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**Socialist Prishtina: The tale of unfinished urbanization**

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**Abstract**

The shaping of socialist Prishtina during the ex-Yugoslav era was influenced by various political, cultural, and ideological factors. In the guise of modernization, the state initiated massive demolitions, deliberately targeting the symbolically significant sites that had shaped the city's urban identity during pre-modern times. The second facet of modernization which encompassed new development, was likewise distinctive: urbanization and new architecture in the city was implemented in fragments, thereby visually challenging its pre-socialist fabric. This contribution examines the interplay between planning decisions and urban activities on the ground, which led to city's fragmentation. Official documents and statements are reviewed, to exemplify the overall ethos of the period and thus contribute to a broader understanding of the mode of urbanization in socialist Prishtina.

**Keywords**

Prishtina — Urban activities — Modernist architecture

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**Introduction**

Prishtina, the capital of the Republic of Kosovo, once the center of the Vilayet of Kosovo (before the fall of the Ottoman Empire), was the capital of the Province of Kosovo within ex-Yugoslavia. It used to be a typical Ottoman city, with a compact urban structure and an identifiable nucleus, the Old Bazaar. Neighborhoods were evenly distributed around the Bazaar and, as in other Ottoman cities, they maintained a superb distinction between public and private realms (Pasic 2004, p.7). Throughout the late 1940s and 1960s, the Bazaar was razed to the ground by the socialist regime, making way for the new city center. This symbolic space was chosen to set the scene for the new Yugoslavian representation of Kosovo, emerging in the form of the Brotherhood and Unity Square, and two state institutions on either side of the square: the Municipal Assembly Building and the building of the Regional People's Committee for Kosovo (today the Parliament of Kosovo). The socialist urbanization of Prishtina replicates such patterns of ideological interventions in the rest of the existing city structure.

De-Ottomanization of the capital city meant not only becoming Yugoslav and modern, but also maintaining an inferior identity of Kosovo Albanians within the federation (Le Normand, p. 258; Malcolm 1998, p. 314). The planned destruction of a large proportion of the traditional architecture justified on the ground of liquidating the backwardness of the Ottoman city (Mitrovic 1953, pp. 165-166),<sup>1</sup> was based not on genuine urban plans as commonly witnessed in other ex-Yugoslav cities, but rather on so-called «urban activities», a term coined by socialist planners to describe the actions that were «necessary for preparing a study on the development

of Prishtina» (Jovanovic 1965). Throughout the socialist period, studies, plans, and «urban activities», were carried out simultaneously, sometimes independently, yet often left incomplete. Thus, fragmented intervention as an output, and unfinished urbanization as a process, became the most distinct legacy of city's modernization.

There is a small body of documentation regarding the urban development of Prishtina during socialism, although in recent times the number of publications on the architecture of the period has increased significantly,<sup>2</sup> along with the awareness of its preservation. However, the gap of knowledge persists on the context of state and urban policies that gave shape to the city development, and this is identified and addressed briefly in this contribution. I argue that shedding light to the interplay of planning decisions and activities on the ground, both chronologically and thematically, helps to understand certain aspects of implementation of urban policies, which were in line with state policies of the ex-Yugoslavia, while complementary to the specific policy of Serbia in Kosovo. Therefore, this study mainly relies on and analyzes the official and archival documents of the period, with the belief that they are rather overlooked by the scholars, while in fact they comprise an important source on the context and contents of planning. In this regard, few relevant quotes are brought in full, which in hand illustrate the official language and overall ethos of the time, and fill-in the larger picture of the mode of urbanization in socialist Prishtina.

### **Laying the Foundations of the New Socialist City**

In the aftermath of the Second World War, among major undertakings in ex-Yugoslavia was to lay the foundations for new modern socialist cities, and this was made clear through various official documents and statements, as illustrated in the quote below:

[...] Prishtina abandoned its former characteristics, and has grown, and is growing into a modern city; its physiognomy is fundamentally changing, it is transforming with an unprecedented rhythm and is erasing all what identified it with a remote 'kasaba' [town] (Zikic 1959, p.24) [...] it is leaving its past behind and is becoming a modern city – a new socialist city' (Cukic, D. and Mekuli E. 1965, p.12).

