
Creating user-friendly public spaces in Cities (Prishtina), between public interest and private rights *Ferhat Bejtullahu*

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1 ABSTRACT

Friendliness of public spaces to users is dependent from accessibility they offer and attractiveness they display. However, these characteristics of public open spaces are always challenged as inadequate in quantity and quality.

Public spaces in Cities of European developing countries are urban spaces which are misused, shared and used by the community. Especially in countries as Kosova that from past century inherited more than 70% rural structure of population and high rate of urban growth hence public spaces in Cities experienced consequences of unplanned urbanization processes. Prishtina is no exception. Situation is provoked by the process of transition to the capitalistic mode of development, where priority is often granted to land used as a means of production rather than consumption.

This paper attempts to examine the original causes and effects (reasons) of significant unfriendliness as a phenomenon of open spaces in Prishtina. Two major issues are associated with this phenomenon: public interest and private rights. Public interest refers to the extreme limited management and supply of urban land, while the private rights refers to unconsciousness in rights and obligations due to unclear delineation of property rights.

The paper will suggest principles that will serve as policies to the new approach in process of design, creation and maintenance of user-friendly public spaces.

As a conclusion, this paper is just starting point in integrative development process to the socially inclusive and spatially assimilative public spaces. I hope that this paper will be used by architects and urban designers as guideline of future research in this field, providing reader's opportunity to reevaluate and re-appreciate our invaluable public open spaces.

2. INTRODUCTION

Definitions:

Explicitly or implicitly, open spaces serve as the representative of the area, displaying the area's dignity, offering a breathing space within a built-up environment, and injecting vitality into the area and its surrounding. (Kato, 1993)

The term "public" implies the idea that these spaces are accessible to every member of the general public. They are characterized by the possibility of allowing different groups of people, regardless of their class, ethnicity, gender and age, to intermingle. (Madanipour, 1996)

Collectively speaking, a public open space suggests an image of a lively setting where people are engaged in either group or individual activities. Brill (1989) connotes the primary goals of such spaces for spectacle, entertainment, and pleasure; marketing, commerce, and work; shaping public concepts of governance, religion, and social structure; exchanging information; and a great deal of learning from face-to-face encounters with or observation of strangers. In the context of urban living, it is where human exchange occurs, it is where social interaction and daily experience of urban life take place. Other authors also adopt similar concepts. For instance, Carr et al. (1992) define public space as the common ground where people carry out the functional and ritual activities that bind a community, whether in the normal routines of daily life or in periodic festivities. They are often related to the role of symbolizing the community and the larger society or culture in which it exists. As to Heckscher (1977), urban open space is "associated with pleasure, with recreation, with human encounters and communal celebration. It plays a significant role in renewing and stabilizing the city's social and economic base."

Public open spaces often present in two major forms. On one hand, people congregate in places that are publicly owned but have not been acquired strictly for recreational purposes. Examples of such include streets, squares, playgrounds and marketplaces. On the other hand, people gather in places that are privately owned but are widely used for recreational functions. Examples of this category include building plazas, shopping centers and business parks. Thus, the emphasis here is the open access to either the space or the diversity of activities taking place in those confined spaces.

2.1 Objectives

Major objectives of this paper are summarized as follow:

To study the underlying reasons for the unfriendliness of public open spaces in Prishtina

To identify actual problems through case study Prishtina

To suggest solutions of urban design guidelines for the future

2.2 Study methodology - Background and context

Many public spaces in cities (Prishtina) become vulnerable when they are reduced to their functional role, dehumanized, lacking in quality or simply abandoned. Their common purpose is slowly eaten away by forms of insecurity that takes place in it. Are they poorly designed places that are incapable of building social ties? Who and how they are managed? What conditions must be met to create public spaces that are user friendly? Public spaces are more sensitive to social (political, managerial, cultural, and economic), environmental (ecological) and spatial (technical), contexts at many levels of scale than any other kind of spaces created by architects.

