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Functional Shift in Public Buildings

The Case of The Sport and Recreation Centre 'Boro and Ramiz'

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Abstract

It is evident that public buildings are crucial and inseparable elements for a society. While people perform in these spaces their everyday life activities, they get connected to each other as a community. Through these activities an emotional bond is created with these objects, becoming a meaningful presence for the city. All of these public spaces not only have a vital importance for people, but are closely associated with the society's identity. In cities where fast urban growth and development has happened; several public buildings, once considered as monumental, have been left non-functional, partially unused or even converted their functional activity due to historical, political, social and economic changes. This phenomenon has negatively affected the overall condition of the city and its image. Such types of structures are evident in the central areas of Prishtina, which are considered as important identifying areas for the cultural and historical background of Kosova. The research takes in consideration the functional conversion of public buildings of the past in relation to the image of a city; also their importance to the society, represented by one of the most monumental structures located in Prishtina, "The Sport and Recreation Centre 'Boro and Ramiz'". Through analyzing the relation of this specific public building with the society, culture and memory, the importance of such building typology for maintaining the identity of a culture, and the necessity of these buildings to remain public and to maintain their function is expounded.

Introduction

Due to the political, social and economic changes that Prishtina experienced in the past, numerous buildings were left abandoned or changed their typology from public to private. In the case of the functional activity shift, in most cases the buildings stopped providing full accessibility and public functional activities dedicated to the public. Some of the most important public buildings were not preserved and were partially privatized, allowing the private investors to invade and change the configuration of its spaces. This phenomenon deformed the image of the city, giving an unclear spatial and

functional definition of what is public and what is private. The research analyzes the phenomenon of the functional shift of public structures that were considered as iconic public objects and as identifying elements of a culture, into private buildings. The research gives an understanding of the importance of the presence of the public buildings in the society by taking in consideration a very representative public building, "The Sport and Recreation Centre 'Boro and Ramiz'".

The Sport and Recreation Centre 'Boro and Ramiz'

"The Sport and Recreation Center"



*Fig1 / The complex of The Recreation and Youth Center
Source / Google Maps 2018*

was designed as a complex for sports activities, cultural activities and a youth center, as part of the competition launched in 1974, during the Yugoslav Communist system in Kosovo . This complex was named after the heroes from the Second World War, Boris Vukmirovic and Ramiz Sadiku, who together were leaders of the partisan resistance to Fascist occupation. The name symbolizes the brotherhood and unity between Serbians and Albanians. After the war, in 1999, the most vibrant parts of the complex were taken to use by KFOR and UNMIK. The great sports hall at the beginning of 2000 was mysteriously burned in a fire. It was partially reconstructed, such as the roof and the facades. Nevertheless, the main parts of the building remained destroyed or changed its purpose. The area that was formerly used as the Center for Youth and Cultural Activities, with a salon for concerts, conferences and amphitheater, is now largely used for business purposes. The building has a monumentality that can hardly be ignored. Firstly, because of the position it has and the connection with the important nodes of the city. It is located in a symbolic space for Kosovo , close to the "NEW BORN" installation, which is a representation of the rebirth

of the city of Prishtina, a very significant symbol for the society of Kosova . The Sport Center is situated close to the Recreation Center, which provides a perfect possibility for the space and buildings to work as a complete complex. But, the connecting space is an unused space, which indicates that the buildings do not work as a whole mechanism.

Secondly, the monumentality of the building is provided from the used built scale that differentiates it from the rest surrounding buildings. This is provided through the mounting of the building at a higher level through several stairs and through the use of the repetitive vertical elements and fragmentations in the volume. These are typical architectural methods applied in totalitarian systems. The building is articulated through its ground floor, which works as a basement for expanding the main circulations. The façade was designed in order to provide several opportunities for accessibility, but actually, none of them is available to the public. The only main entrance provided is the one with a signage or sign board that does not correspond to the function of the Palace of Sport, but to a private business. This is the first sign of privatization, which



*Fig2 / The Recreation and Youth Center of Prishtina,
Source / Diego Delso, 2015*

leads to the big misunderstanding of the exact purpose of the building. The interior of the building offers a variety of spaces and construction solutions to be considered as design elements.

The attachment of the horizontal and diagonal elements to the vertical monumental elements is visible even in the interior of the building, so there is a strong continuity from the exterior to the interior. The condition of this building is quite consumed. This is visible not only from the used materials and the presence of the humidity, but even in spaces supposed to be in use for the well-functioning of the building as a whole structure, but that actually have become dead or dangerous areas where structural degradation has started to happen. Only one sports hall is used nowadays for the public. The other sports hall, which was burnt because of the fire incident, is left in the exact same condition. This has led to the invasion of this empty space from the public as an occasional parking area. On the other levels of the buildings, private businesses have invaded the spaces of the building, not allowing the possibility for the public to use all the spaces provided by it.