This journey in Prishtina commenced in 1947, marked by the transformation of the primary south-north artery (previously known as Lokaq street) into a modernist boulevard, purposed to accommodate newly established state institutions; and was renamed into Marshal Tito Street. The initial modern structure to rise along its eastern front was the Provincial Committee (today the Ministry of Culture), sequentially accompanied by other institutions, such as the National Theatre, the National Bank, and the Municipality of Prishtina, among others (Jovanovic, B. 1965). By 1953, the street transformation came almost to its end.

The Marshal Tito Street project required massive demolitions; beside the Old Bazaar, formerly located at the northern end of the axis, a large portion of traditional architecture including historic buildings (a catholic church and a mosque), were razed to the ground (Jerliu, F and Navakazi, V. 2018) (Fig. 1). It is noteworthy to highlight that this transformation occurred well prior to the adoption of the Detailed Urban Plan (DUP) for the city center in 1967 (Pecanin).

The «retroactive planning» of the city center, as understood from the quote below, was implemented to alleviate the challenge of finishing the planned



**Fig. 1**

Sequence from the former Marshal Tito Street, before and after demolition of the 16th century Lokaq Mosque and the construction of the Hotel Bozur (later Hotel Iliria). The modernist hotel "Iliria" was privatized in 2006 and soon was destroyed to make space for a new hotel Swiss Diamond. (Photo source: Municipality of Prishtina Photo Archive).

urban blocks. They were partially developed to house new institutions, but private parcels within the envisioned enclosed urban block typology, were left untreated. Even today, they are spaces filled with private houses: a pre-socialist cadaster awaiting to be regularized (Fig.2).

This plan was partially implemented for the needs of the administration of the Province, the Municipality and other public facilities... The realization of these spaces destroyed the old Bazaar and a large number of facilities in the surrounding environment. Other contents cannot be realized due to the existing housing, and this plan should be put out of force. (ibid)

In a way, the plan was designed with the expectation of being phased out, which reveals the overarching intention of the socialist regime: to construct the facade of the Marshall Tito Street rather than to urbanize the city center to the benefit of residents, being in majority Albanians (Jerliu and Navakazi 2018).

### Socialist Urban Planning: "Loading..."

A milestone date in the city development is 1953. This is the year identified among other as the beginnings of a large-scale deportation of Kosovo Albanians, as part of the treaty signed between ex-Yugoslavia and Turkey. The so-called «Gentleman's Agreement» reached in January 1953 between Tito and the Turkish foreign Minister Khiprili requested that Yugoslavia fulfils the 1938 Convention, according to which about one million inhabitants were to be settled in vacant regions of Turkey. Between 1945 and 1966, known as the «Rankovic's Era»,<sup>3</sup> roughly 246,000 were deported to Turkey from the whole ex-Yugoslavia of which 100,000 people (mainly Albanians) from Kosovo alone (Malcolm 1998, p. 323).

This process had a profound impact on Prishtina, both demographically and economically: most of the investments during this period were concentrated in the capital-investment, rather than labor-investment. Also, investments were made in primary industry such as in mines, power stations, and basic chemical works, a sector that was intended to supply Kosovo's raw materials and energy for use elsewhere in Yugoslavia. (Malcolm 1998, pp. 322-324).

The year 1953 is also symbolic for the beginnings of urban plans in Prishtina. It is the year of adoption of the *Urban General Plan for Prishtina 1950-1980*, drafted by *Iskra* from Belgrade under the leadership of Dragutin Partonjic. The plan foresaw the city growth from 24, 081<sup>4</sup> to 50.000 inhabitants and surface from 223.04 Ha to 950 Ha. While information on the technicalities of the plan is briefly revealed in a later Prishtina Urban





**Fig. 2**

Sequence from the modern city center, showing the mode of unfinished task of socialist urbanization (Photo excerpt from Google Earth 2022, drawing by the author).