Creating user friendly public spaces design concept means that many external variables have to be taken into account apart from the internal ones that shape architecture of buildings around.

Open letter to the Mayor of Prishtina Municipality, Mr. Isa Mustafa, and other members of Prishtina Municipality about FENCES OF PUBLIC INSTITUTION from GAP Institute for Advanced Studies on August 11, 2008 is one example of misused and not jet improved public spaces in Prishtina.

The layouts, landmarks and public spaces all contribute to each city's distinctive sense of identity (Figures 1 and 2).



Fig. 1: Google Images of Prishtina
Source: Google image search on March 11, 2011

A particular place (city, district, neighborhood and streets), its space, people, community, culture, traditions, and heritage, gives people a civic pride and is a source of sense of place and a sense of belonging .

Landmarks & urban (re)development projects must link between identity and image.

Public space & Urban Design must be in function of reinforcing city images through strengthening city identities understanding of how different social groups have sought to claim a right to the city through various means.

Prishtina squares changes during every period, every regime tried to be oriented in changing center and to delete the traces of past. This issue is of considerable importance when discussing the identity of the city of Prishtina. Movement of population enhanced the urbanization process as well as bringing heterogeneity and diversity of Prishtina reflected in different images of squares and open spaces.

During Yugoslav period under-development of Kosova, kept Prishtina in a dependent economic relation to Serbia and allowed Serbian investment capital to remain in Serbia proper; it, and positioned Albanian majority population primarily as an industrial labor force; and it created spaces in provincial and municipal bureaucracies for Kosova's Serb minority population. (Andrew Herscher) Politics organized as mono-party has started developing semi - industrialized economy.

In the following years the city center underwent almost obsessive urban transformations and architectural reforms to relegate the memory of old center, the destruction of the old city center had a significant social meaning since the commercial center of the Old Bazaar was considered by the political elites as a vital center for some social segment destined to be eradicated. Moreover, up to that time images of Old Bazaar used to be the identity marker of Prishtina, the city which was created and flourished during the late years of the Ottoman period. For this purpose, the communists justified the old bazaar's fade away as a simple need for modernization while on the other hand, all the aspects of social life entered a period of restructuring.

The centralized and technocratic planning facilitated the expansion of Prishtina territories, developed on the basis of equity principles that characterized the socialist ideologies in general. The attempts on controlling all aspects of public life were accompanied by standard urban planning for many Kosova cities. In this light, political authorities spent great efforts on the preparation of structural plans for the transformation of images and identity characteristic for Kosovar towns, based on the same principles.

2.2.1 Analyze of Social Hypothesis

Prishtina identity is mainly but not only a product of social structure. The city is a physical manifestation of culture or as a mirror that represents the nature of culture. Consequently multiculturalism as a new kind of cultural order is related to the city, and its physical pattern may reveal what multiculturalism means for those outside the culture of that city. Sandercock said: "becoming a multicultural society/city is more than a matter of bureaucratic management, or of citizenship legislation. It also requires the active construction of new ways of living together, new forms of spatial and social belonging" (Sandercock 2003, 14).

The conversion experienced by the space based on the efforts for giving a meaning to the space where the life is lived in, also shapes the structure of the society. Scope of problems comes to top when discussing conservation and environment in Prishtina context.

From ancient times, in territory of today's Prishtina there has been a constant dialogue between social and other pressures and creativity. High levels of immigration and mobility in city, along with widespread poverty, have often generated real problems of urban dislocation, social polarization, and political tension. Until today, unfortunately Prishtina was unable to respond strongly to problems of this kind by reinforcing a sense of urban identity.

The nature of public space has changed profoundly in the past decades. Many projects designed before has socially exclusive concept. Town planning schemes have become old-fashioned, other more recent ones have proved to be inappropriate to today's new lifestyles and in certain districts the absence of on-site managers in public spaces has led to major malfunctions. Public space has sometimes been replaced by new private spaces capable of filtering users and implementing rules to restrict freedom of use.