Anti-Spaces

Trancik was one of the first pioneers

to discuss the issue of misuse and abandonment of spaces. In the book "Finding lost spaces" he defines them as "lost spaces" or "anti-spaces". These are places with no shape, no definition, planned incorrectly, hardly measured, undefined and useless or used in a wrong way with low human activity that make the place a meaningless one. (Trancik, 1986) Because of the radical changes in economy, in political structures and being a post-war country, in the cities of Kosova the appearance of lost spaces has become very common.

Trancik speaks about the presence of these types of spaces in the urban tissue. They interrupt its continuity, leaving the urban configuration incomplete. The built structures are elements that contribute in composing this tissue. The unclear character of the building "Boro and Ramiz", by the means of what types of functions it offers, characterizes it as a lost space or anti-space, since it makes no contribution to the public users and fails to connect it through activities with other elements of the city in a coherent way. The functional shift from public to private interrupts the public activities, because when privatization of such building occurs, other options should be offered for the public to perform their recreational activities,



*Fig3 / The non-functional Sports Hall used as parking area
Source / author, 2018*

which in the case of “Boro and Ramiz” building is not done so.

In a city it is vital for the society to perform all the functional activities that are crucial for their well-being, so the city should provide all the structures to realize these activities. The term of “function” in psychology is defined as “ability” or “mode of action”. De Buijn defines four different functions. (Zeeman, 1980) Protective function: protection against influences and dangers; Domain or territorial function: Buildings that provide privacy, safety and security; Social function: Buildings that provide spaces of optimal activities for people; Cultural function: A building that satisfy the requirements relating to the form and character of the spatial environment and includes the notion of civilization. According to the architectural critics Hiller and Learman (1976) there are four main functions of a building divided in a different way from Buijn: Spatial organization of activities: The building must provide the availability of performing the activities through arranging the available space: for instance, the correct way of sitting configuration in a common space to provide an efficient communication between users; Climate regulation: Insuring the optimum interior climate for the user, his activities and property.

The interior climate of spaces should follow the efficient performance of the activity intended; Symbolic function: The material embodiment of ideas and expectation for the users, making it a cultural object, with a social and symbolic significance and meaning; Economic function: A building requires investments in its maintenance and management. An investment object has economic value, and as a result, an economic function.

By these two ways of classification of buildings, we can summarize them in two main function activities: the utility functions and the cultural functions. This type of categorization is defined through the social activity that is provided, giving to it a social meaning. A building can also represent something cultural, perhaps something religious or philosophical. The combination of a building as a piece of social environment and its cultural symbolism can be referred as a “symbolic environment”. (Norberg-Schultz, 1965) This functional quality and architectural quality of a building is closely related to its utility value. It involves the ability of the building to perform all kinds of different activities, perceptual qualities, cultural values and meanings. Cultural Buildings should provide the social function and if not,

it loses its purpose and meaning to a society. It remains only an aesthetic symbol.

This shift of functions from public to private is a result of several factors.

1. Political factors: Poor land and property management, lack of coordination among decision makers create the right conditions for this functional shift of such spaces. Ignoring the importance of symbolic buildings with a public purpose from responsible actors leads to the misuse and degradation of such buildings.

2. Economic factors: Kosova is one of the newest country for gaining and declaring its independency in 2008.

Being faced with economic difficulties, resulted in the creation of empty spaces in the urban tissue, partly used buildings and abandoned ones. This resulted in reshaping of the city's configuration physically and in its activities. To maintain its economical function, The Sport and Recreation Center, has partially shifted its function from public to private.

Such privatization may occur in cultural buildings by impacting only some functions or phases, but the primary purpose of this action is the maintenance of the intended purpose. Privatization is closely related to the political structure through its meaning, origins and objectives. The word privatization may evoke different interpretations in different contexts. It is the change of ownership of public assets, through the partial or total transfer of an enterprise from public to private ownership (Bos, 1992). It is a reaction to political or ideological reasons, but that may improve the economical quality of a building in the case when the government's budget is not capable of maintaining it. It is clear from the inside spaces that the building is not maintained, but completely left deteriorated, making it a possible future element of a total privatization. This would cause not only the change of function from public to private, but

the change of the original architectural quality of the building because of the private business actions. The main issue for Prishtina nowadays is the disappearance of the spaces and buildings that provide public activities. This phenomenon endangers the well-being of the society.

Buildings and Memory

Buildings are the demonstration of human's existence. Philosophy has tried to explain the essence of the existence, precisely, existentialism focused in the way humans find themselves existing in the world. Martin Heidegger is one of the few philosophers that explained the existential aspect in connection to architecture. According to him, buildings locate the human existence and configure the human presence through the configuring of the activities for the presence of time. The figure of building deals with the presence and absence of an inhabitant. First, it is built for the needs of people and then it shapes his life, and vice versa.

