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# Envisioning the future of Prishtina

## An image shaped by the spatial experience

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Prishtina, the youngest capital city in Europe, since the early communist era has been formed through a piecemeal process of juxtaposition of new units and large scale architecture landmarks (Jashari-Kajtazi, Jakupi 2017) almost spatially autonomous from each other, but having a strong character of space formation.

The first fragment of this complex image is a remained part of the old picturesque ottoman city, which survived the destruction policies of Milosevich under the Yugoslavian regime during the 50th, not without losing important monuments such as the main Mosque, the catholic church and the Synagogue, the old ottoman bazaar and a large number of houses (IKS, ESI, 2006).

Between the 60s and the 70s the city was developed in by separate neighborhoods: the unitary residential neighborhoods such as "Ulpiana", "Dardania", "Bregu i diellit", and during the 80s new functional islands emerged; the University center with the library as the main object; the youth sport center and the stadium area recently identified as New Born, the main boulevard and the parliament, the Gërmia Park, the hospitals and the industrial area, etc.

During this period, Prishtina grew up through the layout of large scale building or areas which constitutes specific units in the city easily recognizable. Then, after the war starting from 1999, an informal buildings boom affected the city structure (Sadiki 2015) both from inside and outside, creating an extensive mass of insignificant buildings in which the historical landmarks were hardly identifiable. Still, despite this visual complexity, the image of Prishtina can be read through single objects or parts that appear repeatedly along a path which constitute visual and functional episodes that emerge in the shapeless city and recompose the image of the Prishtina as a whole. The space resulted contaminated by these heterogeneous objects and today in many cases degraded because of the decay of this large scale islands dominating the city.

This idea of contaminated space by unexpected juxtapositions that creates ambiguity and continuous contrasts between horizontal and vertical, flat and depth, changes of scale etc., has been object of interest of Colin Rowe who finds interesting precisely this attribute of space (fig.

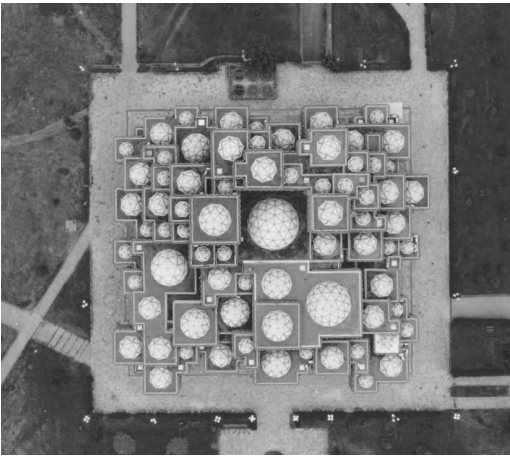


Fig1 / Old Ottoman neighborhood, National Library, Sport youth center, Dardania neighborhood, Pristina  
 Source / available online on <https://zeri.info/dosier/183776/prishtina-e-vjeter/>, accessed on 10 may 2019) b. National Library, Pristina (available online: <https://es.wikiarquitectura.com/edificio/biblioteca-nacional-Prishtina-nulk/> accessed on 10 may 2019), c. Sport youth center, Pristina ( photo by Afrim Spahiu, available online: <http://www.piranesi.eu/the-undiscovered-modern-architecture-of-Kosova/>, accessed on 10 may 2019), Dardania neighborhood, Pristina (source: available online on <http://info-komuna.com/m/sq/lajme/-lagjja-dardania-i-kerkon-komunes-shtylla-antiparkim>, accessed on 10 may 2019)