It acts as a meeting space, space for debate, controversy, discussion, in short where democracy takes place. Public space contributes to social cohesion, the forging of social and political bonds¹. It is a space accessible to all, that everyone is able to use and appropriate subject to acknowledging the differences and similarities of others².

- Legibility

Spatial hierarchy and clear definition of spaces fosters a positive perception of the space in question reduces zones of conflicts and minimizes abusive usage. Certain architecturally designed spaces are unnecessarily complicated and a source of insecurity. It is important to mark out private domains and the letters' boundaries, transitional spaces, using physical and landscaping characteristics (barriers, paving on the ground, planting, etc.). In addition to property/land, space definition should take lifestyles and behavior into account and be based on usage in order to guarantee boundary acceptance on the part of users and correct operation. Finally, it may be necessary to separate two spaces with incompatible or different usage within the private domain or on the same land development property in order to clarify said usage, prevent conflicts and facilitate compliance with usage rules.

- Socializing, activities

The capacity of an urban environment to support social interaction, foster the use of public spaces, organize activities and urban functions in such a manner as to generate urban human activities act as deterrents for delinquents and reassure users. Insecurity is often due to abusive usage provocative groups.

That are detrimental to normal usage, etc.), or, on the contrary, a lack of usage that gives an impression of emptiness that provides ideal conditions for crime. In both cases, fostering space socializing and organizing activities are factors of paramount importance in terms of public safety.

Socialization is fostered by involvement, participation and mobilization on the part of users and residents, by mixed usage, the organization of ad hoc events and diversity of activities in the surrounding area. The distribution of activities and way in which the later operate, locating safe activities in non-safe places and vice-versa, avoidance of isolation and remoteness, mixity, specific approach to risky



Fig. 2: Pictures of Prishtina
Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prishtina>
March 11, 2011

activities contribute to the natural surveillance mechanism and appropriation and can deter disruptive usage. At city council level, land use measures can also have a potentially favorable effect on urban public safety. It is necessary institutional framework that can effectively coordinate the action of numerous players in transforming the urban built environment and accomplishing a desirable and efficient outcome. Under the perspective of new institutional economics (NIE), institutions refer to the “rules of the game” that cover the formal rules, informal norms and their enforcement characteristics (North, 1981; 1997; 2000).

Institutions are constructed by the human society to govern the social relationship and structure the pattern of social interaction in daily life. The institutional arrangement provides the systems of incentives and constraints that influence individual and organizational behavior. Depending on circumstances, such behavior may take the form of “cooperative exchanges” that enhance benefits of all the contracting parties and improve overall economic efficiency, or, conversely, of “exploitative appropriation” of the others resulting in welfare reduction (Hirshleifer, 2001). In the long run, collective outcomes of these strategic behavioral interactions can either reinforce or transform the prevailing institutions (Aoki 2000; Campbell, 2004)

- Presence of site managers

Tangible damage leads to a sense of insecurity and permissiveness in the face of petty delinquency. A broken window pane that remains un-repaired sends out the signal that it is acceptable to commit other crimes and that the space in question is vulnerable.(17) More generally speaking, damage, dirtiness, buildings or highway in poor condition result in a depreciated character. Thus all public space requires a site manager present on site that is responsible and responsive in charge of repair and maintenance, a human presence, someone to refer to that guarantees compliance with acknowledged, legible usage rules, in order to ensure hospitality for all. The presence of a site manager is a grassroots urban management principle developed in contemporary town council policy.