Plan 2000 (PUP 2000), a report from 1953 *Gradovi i Naselja...* provides the substance of the plan. Given that the language used in this report is rather self-explanatory, hence the quoted vision:

The geopolitical position of the city, its role in the economy of the country (ex-Yugoslavia), especially of its wider region, the changes in social conditions, the relatively rich economic hinterland, the inherited primitive and materially poor construction of heritage, and other factors, impose the need, in solving the urbanization problems of Prishtina, for a general reconstruction of the existing situation, not only of the city but also its immediate surroundings. Based on the analysis of established current and possible objective conditions, the future development program for the next 20 years envisions Prishtina with an increased population of 50,000 and an economic character as a poorly developed industrial city, with predominantly processing industries employing 8-10% of the population. The guidelines of the program had to inevitably reflect in the basic framework of the regulatory plan. The applied type of urban reconstruction anticipates the acquisition of free territories and radical measures for the rearrangement of the built-up area, with maximum utilization of inherited values. (Mitrovic 1953, p. 166)

Based on this rather unambitious vision, the new city borders were set. Extensive reconstructions took place in the inner-city while vastly disregarding its built heritage, and the southern outskirts developed into new modernist neighborhoods. However, within a decade, the city's population had reached the envisioned figure of 50,000 inhabitants,<sup>5</sup> therefore, a decision was made to expand the city boundaries from 950 hectares as planned in 1953, to 1950 hectares (Cukic and Mekuli 1965, p.36). Interestingly, PUP 2000 disclosed that no material evidence on urban plans for the following development phase were found in the premises of the Municipality of Prishtina:

Judging by the note that this space was planned for 107 954 inhabitants until 1980, this could have been the amended Prishtina Urban Plan [alluding to Partonjic 1953 Plan], for which no traces of documentation exist. [So] In 1965 arch.

**Fig. 3**

DUP for the Historic Core: existing situation (left), proposed layout (right). [Figure-base: Urbanisticki Zavod Opštine Prishtina, 1979; drawing by author].



Nikola Dobrovic began the drafting of the “Directive Plan for Traffic and Land Use for the city”, which was completed and approved in 1967. The plan was drafted for 100,000 inhabitants and surface of 1950.00 hectares. From documentation, only the graphic annex of land use exists (S: 2500). In 1969 the decision was made that the “Directive Plan for Traffic and Land Use for the city” is replaced by the General Urban Plan for Prishtina, by which the Plan of 1953 ceased to be in force. (Municipality of Prishtina 1987, p.11)

As the quote reveals, throughout 1960s-1970s, there was a process of planning for a new “general” plan. In meantime, as of 1965, and well beyond until mid-1980s, urban development in Prishtina continued its pace on the basis of smaller plans, namely, Detail Urban Plans (DUPs), which according to the planning officials: «... [were] based on the Decision that replaces the General Urban Plan from 1966, and more recently on the General Plan of Prishtina» (Pecanin). Regardless the confusions deriving from this statement as to which plan substitutes or is substituted by a certain decision or plan, or whether generally existed any General Urban plan, DUPs were made for various sizes of space and contents, ranging from large-scale neighborhoods to small housing areas, be it built-up areas scheduled for demolition or free land, from large to small complexes of housing and public buildings; there were even DUPs for individual buildings too<sup>6</sup>. According to archival data, between 1967 and 1986 a total of 34 DUPs were drafted; by 1990, majority of DUPs were partially implemented and only a small number of them were in fact fully realized (Pecanin).

Another victim of «retroactive planning» was the Historic Core. The Detailed Urban Plan (DUP) for the Historic Core was approved in 1979, which is over 30 years after systematic and planned destruction of Prishtina’s urban built heritage. Although in principle DUP should have intended to protect the survived heritage, its highlight was the planning for a massive commercial building of 18,600 sqm, occupying circa 60% of the total planned newly built area. This superstructure foresaw to amalgamate the shops which started anew eastward Bazar’s area after its destruction: the Bazar’s second life was beginning, and the regime went after this one too. Spatial analysis reveals that the plan aimed to preserve roughly 50% of the existing area, of which 8.6% was roadway, 24.6% green space, and a mere 11.7% existing structures, which included a handful of significant monuments. The remaining half of the area was earmarked for reconstruction. (Urbanisticki Zavod Opštine Prishtina, 1979, pp.20-22) (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 4**