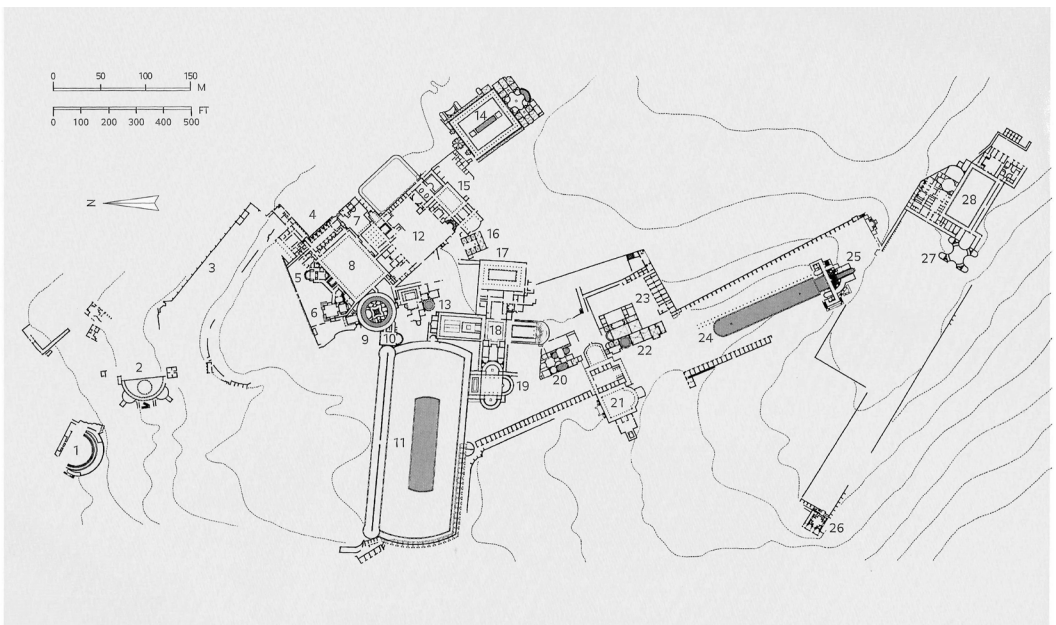


Fig2 / Plan of Villa Adriana. Source / Sapelli ragni, 2010

2). In this conception of space unity is given by the sequence created along the path which works as a system made of elements in contrasts and interruptions (Rowe 1977). The image of a certain path in this case depends on the composition of frames along a

path. This idea of visual unity in an urban scenery made of heterogeneous objects has been developed since the 70s by Gordon Cullen (1971), in his seminal book "Concise Townscape", in terms of sequential narration of space

perceived by a pedestrian. Following the landscape traditional artistic approach in city design, he pointed out a series of physical and visual elements characterizing the aesthetics quality of the urban scene addressing human-oriented sensitive aspects related to their aesthetics satisfaction. In his studies, urban landscape vision exceeds the existing concept of visually pleasing static frame through which the city was perceived, by considering human perception as a dynamic experience, in movement, which lead to a serial vision or space sequences. In this sense, Cullen was one of the first who highlighted a picturesque approach in urban design based on an articulated and interconnected system of spaces and elements that contribute in the definition of the urban environment such as buildings, trees, roads, water, urban furniture, etc. (fig. 3,4)

This architectural spatial composition achieved by grouping of buildings perceived along the walking, creates a continuous and coherent walkscape. Caperi (2002), in *Walkscapes* used this term to manifest the pleasure and adventure of walking in certain environments. Views become at the same time stimulant to the sight to be explored as they offer a variety of vistas characterized by different spatial configurations. The image of the city in this case is built by a spatial concept referred to a larger project made up of various buildings. In the urban structure as a whole, the various episodes defined were determined by singularities and peculiarities of place related to a particular object, a particular spatial configuration, a particular point of attraction etc., which simulate and please the view step by step. Nevertheless, being connected to each other in a formal continuity as urban patterns, they contribute to the formation of the image of the city as a whole. Accordingly, from the human perspective "the whole city becomes

a plastic experience, a journey through pressures and vacuums, a sequence of exposures and enclosures, of contrast and relief" (Cullen 1971). In fact, the visual variety is achieved by the sum of different patterns and the singularity of the urban episodes, which are linked in a sort of continuous promenade within the urban space, with the intent to evocate aesthetical feelings.

These perceived images of human experience were used by Cullen as tools to read and interpret the spatial dimension of the city. On one hand, buildings are grouped to create an architectural composition at the urban level, on the other hand they define a space in which to penetrate and which vision is designated by human perception.

This idea of a composition sequence along a path was further developed in Luigi Moretti methods of composition, highlighting the role of volumes and tridimensional forms in space.

In this case, the sequence is highlighted by the insertion of contrasting volumes in scale, dimensional and proportion, similar to the effect of Palazzo Ducale in Urbino, commissioned by Federico da Montefeltro, which created a strong visual surprising effect in the old medieval road, through a change in scale and proportion of space. In this view urban enclaves, outdoor rooms, silhouettes as well as space characteristics of the sequences such as ambiguity, visual graduations, gradients, mystery and different contrasting patterns: open space - intimacy, continuity - apparent interruption reveal the essence of the city beyond the individuality of the single part. As a result, the methods of urban design should be based on the perception in movement and on the visual effects of volumes in space. Considering his method, the city becomes more permeable, open and objects are more interconnected through the public layer.



