



PRELIMINARY REPORT

“Historic Centre” of Prishtina counts its last days

The narrative of Prishtina begins with its Historic Zone. Founded since the XIII century, records reveal that this quarter is the only part of the urban fabric containing autochthonic and environmental heritage values. By the time referred to as a ‘village’ and until the time acquiring the shape of the capital city of the present-day, Prishtina was preceded by clustered development of its city core. Snuggled between two rivers, the city was developed for centuries being singled out for its street tissue, public facilities, the religious ones, its çarshia (*old marketplace*), Sahat Kulla (*the clock tower*), hamams and distinctive houses and, why not, for its curriers, milliners, coppersmiths, potters, rugmakers and all of its craftsmen. What makes it for not being acclaimed for good is its political and cultural treatment over centuries. Devastation and degradation methodologies were applied in Prishtina, ranging from the struggle in bringing modernity hurling with the slogan “Raze the old and build the new” – approach extending further to our days with its continuous destructions. With Prishtina’s historical fibre was experimented and continues to be experimented with!

CURRENT SITUATION

Continuous degradation of the “Historic Centre” of Prishtina (construction of new structures and interventions in the old ones) – Old citizens of Prishtina, and not only, have not much left remained for walking down the memory lane of an old Prishtina. It is easy for the wider community to decipher what is happening in the ‘Historic Centre’ of Prishtina. Some houses are in the process of flattening, others were burned intentionally or by accident, and the old structures are being bit-by-bit replaced with the new ones. Restorations in some public and religious buildings are continuing to thus fuel criticism on the professional and legal correctness of interventions on those structures. The state of objects within the once-known ‘Historic Zone’ is upsetting! Maintenance of the buildings, once under the state protection, deteriorates day after day. Unlike treatment of frontal façades, application of inadequate materials and unfitting treatment of ground-floors with openings of commercial contents are continuously downgrading this zone. Furthermore, these actions are followed by other megalomaniac interventions, such as construction of new structures that tend to correspond to contemporary architecture, which, in fact, alienate the existing cultural heritage values.

Institutions and professionals turning a blind eye to its treatment – At the time when such approach is wreaking havoc on the “Historic Centre” of Prishtina, institutions and experts are virtually completely mute. For “Historic Centre” is being written flimsily while the general public, apart from what it can personally glimpse and experience, they are not tempted much by the media either. Worrying is the fact of the absence of promotion of existing cultural heritage values within a whilom “Historic Zone”. The latter precedes the depleted awareness of citizens, often by the residents themselves of the protected properties, for intentional degradation of the existing heritage values.

Fading of collective memory on the heritage values existence - The time factor has caused for new generations, but also the old ones, to have little of what to recall from cultural and urban-architectural heritage of this historical zone. There is a lack of publications or cultural activities for raising awareness on the values existence in this zone. Furthermore, lacks also an interpretation of these values by educational institutions. Destruction of this area has mostly involved the disappearance of the collective memory of the existence of values and their preservation.

DEVELOPMENTS FROM 1978

Urban planning in the zone and decisions rendered over the years – Starting out with the Master Plan of Prishtina in 1951, and continuing with other urban plans, the central area of Prishtina was given a particular attention as a result of the destructions made in its cultural, economic and administrative centre. Although the funds for stopping this demolish-construct venture had lacked, a number of traditional and vernacular architecture structures have managed to outlast. The year 1978 is the year to be marked in terms of the development of the historic core of Prishtina. The Detailed Urban Plan of 1978, developed by the Institute of Urban Planning of Prishtina, by evaluating the existing urban structure and concentration of buildings under protection, has defined boundaries of the so-called "Historic Zone". In spite of the destruction of the old market and many traditional objects, this area still had historical, architectural and environmental values, and as such it required special attention! A similar attention to this zone was given in the new Master Plan in 1987, although the negative effects of developments in the zone were increasing. Later on, in 2004, Prishtina authorities adopted a new strategic urban plan for prevention of enormous threats to this zone. In 2006, the process of drafting a Regulatory Plan for the so-called "Old Town" of Prishtina was initiated to be continued in 2009 with the extending of the former boundaries of this zone to 42 hectares (from 20 hectares as they were). It is still disputed by the experts on how it was decided to increase this surface area. What were the criteria and the purpose of this?

Construction activities in the zone are continuing without prior planning and unmonitored. Regulatory Plan of this area has been initiated (with tendering procedures) three times successively by the Municipality of Prishtina and was terminated due to the requirement for being vested previously with the drafting of the Detailed Regulatory Plans.