Modern architecture in Prishtina. a) Ulpiana neighborhood built in 1960s in free land; one, if not the only example of successful planning implementations b) National Library; until late 2004 the surrounding of the library was deserted. Greening and few paths were introduced latter to enable access from the university buildings located in the near vicinity. (photo source: facebook community page 'Prishtina e Vjetër' in: <https://web.facebook.com/PrishtinaOLD/> (accessed 7.12.2017))



Since its inception, the DUP for the Historic Core was continuously opposed. In 1987, PUP 2000 introduced new boundaries and conditions for the preservation of historic area, and by 1990, authorities had also acknowledged their complete failure in safeguarding city's pre-socialist past (Pecanin).

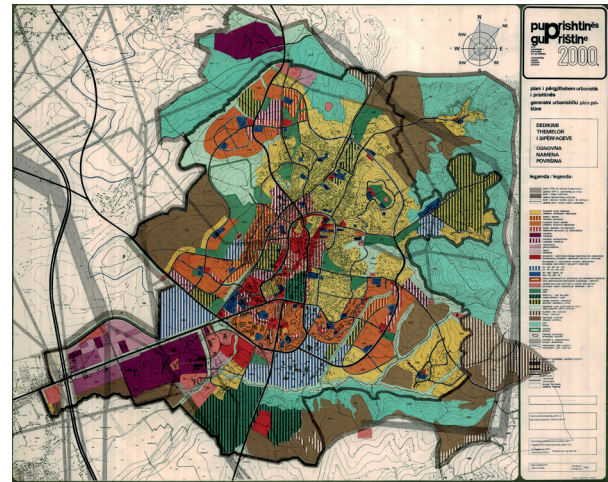
### The Promise of Urbanization

During mid-1970s and 1980s, Prishtina benefited the most from the Yugoslav development fund for underdeveloped regions. (International Monetary Fund, 1985). A considerable portion of this fund in the urban development sector was allocated for planning, and to a lesser degree, for building new state institutions, one of which was the University of Prishtina, established between 1975 and 1977. The University acted as a catalyst for large-scale internal migrations to the capital, resulting in its rapid expansion: between 1971 and 1981, the population nearly doubled, increasing from 69.514 inhabitants in 1971 to 108.083 inhabitants in 1981. (Municipality of Prishtina 1987, p.5)

During this period, Prishtina witnessed substantial growth in its southwestern area, characterized by the creation of new modernist neighborhoods, yet, with no foresight for their physical interconnection. This included the creation of Dardania, Sunny Hill 1, Sunny Hill 2, and Lakrishte neighborhoods, while Ulpiana neighborhood had already been built in the late 1960s (Fig. 4.a). Significant segments of the city's outskirts were also planned through DUPs, primarily for individual housing, like the Tauk Basce small neighborhood, Aktash 3, Dragodan hill, among others (Pecanin.). As was common in other socialist cities, these houses were constructed for the wealthy and higher-income working-class groups (Sze-

**Fig. 5**

Comune di Pristina, Mappa del Piano urbano di Pristina 2000, 1987.



lenyi 1983, p. 63). Contrastingly, the remainder of the city, particularly its entire north, was largely overlooked throughout the entire socialist era. The most significant architectural contribution of this period was the construction of modernist public buildings. However, similar to the case of new modern neighborhoods, they often lack integration with their surroundings, thus creating disjointed spaces. Many public buildings, like the National Library for instance, failed to shape cohesive urban quarters due to the unfinished public space in front and around them (Fig. 4.b). The reasoning behind such an approach might have been political, as the social utilization of urban space, especially public gatherings, were perceived as a potential catalyst for Kosovo Albanians' revolts against the former socialist regime.