Fig3 / Urban space of Gjirokastra. Episodes related to nodal points. Source / author's PhD thesis (2018), p 220,222

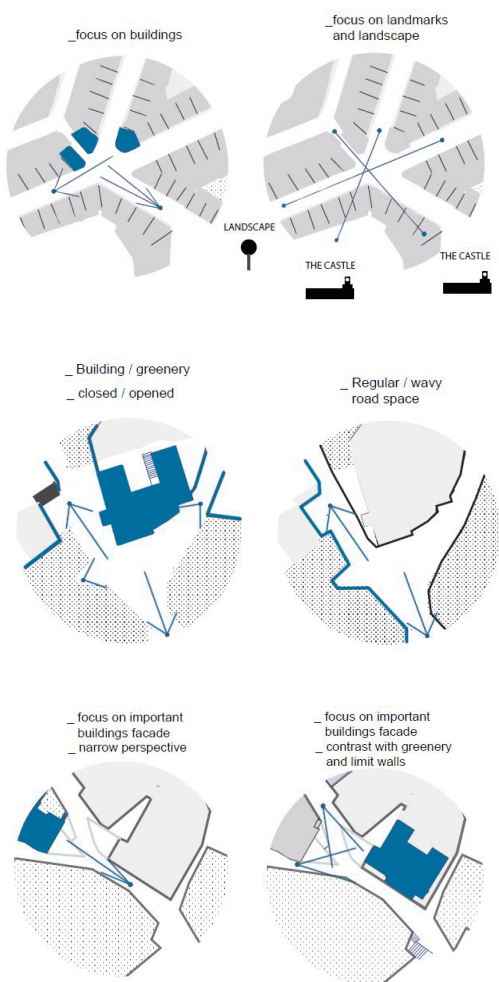


Fig3.1 / Urban space of Gjirokastra. Episodes related to nodal points. Source / author's PhD thesis (2018), p 220,222

Despite formal aspects of image and volume composition related to visual architecture, the experience of urban space is also identified with the functions and activities happening along the path as well as temporal events (fig. 5). The naked city map illustrated by Guy Debord expresses an idea of the city as an experience which does not affect simply the built forms (buildings) but also events (the life of citizens) (Sadler, 2017) (fig. 6).

In this regard, Bernard Tschumi highlighted the role of "events" and "actions" in the dynamic perception of space. In his essay "Sequences" (Tschumi 1983) he introduced the concept of narration to interpret space as a combination and overlap of events (fig. 6,7). The sequences usually emphasize a path made of quiet spaces, spaces of uncertainty and dynamic spaces in which activities and events happen. Contemporary cities nowadays are identified through major programs buildings or spaces such as business centers, railway station, art center, multimedia center, sport

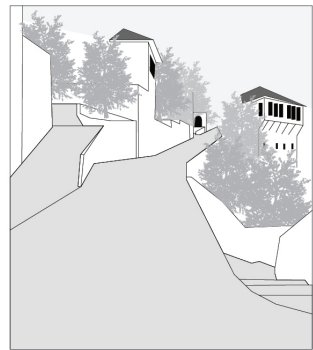
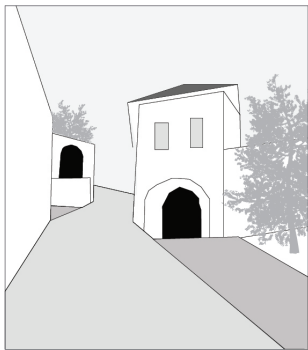
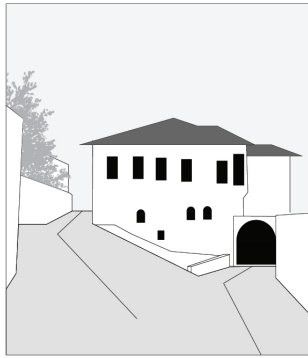
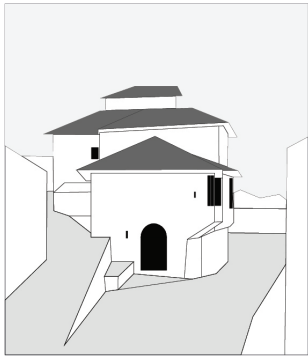
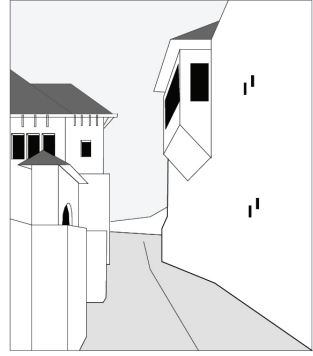
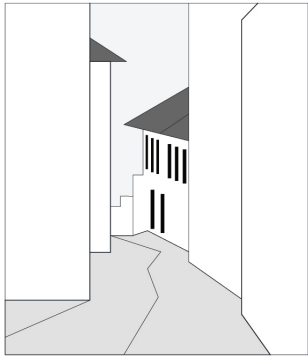