2.2.2 Cooperation of Spatial Models

Spatial segregating concept in the past century was used by architects and planners to define public space in Cities (Prishtina). Public space is used to refer to a wide variety of spaces such as streets, marketplaces, boulevards, courtyards, quaysides, paved structures, paves, gardens, squares, promenades, esplanades, etc. and all sorts of spaces, less well-defined or with intermediary private / public status. Although by definition public spaces are spaces that belong to the public domain that are open and accessible to all, by extension, from a physical point of view, the category covers all spaces to which the public has access:

- Spaces situated between buildings - i.e. the city grid, open to varying degrees, in contrast with strictly private space
- All initiatives involving public spaces must address this wider definition.
- Reinforcement of territoriality

Space territoriality can be conducive to a sense of ownership or responsibility that facilitates appropriation, co-surveillance and social control. It acts as a factor that deters delinquents from perpetrating their act in a monitored, « guarded » space and reduces the sense of insecurity on the part of users. In contrast, the absence of territoriality fosters abusive appropriation and certain forms of delinquency. Territoriality is achieved by clearly defining places and ownership of the latter (property or usage-related), by applying the principle of legibility. However, depending on the type of public space in question, it can sometimes be difficult to achieve. It may be easy to set out for a neighborhood green space, but it is more complicated to achieve outside neighborhood fabrics where users are merely temporarily passing through and less inclined to appropriate the spaces in question. In this respect the presence of users in itself guarantees a certain degree of safety. In contrast reinforcing territoriality should not run counter to the concept of public spaces being accessible to all.

- Natural surveillance

Natural surveillance is a mechanism whereby users are controlled by the users themselves. It works by deterring delinquents and reassuring users. It varies according to the physical characteristics of the space in question, location and diversity of activities, configuration of the thoroughfares, accesses, parking areas, etc. Its positive conditions are fostered by developing usage and urban human activity, by encouraging frequentation of the spaces at different times of the day, concentrating usage in the same location. For example, redesigning a green space that has been experiencing problems would involve attempting to attract users by developing regular activities. In terms of architectural design, bricked up walls at ground level would be avoided and windows and use of transparency recommended to foster visibility and surveillance.

2.2.3 Environmental trends understanding

Once a local space, in which the fundamental elements were the street, square and neighborhood, its function and form have evolved with society's increased mobility and changes in lifestyles. Residents once spent a great deal of their time in these spaces that are now reduced to their functional role, dehumanized, lacking quality, apparently abandoned and subject to improper use.

The quality and safety of public space depend on effective town planning and management and making it welcoming. For public space to fulfill its federating role it must be user-friendly.

- Visibility

Spaces should be planned to foster visibility and enable people to be seen. This is achieved by designing clear views, avoiding concealed spaces and traps. The resulting surveillance between users deters potential delinquents from committing acts and reinforces the peace of mind of users frequenting the places in question (reduces the sense of insecurity). It also allows law and order forces on patrol to see into spaces that cannot be accessed by car. This does not mean that it should be possible to see everything from all positions. It is primarily important to be familiar with the existing risks of delinquency and nature of the sense of insecurity in the place in question before taking action.

- Contribution of landscaping

Lighting, urban fixtures, planting, signage all contribute to public safety as part of an approach often referred to as passive public safety. They can either provide ideal conditions for crime or, in contrast, enhance the safety and welcoming nature of public spaces. Lighting is an important component that involves external public lighting and indoor lighting in public places and spaces on private property shed on public space. Insufficient in guaranteeing public safety on their own, welcoming spaces should not be used to render places attractive that are fundamentally unsafe or have not been made safe using other means. Urban fixtures can direct and channel usage and users and contribute to the reduction of usage conflicts. In contrast they can also constitute an obstacle to clear visibility and pose a risk. Planting can render spaces visible on condition that it is trimmed and maintained. Its aesthetic capacity is valuable in regenerating deteriorated spaces. Signage enables people to find their way around the environment in question and reduces their sense of insecurity. Architectural features are also components of public space that enable people to find their way around and read the urban environment.

- Natural access control

The use of architectural and landscaping features can deter access to potential targets. Measures of this kind are designed to act as deterrents rather than constitute protective measures. Their purpose is to maximise the sense of risk and effort on the part of potential delinquents. Thus designing the layout of entrance halls to apartment buildings so that they look out onto the street, can, in certain cases, reduce the risks associated with tortuous access routes crossing open block backlots. Natural access control uses a range of techniques such as the creation of thresholds and secure entrance systems, planting, enclosures (low or high, opaque or transparent, etc.). Before taking any initiatives it is necessary to identify the real risks of delinquency and whether or not spaces are targets, and from what they need to be protected. A sense of insecurity can often result in unnecessary excessive forms of protection.

