designation is probably the single most important means of ensuring its success in preserving the community's historic resources. Property owners need to understand the protection of the Historic Centre's character that is inherent in the centre designation. Likewise, property owners need to be aware of the restrictions applied to their properties. The benefits of owning property in a designated district are significant. Having property owners aware of the certificate of appropriateness requirement will help to alleviate problems of modifications being undertaken without proper review.
- The institutions should offer reasonable and timely technical assistance to property owners and developers for encouraging and developing compatible designs for restoration and new construction in the Historic Centre of Prizren. Often property owners find it difficult to deal with problems specific to their historic structures and, in particular, with the maintenance, repair or replacement of historic exterior elements. Frequently, out of frustration or ignorance, historic elements are removed and replaced with incompatible materials.
- The municipality of Prizren should develop the guidelines for implementation of laws and conservation plans; also it should develop the guidelines for uniform advertising signs and awnings for all hotelier and commercial facilities;
- Organizing an international conference to discuss global best practices of the establishment and management of historic centres. The conference should invite: urban managers from European cities, cultural heritage experts and spatial planning, international organizations operating in Kosovo, the Kosovo state institutions (central and local) and institutes specialized agencies, local experts of cultural heritage, spatial planning, urban management, history, civil society, community and all other stakeholders;

4.3. Economic Aspect

No historic preservation can be successful without economic support. Prizren has a potential for creating of an attractive environment for development of private business activities and encouragement for the best utilization of local economic potentials and natural and human resources, such as culture, tourism, trade, agriculture, light food production, textile, pharmaceuticals.

For sustainable economic development of the Historic Centre of Prizren should be taken these actions:

- Development of cultural and historical tourism through preservation of cultural, historic and natural heritage of the Historic Centre;

- Stimulation, preservation and cultivation of traditional handicrafts;
- Development of cultural and hotelier facilities to support the tourism and cultural activities in the Historic Centre;
- Tax concessions should be provided in the Historic Centre of Prizren. This will provide incentives to property owners and developers to encourage adaptive reuse and renovation of existing structures and historically appropriate new development.
- Creating opportunities and enough space for potential local and foreign investors; Establishment of public service units within the historic centre, so that all services to be performed within the centre;
- The municipality of Prizren and government should support and create conditions for the functioning of events in the Historic Centre of Prizren which have the potential to turn small investments into big profits in local economy, such as the traditional international documentary and short film festival Dokufest, which impact in the local economy is quite impressive. Direct beneficiaries of the festival are the local businesses in the city of Prizren: café bars, restaurants, street vendors, hotels, landlords etc., but also bigger businesses in the national level, such as: aero companies, banks and telecommunication companies. Thanks to the number of visitors in the festival during last year's edition, the impact of Dokufest 2011 reached 3.1million euro.
- Integration of historic, cultural and religious heritage into cultural activities, such as mosques and churches facilities can be used as the improvised cinemas, in the same way as the improvised cinemas in the fortress of Prizren, on the river Bistrica, in Albanian League of Prizren etc. as shown in fig.8 and 9.
- The fortress needs reconstruction and free access to keep the values of cultural and historical heritage and to contribute to the development of cultural, recreational and tourist activities. It is very attractive, both for the local population and for tourists who are continuously visiting the town. The fortress is suitable for different cultural events, and could be transformed into a recreational-tourist centre, with commercial activities, as part of cultural and tourist activities.
- The importance of establishing partnerships is widely recognized; especially Public Private Partnership is a very important tool for providing real sources of financing, but also providing new ideas, more efficiency and entrepreneurial spirit. Promotion of Public Private Partnership in reconstruction and use of burned, destroyed and abandoned housing in Nënkalaja neighbourhood for tourist accommodation can be one of such partnerships;
- Developing a matching grant program for the removal of signs and awnings or the replacement of inappropriate signs with appropriate signs and awnings, also for exterior building facade renovations, interior building renovations and improving the public facilities and features that serve the Historic Centre.
- Marketing and promotion strategies are also an important component in process of preservation of the Historic Centre. All competent authorities in Prizren should promote historic, cultural and urban heritage as a central factor in the mutually supporting objectives of sustainable development, cultural diversity and contemporary creativity, fostering economic and social climate which supports participation in cultural heritage activities.



Fig. 8: Improved Cinema in Fortress of Prizren.



Fig. 9: Improved Cinema on the River Bistrica in Prizren.

5 CONCLUSION

Integrated and comprehensive strategies are needed for preservation of the Historic Centre of Prizren. In the best examples of historic preservation is an important physical, social, economic and environmental element representing the past, persistence in the present and the future continuity. Preservation of the Historic Centre of Prizren can be achieved through social and economic programs with local elements by acquiring a permanent character and contributing to the rebuilding of the city's historic identity. Citizen participation and partnership are key elements in this process. Prizren community and stakeholders should share roles and contribute to collective efforts to improve urban areas.

And at the end, taking into account the undeniable cultural potential, historical tradition and the real possibilities of cooperation, the main goal for the Historic Centre of Prizren should be to join the network of cultural roads of the Balkan region and Europe. In this way, Prizren will be given a deserved place in the procession of the pearls of world heritage of universal culture, as a city of historic and cultural tradition.

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