Buildings have a dual character of presence and absence. For Heidegger, building configures physically over time how people measure their presence in the world. They set out the particular character of the builder and dweller. Like our own shadow, buildings of the past remain a trace of a presence that is there and that has been under a process of transformation. When they are left deteriorated they evoke a fear to human as a testimony of the human powerlessness and the fear of not having in control over such aggravation. (Sharr, 2007) These type of places, primly, are understood by use and existence. For an investor, economically, it is easier to demolish a building and rebuild a new one. This seems a simple action, but quite drastic for a city and its society. If this kind of action would have been taken continuously, no testimony for the history of a city and no identity for a culture and a society would have been left.

According to Kevin Lynch, there are three components that create the image of a city: Identity, Structure and Meaning. The image of the city is created through the identification of a specific object, which distinct them from other elements. These are the tools of creating the identity of a city and tend to have a meaning for the observer, whether practical or emotional. (Lynch, 1990) Public buildings, such as The Recreation and Youth Center of Prishtina, are a reflection of the identity of the community and society of Kosova gained from the past. They reflect the beliefs and aspirations of an era that has had an important indication in the present Kosova. Places trigger individual and social memories, which are defined with the term "collective memory".

Cultural memory connects three poles: memory, culture and society. Buildings play a significant role to collective memory, since there are places where personal histories and individual experiences happened deriving into collective history and collective experiences. Places serve as mnemonic aids, which means that they remind us of memories, individual and collective ones, and also stimulate people to investigate social memories they do not know. Urban reminders, the leftovers from previous inhabitants of a place, may influence memory of places either directly, by conveying historical information, or indirectly by arousing curiosity and increasing motivation to discover the place's forgotten past. (Nora, 1989).

Places of the past contribute to the sense of continuity, giving to people a coherent identity as a national narrative. They concretize the identity through functioning as elements of storing the historical and cultural knowledge. Man lives historically, which means that he recalls the past and has the capacity to reconstruct the past through cultural memories, which

are fixed in immovable figures of memory, such as buildings. This way of crystallization and communication of a collective knowledge serves to stabilize and convey the society's self-image. Upon such collective knowledge each social group relates itself in different ways, such as appropriation, criticism and sometimes preservation or transformation. (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995)

Memory and identity are often an object of argument. There are different approaches about places of the past. Their history may be interpreted and reinterpreted differently through different historical contexts. Demolishing or conserving a memorial building is a very delicate discussion which has various positions from different groups of society.

Memory is a way of how humans relate to time, and the capacity to remember and recreate past events. It is the ability to separate the past from the present, and to relate his identity with the objects that correspond to different periods. 2) The second type of persons are those who don't know or have not been taught how to see. The past, the present and the future are the three layers to be present in a city.

Due to an unwanted past, the objects built in an era that is not preferably remembered, as its representative, in order not to be reminded of the past, these objects should be avoided. (Sharr, 2007) These arguments highlight the importance of a place of the past. Various points of view about memory happen about a place. The continued existence of a place allows new memories to be created, but even when a place stops existing the memories survive. Memory recalls visions of the lost.

Conclusions

In a city in transition, in-between the past and the future, several building typologies are found

which are representative for each corresponding era of the creation and development of a city. Buildings of the past are broadly found in the city of Prishtina as identifying objects of a history and its society. Their condition explains the present political, historical, financial and cultural situation a city is going through. The Building of Sports and Recreation Center of Prishtina, is left partially unused and partially privatized, making it vulnerable to the future distortion of its configuration. It is considered as a "lost space" because of the unclear functional definition. Buildings that are meaningless to a society are those that are misused by not contributing to the life of a whole community and society.

Buildings with a public purpose are an important element for defining the image of a city. They concretize their identity as elements of conserving the historical and cultural knowledge. This type of building is important for the public character that it provides. Through shared activities, they begin to function as a community. There is no strategy declared for the future that provides all the necessary qualities to meet the many cultural needs of the capital Kosova. The predictable future for the building of Sport and Recreation Center is its invasion from private investments, and a complete change of function. Along with this transformation will come the desecration of the building, the loss of its monumentality and symbolism, which will partially remain on its facades. The object is related to people's identity and memory.

The image of the memory will be distorted, while not having a specific function dedicated to the public. Prishtina today has no active representative cultural center, although there is an unused object in the center of the city that is over 10 thousand square meters.

An emergency action should be taken, which consists in its rehabilitation and restoration, providing cultural and public activities in order to re-establish its glory. If the building will be constantly borrowed, structural and architectural changes will happen not in tune with the original design of the building, and in the future the reuse and restoration to its primary form and shape will be an impossible operation, because it will have lost its identity and symbolism.

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