Better access management offers better accessibility and balance for shared spaces.

Access management is a management of mobility with a view to reach a better balance between all transport modes thanks to tools such as an effective parking policy, traffic calming measures, street design.

The following is a discussion of these qualitative deficiencies through actual cases of the selected estates. In this discussion, the six criteria of successful public open spaces identified in Part I of this paper will be used as the basis, and they are respectively accessibility, legibility, interaction, robustness, aesthetics, and integration of space inside and outside built structures.

How to create user-friendly public spaces? First of all we have to start ASAP a policy debate on the relationships between public space and insecurity in order to identify solutions, give public spaces back a character, responsible collective support and a new sense of urbanity. Town planners, architects and designers should already be familiar with a certain number of best practices. However even the best public space is unable to withstand deficient management. Integration process stresses the key role of on-site managers, whether the State, local authorities, communes, public and private operators, and managers. Public space managers should supervise maintenance, compliance with usage and hospitality rules; respond promptly in the event of malfunctioning. Reviving public space has become a major contemporary issue, ensuring that its strengths is preserved and its place is guaranteed in today's large urban areas.

There are eight basic town planning principles or "basic rules" setting out the characteristics that deter delinquents from committing acts and conditions designed to foster the improvement of the urban ambience which can serve as guidelines for initiatives and schemes. Each can be reviewed and adjusted modulated in accordance with the situation, context in question, space and type of insecurity encountered.

3. SUGGESTIONS

This paper is a study of the user-friendliness of public open spaces in contemporary Prishtina. Shortcomings in regards to their unfriendliness are identified through review of current planning mechanism, as well as actual case examinations. From these analyses, it is found that open space provision in Prishtina is deficient in three major aspects, namely extreme shortage of land, insufficient policies, and inadequate concern on qualitative matters. Based on the faults associated with these three issues discussed in the previous chapters, a number of urban design guidelines are formulated, which can be recognized under four general categories:

- Reconsideration of current provision policies
- Increasing concern on human as the ultimate users of the open space
- Innovations in land use
- Better integration in development of public open space

These design guidelines are not meant to be used rigidly; rather they merely serve as guidance that addresses some of the issues that has not been fully considered. Therefore, they should be adopted with great flexibility. Moreover, these recommended guidelines are formulated as a general reference, which means that additional cautions should be paid in individual cases.

Social

An integrated approach: making strategic choice is inevitable. Prishtina's commitment toward sustainable mobility dates back to 1999 and is now part of the conurbation urban mobility plan.

Given clear delineation of property rights in land asset, individual owner will have an incentive to protect it, enhance its value through deliberate improvements and capture its benefit through voluntary transacting with others. The parking policy is one of the most important tools for local authorities and a particularly effective instrument in the regulation and management of mobility.

3.1 Revision of Current Provision Policies

The major guiding channel that governs provision of open space is the strategic plan, therefore a review is recommended. In the revision, the following issues should be addressed:

- The standards should be updated more frequently, such that the standards are practically reflecting the rapid social and demographic changes.
- Higher level of flexibility should be encouraged, such that the standards can cater the unique characters of different districts.
- More guidance in regards to qualitative issues should be introduced, such that the standards will be more comprehensive.
- Population-based standards of provision should be adopted with greater flexibility, such that the issue of quality comes before quantity.

3.2 Increasing Concern on Human as the Ultimate Users of the Open Space

Since the end-users of these open spaces are the general public, therefore more user-oriented approach that caters for their needs is recommended. In addition, users' involvement is highly desired, as this is the most direct channel to voice their opinion. In respect to these, the following issues should be addressed:

- Users needs, whether actual users or potential users, should be the crucial point of considerations, such that the resultant space functions to serve their needs.
- Community involvement is encouraged in various stages of open space development, such that the end product ensures to reflect their opinion.