Fig4 / Walkscape of Gjirokastra. Source / author's PhD thesis (2018), p 198, 199

centers etc. Hence, their event-architecture becomes emblematic and its inclusive character and strong symbolic significance define the nature of urban reality.

This dimension can be further enriched by the concept of episode if we consider moving through the urban space. Episodes are a separate event or a

group of events occurring in isolation, but also being part of a sequence suggesting emotions or memory along with the experience of space. In this sense "episodes constitute a method of space composition based on the placement of functions and actions in a moving image" (Molinari 2018, pg.81). Events and experiences can be

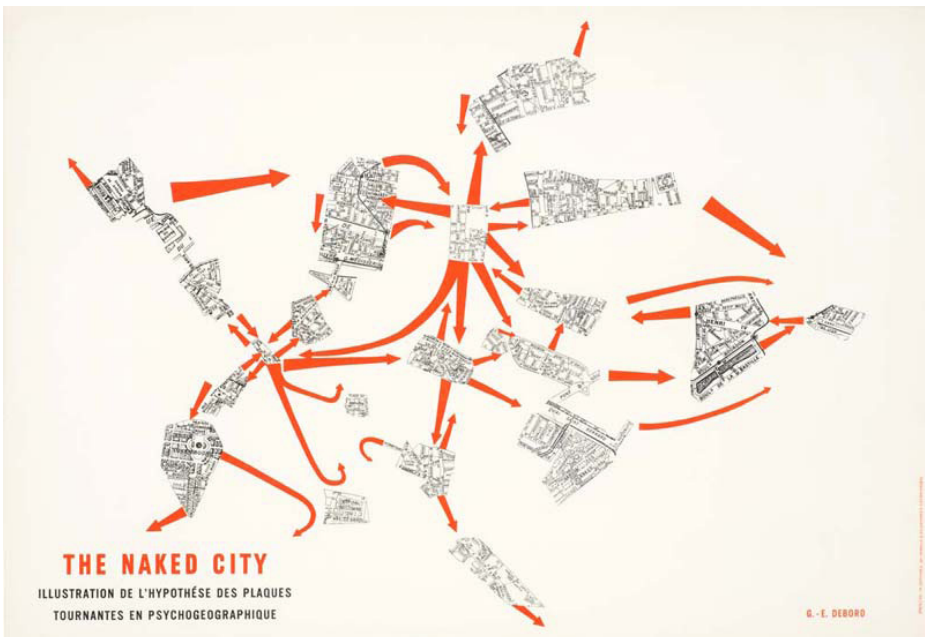


Fig5 / The naked city, Guy Debord. Source / <http://urbantick.blogspot.com>

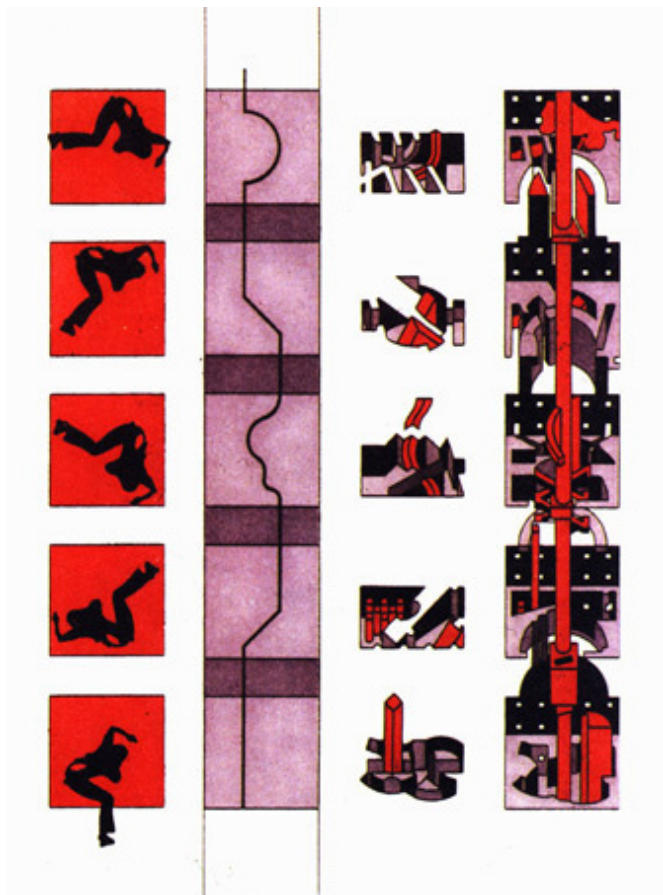


Fig6 / Manhattan Transcript. Source / Tschumi, 1981, p 42, 43

considered as important fragments that rebuilt the image of the city in movement. Hence, they can be considered as a method of design and interpretation of the city and can be used as a new way of planning and building the future of urban space in Prishtina, which due to the informality is impossible to be planned as a

continuous and unitary whole. The idea of large scale event-buildings and experience-spaces can be a tool to be used to revitalize the emergency fragments of the city of Prishtina. This conception of urban scale promoted the development of certain potential areas changing their function and architectural regime and