Legal status of the zone and buildings in particular – The area in question, conceived as "Historic Centre" of Prishtina, has no defined boundaries currently. As such, it lacks a legal status and is not protected as a zone! Beyond that... The objects of this zone, once under state protection by the law of Yugoslav/Serb regime, under the Cultural Heritage Law of Kosova from 2006 enjoy a different status, that of temporary protection. This status must be reviewed every year! The temporary protection status is extended according to review and reassessment procedure each year, and as a final product is a List of Cultural Heritage under Temporary Protection.

Transfer of institutional responsibilities – Preservation, safeguarding and effective and proper development of cultural heritage is a constitutional obligation. Cultural Heritage Law, adopted in 2006, has assigned the authorities and institutions in regard to the fulfilment of these obligations, such as: The Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, Kosovo Council for Cultural Heritage (KCCH), central government (The Office of the Prime Minister, MCYS, MESP, cultural heritage institutions, those of territorial planning and Cadastre) and local government. Changes in the lawmaking and the process of creation of this institutional hierarchy has also influenced in recent developments in the Historic Centre of Prishtina.

Demolition, burning and destruction of a considerable number of heritage buildings in the zone – Relevant data point to a high percentage (44%) of the destruction of objects once legally protected. The condition of many objects (especially of individual houses) is quite grave. Visually it can be assumed that most of them are at risk of partial collapse. Over the last two decades, there are cases of intentional demolition of the old structures in order of replacing those with new ones. Current situation of monuments is endangered also from new constructions which have not respected a required radius of distance in the case of buildings under protection.

Restorations in objects within the zone – While the monuments within the zone conceived as "Historic Centre" of Prishtina continue to be under temporary protection, the time factor has also affected their overall condition. Government authorities, between residential buildings and those of religious and administrative character have decided on the latter ones as a priority for restoration intervention process. These interventions however, although with substantial financial investments, were rated adversely by many critics. Restoration projects are thought to have taken from much more the values of the original structure of objects. It is deemed that neither the international conventions for the protection of heritage were considered nor the experts in relevant fields were consulted. In addition, lacks the documentation supplemented with preliminary analysis for determining the new purpose of the objects in question after restoration (especially the Great Hamam case). It is to look at also the

relationship between the contractors, supervisory authorities, who are thought to have committed legal violations and misuse of office for personal benefit. All these have led to the degradation of these primarily historical important monuments.

Publications related to this Zone – On top of the fact that institutions have been required to continuously make the inventory or recording of cultural heritage assets; archive, library and audio-visual materials are missing as well. If the latter does exist, still lacks their collation and the analysis of data authenticity. What can be drawn as positive in this regard are the feeds from two recent publications, “Heritage of Prishtina” – CHWB and “Conservation basis for the ‘Historic Centre’ – EU/CoE. In spite of the potential shortcomings, both these publications constitute the only sources of this nature intended for the historic core of Prishtina in cultural, urban and architectural terms.

ISSUES

The existing situation in the Historic Centre turns out to be alarming. Activities within the area and the failure of institutional responsibilities bring out the following key issues:

Lack of institutional interaction (MESP–MCYS–MP¹) – Interaction between these three institutions appears to be an open loop circuit. MCYS is borne with the main burden, and as such being blamed by the experts for stalling the process of interaction with the MESP and, in this particular case, the Municipality of Prishtina. The calls from the latter for calling-up of an initiative in defining the issue of the status of the zone and the objects, as well as the boundaries of this zone, result in not being met with enthusiasm.

Lack of the Zone’s defined boundaries – Lack of legal boundaries is preceded by the lack of defined boundaries of the zone. Though we often refer to “Historic Centre” of Prishtina as the “Historic Zone”, in fact it is not defined as such at all. Although we could refer to different boundaries in the urban plans over the years, this is not the only component. The boundaries of the Zone should be defined on the basis of the remains and and possible potentials of cultural heritage values.

Lack of legal status for the zone – Without definition of the boundaries of what we would determine as the zone, the area treated with the possible contents of cultural heritage cannot be defined with legal status. The fact this zone is not protected has directly influenced in its continuous degradation. In case this zone would enjoy a defined status (under protection) then this would aid in the prevention of all adverse developments within and in its surroundings. The (temporary) protection status of the monuments in particular, did not help in the protection of the zone in general.