- Alternative forms of public involvement should be promoted, such that public are able to demonstrate their effort in making a better future. Examples of these alternative channels include design competition, public forum, etc.

Spatial Suggestions

Interdisciplinary for more user friendly spaces

Anarchic parking, numerous car lanes and high car speed blight the urban landscape, increase pollutant emissions and the feeling of insecurity for pedestrians and cyclists. A better street design (reduced traffic lanes, improved urban landscape ...) is needed in consistency with an effective parking policy and a good balance between all transport modes.

3.3 More Concern on Qualitative Criteria of Open Space

Qualitative measures are generally absent in the current planning standards and guidelines, often resulting in open spaces that are neither welcoming nor attractive. In assessing this increase of qualitative concern, the following issues should be addressed:

- The six qualitative criteria (accessibility, legibility, interaction, robustness, aesthetics, and integration of space inside and outside built structures) used in this paper should be formulated as an additional guidance in provision of open spaces.
- These criteria can be further quantified, such that assessment of their attainment will be easier.
- None of these criteria should be applied alone, as they are all related in one way or another.

Environmental

Improving accessibility to alternative modes of transport

This goal can be reached through the reclaiming of car lanes and parking spaces to the benefit of pedestrians, cycling lanes and bus corridors. More space allocated to alternative modes of transport, Prishtina.

3.4 More Comprehensive Approach in Public Open Space Development

Despite the fact that the procedures of reservation, allocation and implementation of open space provision are all monopolized within governmental bureaucracy, they are actually carried out by different government departments. In assessing a more comprehensive way of provision, the following issues should be addressed:

- Contributions of various departments should be better integrated, such that their efforts are to be utilized in a most productive manner.
- A mediator should be introduced to act a middle person that organizes the procedures as well as integrates the input of the various disciplines.
- Interests of the public should be the key consideration, such that conflicts regards individual interests should be minimized.
- Quality control and easier management should be the possible outcome of this integration of efforts.

The paper illustrates that the model embodies an institutional and regulatory framework that comprises supportive government land use and transport strategy, complementary project planning and development process, and competent and responsible organizations that strive towards making the best use of urban space and producing high-quality urban infrastructure and land development in meeting private needs and public interest (Tang et al., 2004).

Benefits of access management

To the user: A better quality of life thanks to an improved accessibility, comfort and security.

To the quality of urban life: More user-friendly spaces where all modes of transport and activities find their place.

To the environment: Better environmental quality thanks to a decreased number of cars

Application of town planning principles Strategic & operational approaches

The mentioned town planning principles can be applied in the context of a turnkey strategy or for individual town planning schemes. The objective is to formalize the addressing of public safety issues in terms of town planning. Local authorities have adopted global public safety strategies that involve town planning. The process starts by precisely specifying the town planning principles to be introduced into the development procedures and policies. Then the different players involved in the town planning process are informed of said principles in order to foster their application in commune management, in projects and schemes in progress and also in town planning resources and documents. A balance should be struck between regulation, incentives and raising awareness in order to optimize adaptation to the context, available resources and skills of the players concerned. In contrast to rigid framework it involves constant

4. CONCLUSIONS

Prishtina's sustainable urbanization requires more efficient and intensive use of land space to accommodate the needs of a fast-growing urban population. Like sustainability, user-friendly public space is a multispectral concept that serves multiple functions in an urban society. As urban sustainability is built upon an inter-dependency of human activities and a common destiny of the community, the user-friendly public space model may not be truly integrative if the development projects are socially exclusive rather than inclusive, and spatial segregating rather than assimilative. Pushing it to an extreme would endanger the public interest in an urban society unless it is concurrently accompanied with the development of public space. The success of the new concept and principles relies heavily on a healthy growing urban economy and a strong real estate market.

5. REFERENCES

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