The promise for comprehensive urbanization of Prishtina was most convincingly given by the 'Prishtina Urban Plan 2000' (PUP 2000), approved in 1987 (Fig.5). This plan, the final one conceived during the socialist era, remains one of the few official documents that still serves as a valuable resource in understanding the city's narrative. PUP 2000 sought to rectify the accumulated spatial and social discrepancies and challenges. It conceded that Prishtina's development suffered from a lack of consistent and inclusive planning, which, as it postulates, led to the formation of three markedly different spatial entities in the city, each unique in its creation and development: 1) The neglected and unplanned northern part of the city, typified by poor living conditions, thus urgently needing improvements; 2) The historic city center inclusive of new modern buildings, necessitating the completion of the residential urban infrastructure, with a specific emphasis on rehabilitating the historic core; and 3) The new modernist center and southern parts of the city, which began developing from the 1960s onwards, characterized by solid construction and services, but requiring phased reconstructions and completion (Municipality of Prishtina 1987, pp. 38-39, 57-59). This categorization endures even today, attesting to the substantial impact of fragmented and unfinished process of urbanization of the city. PUP 2000 also noted that:

[...] the protection and regulation of archaeological sites and historic nucleus is imperative, since the future of this sector risks to be left without its past, and the results of creation of contemporary values risk the abruption of historical and cultural continuity. ((Municipality of Prishtina 1987, p.172)

Two years later, with the ascension of Milosevic to power in ex-Yugosla-

via, Kosovo entered a terrible phase of state repression that greatly undermined the comprehensive urbanization improvements as proposed by PUP 2000. In the present day, Prishtina has developed new urban plans; however, PUP 2000 - more often being overlooked than revisited - continues to be vital in genuinely tackling the city's challenges rooted in its socialist past.

## Conclusion

The *tale* of socialist Prishtina is one of unfinished urbanization. Its modernization during the socialist era is intriguing - especially if juxtaposed with other centers of ex-Yugoslavia - not only for understanding the nuances of modernist and socialist urban policies, but also to make sense of what has been inherited from that era and how it has influenced the city's subsequent development. Enlightening in this view are the official documents and statements of the time of socialism; their analyses offer significant insight into the enduring impact of the political ideology in city's intricate urban development.

Initially, the Ottoman city had a compact urban structure; it was deranged in the name of recreating it as a compact modern city, but this aim was not truly achieved. Instead, the rebuilding process erased vital fragments of historical tissue, while new development themselves were left scattered throughout the urban landscape. As a result, the once compact city became fragmented. Thus, fragmentation is the legacy inherited from the socialist era, and comprehending its content, along with the latent potential for its recalibration in line with the premise of historical continuity, as advocated in current discourse, proffers a hopeful alternative for the present and future of the city's modernist legacy, as well as a means of overcoming its "unfinished" condition.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The 1953 report on cities and towns in Serbia defined the existing architecture of the city of Prishtina as to being remote, and therefore, subject to the so-called «general radical reconstruction» of the «primitive appearance and poverty of material and architectural heritage values of the city».

<sup>2</sup> Some recently published books on Prishtina are: A; Sylejmani, Sh. (2010). Prishtina ime (My Prishtina). Java Multimedia production: Prishtina; Hoxha, E. (2012) Qyteti dhe Dashuria: Ditar Urban - City and Love: Urban Diary, Center for Humanistic Studies "Gani Bobi" Prishtina; Gjinolli I, Kabashi, L., Eds. (2015). Kosovo modern: an architectural primer, National Gallery of Kosovo, Arbër Sadiki (2020) Arkitektura e Ndërtesave Publike në Prishtinë (Architecture of Public Buildings in Prishtina), NTG Blendi, Prishtinë, among other.

<sup>3</sup> Aleksandar Rankovic, the Minister of Interior who was known for directing a harshly anti-Albanian security policy, was dismissed in 1966.

<sup>4</sup> 24,081 inhabitants reflects the figure from the second registration of population carried out in the same year, 1953, by the socialist regime in ex-Yugoslavia.

<sup>5</sup> This growth is mainly attributed to the natural growth of the Albanian population in Kosovo, a feature that characterizes the demography of Kosovo throughout the 20th century. For more information on population growth during the 20th century see: Statistical Office of Kosovo (2008), Table 2, p.7.

<sup>6</sup> The strategy of 'fragmented' development through DUPs was observed in ex-Yugoslavia during the 1960s, as a result of inconsistent execution of urban plans after the Law on Urban and Regional Planning was enacted in 1961. (See: Le Normand, B. 2014, p.118.) However, in Prishtina this mode of development continued throughout the socialist period.



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