Temporary status provided for the objects under protection – Transition from permanent protection to temporary protection had just further damaged the monuments and their original state, experts consider. Initially, this has returned those to an earlier state of their review, knowing that monuments are initially announced as monuments under temporary protection and after that into permanent protection. The monuments within this zone definitely do require re-inventory and definition of their status in order to prevent their continuous destruction because of the lack of seriousness of the status they enjoy.

¹ Municipality of Prishtina

Construction activities within the zone (illegal constructions/questionable permits and lack of institutional responsibility) – Construction activities in this zone are still on the way. Though these activities are denied by the municipal authorities, new objects, in some cases even a medium and high etage are being built in the vicinity of objects under protection. There is an ambiguity in the way that permit construction applicants should follow as per this zone. Whilst the Municipality of Prishtina assumes that it forwards these applications to the Regional Centre for Cultural Heritage (RCCH), the recommendations of the latter result in not being taken into consideration. New structures are being erected in the vicinity of protected monuments by not observing the etage, the zone's traditional architecture concept, materialization as well as the radius of distance.

The Impunity of persons who intentionally destroyed and degraded objects once under protection – It has become a custom to set ablaze or demolish the old in order to freely be given room for the new. The owners of objects with cultural heritage values, dissatisfied with the state of objects for which they have to look after themselves and without any support and facilitation by institutions, choose to demolish their properties, lured by the benefits to be gained from new alternate buildings! It lacks the penalizing of persons behind of such crimes against cultural values.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In this preliminary report, which precedes a detailed report that 'EC Ma Ndryshe' will shortly release, we provide the following urgent recommendations:

Temporary termination of all construction activities in the zone (of new structures and interventions on the old ones) – In order to prevent further destruction and degradation of the zone, hereby we call on municipal institutions to terminate to an indefinite term every construction activity.

Reconsideration of institutional responsibilities under the laws in force – To consider the lack of cooperation among responsible institutions as stipulated in the Cultural Heritage Law. Cooperation among MESP-MCYS-MP lacks too. There is also stagnation on the operation of the KCCH. The drive the MCYS for immediate mobilization for assuming the situation under control.

Engagement of experts in the field of heritage, urban planning, architecture, history, art and jurisprudence (including the representatives from the University of Prishtina) – As the evaluation of "Historic Centre" of Prishtina is very complex and highly responsible operation, necessary it is for inclusion of experts of the aforesaid fields, without disregard of international experts proven in the treatment of historic centres.

Valuation of what have remained from this zone (an action of the screening and inventory to be undertaken on the ground for reviewing of the remaining objects and to asses heritage and urb-architectural values in the zone) – Due to the dynamics of negative activities in the zone (destruction and inadequate constructions in the zone), it is more than necessary to counter-act with the same beat. Mobilisation of student groups or of volunteers, followed by a professional staff, for screening the situation on the ground, would precede the assessment process on what has remained as preserved value from the former list of objects under permanent protection and what from the "Historic Zone" of 1978.

Definition of boundaries – Recognition of the values of existing objects within the zone would precede the process of defining its boundaries. Objects of cultural heritage values and potential of the development of activities in their vicinity could serve as an indicator for the need of expanding (or narrowing) of the boundaries of the formerly-known "Historic Zone".

MCYS to provide legal status (for the zone in general and objects in particular) – Within the shortest time the Ministry of Culture is urged to provide a defined status as permanent protection for the objects of cultural heritage values within the zone. This would prevent and eventually stop their constant degradation; it would create space for penalizing the persons behind such demolitions and would protect these few objects rescued from the degradation of recent years. In addition to this, this zone, as a defined parcel, should enjoy a defined status for the protection of its boundaries and all construction activities within it.

To proceed with the Conservation Plan – Reassessment and redefining the territory of once “Historic Zone” of Prishtina, would pave the way of calling for Conservation and for the design of the Conservation Plan.

NOTE

This preliminary report heralds the production of a final detailed report on the “Historic Centre” of Prishtina

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MCYS	Ministry of Culture Youth and Sports
MESP	Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning
KCCH	Kosovo Council for Cultural Heritage
RCCH	Regional Centre for Cultural Heritage
EU/CoE	European Union/Council of Europe
MP	Municipality of Prishtina

LITERATURE

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INTERVIEWS

Gjejlane Hoxha, Kosovo Council for Cultural Heritage
Avni Manaj, Promotion of Cultural Diversity in Kosovo; European Union/Council of Europe
Festa Nela, Institute of Spatial Planning; Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning
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