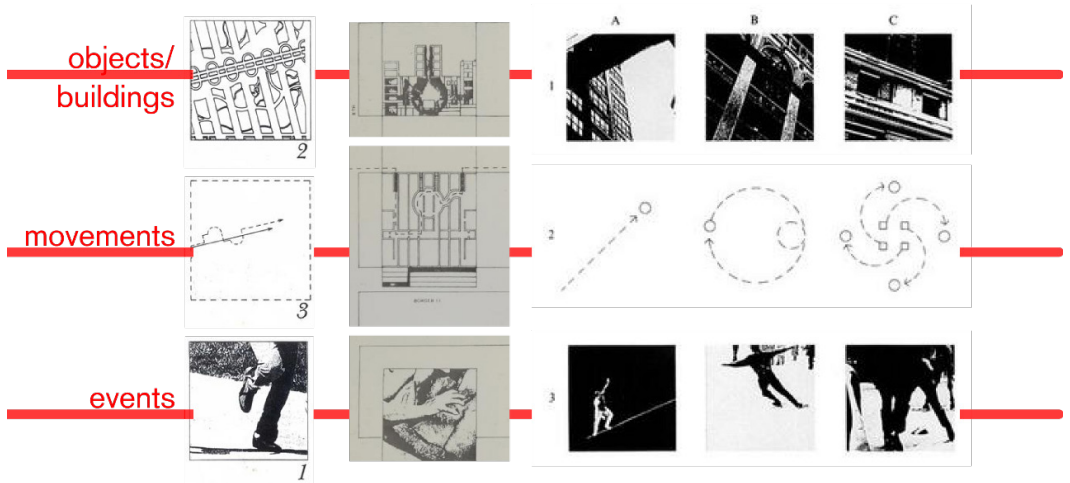


Fig7 / Elements of space composition according to Bernard Tschumi (1983). Source / Tschumi, 1981, p 46

transforming them in attractive areas, not only visually but also in terms of activities that take place.

Each of those event-buildings/ experience-spaces can promote diversity and multiplicity and can give impulses to the development of the surrounding areas. More precisely, parliament complex and municipality, sport center, rail station, library and main city square, art galleries and museums can be some of the large scale complexes that can build up a new image of Prishtina capital city. They are separate entities, but still are strongly interconnected into a unified scheme relate to movement inside the urban structure, through which is possible to think about unity in the complex urban space of Prishtina.

In addition, considering the public layer, it's possible to think about continuous sequences of interconnected space in a wide scale permeated by human fluxes that put together existing voids to be requalified, existing activities, landmarks, and newly designed buildings.

This idea of permeability given by interconnected sequences of space on one side absorbs fluxes into event-buildings and on the other side distribute them in different activities and experiences in the surrounding space.

In conclusion, Prishtina can be thought with a similar public layer to merge the

urban experience of space with that of the single architecture.

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