

REVIVAL OF CITY SQUARES IN BALKAN CITIES

Contribution to cultural and civic participative policies for
livable city squares and public spaces

Co-PLAN Institute for Habitat Development
COALITION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
EXPEDITIO
U_POLIS

supported by:



swiss cultural programme
in the western balkans

Revival of City Squares in Balkan Cities

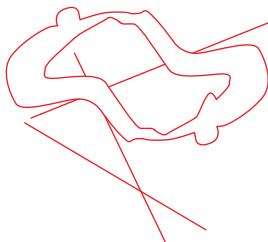
Contribution to cultural and civic participative policies for
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PREFACE NOTE

This publication was accomplished using archive material of the project “Revival of City Squares in Balkan Cities”, a project which was implemented jointly by Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development (Albania), POLIS University (Albania), Coalition for Sustainable Development - CSD (Macedonia) and EXPEDITIO (Montenegro), and supported by the Swiss Cultural Programme for Western Balkans.

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The artists of the exhibition “The Pythagoras’ (un)costant” for the artworks texts and pictures.

The speakers of the conference “Vibrant Squares” for the abstracts and their contributions.

Photographic and video credits:

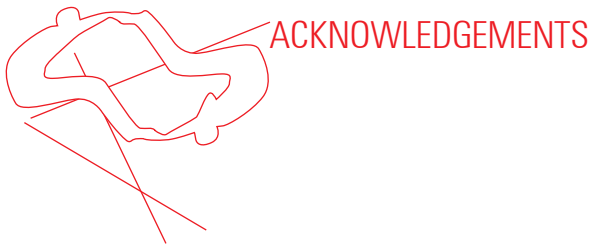
Co-PLAN (Albania), EXPEDITIO (Montenegro), CSD (Macedonia), POLIS University, Sonia Jojic, Erandistic, the leaders, the assistants and the participants to the actions and the workshops.

Proofreading: Aida Ciro

Publication editor: Stefano Romano

Printed by: botime afrojdit

Printed in: 2012



We would like to extend our thanks to all those that in a way or another participated in the project, including all the students, young architects and artists who participated in the Workshops (Regional and Local) and in all the project activities, particularly to all the moderators of the workshops, collaborators, participants in the conferences, and media representatives.

Moderators of Regional Workshops:

Ivan Kucina, Regional Workshop in Tirana (Albania)

Dr. Ružica Božović Stamenović, Regional Workshop in Kotor (Montenegro)

Natasha Poplavska, Regional Workshop in Skopje (Macedonia)

Collaborators:

Professors Besnik Aliaj and Sotir Dhamo who focused their academic course at Polis University on the realisation of the survey's in Tirana and Durrës and the creation process of the architectural project used as base for the actions in Tirana and Durrës.

Elvan Dajko, Ledian Bregasi, Julian Veleshnja, Olgica Nelkovska, Sonja Jojic, Eno Muho, Albana Koçollari, Ernest Shtëpani, Nedi Petri, Giulia Maci for their assistance during the Regional Workshops in Tirana, Kotor and Skopje and their involvement in the survey's realisation and all the actions realised in Tirana and Durrës.

Miomirka Lučić, sociologist, author of Survey

Jelena Pejčković, Saša Karajović

Elizabeta Avramovska, Meri Batakoja, Jasna Stefanovska, Ognjen Marina, Bojan Karanakov, Stefanka Hadzi Pecova, Aleksandar Prokopiev, Naum Paunovski, Guest lecturers at the Workshop in Skopje

Participants in the Conference:

Nahid Majid, Ana Džokić – Mark Neelen, Claudia Zanfi, Eleni Tzirtzilaki, Maria Damkalidi, Stefanos Handelis, Dejan Milovac, Danijela Petrović Jablan, Filip Aleksić, Izabela Matoš, Tomislav Žegura, Sasho Ivanovski, Besnik Aliaj, Sotir Dhamo, Elvan Dajko, Silvi Jano,

Aleksandar Krsteski - Representative from the Municipality of Kisela Voda, Stefanka Hadzi Pecova, Mileva Zlatanvic, Vangel Karaivanov - Representative from the Municipality of Karpos, Snezana Domazetovska.

Participants in the Exhibition:

Verica Kovacevska, Armando Lulaj, Network Nomadic Architecture, Oliver Ressler, Studio203, Claudia Zanfi and the artists of Open City.

Individuals and Organisations:

Oliver Musovik, Ana Hoxha, Eno Goxha, Altin Sula, Roland Lleshi, Eno Muho, Eriselda Çobo, Romeo Kodra, Petar Pejaković, Giulia Maci, Sinestezija group, Prostorozh.

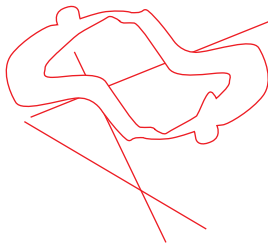
Municipalities, citizens and stakeholders:

All citizens, stakeholders and representatives from the Municipalities of Tirana, Durrës, Kotor, and Skopje for their support and contribution and participation in any of the project phases.

Organisations who supported and helped with the accomplishment of the project:

Swiss Cultural Programme for Western Balkans, POLIS University and Tirana Architecture Week.

Foundation Open Society Macedonia, Foundation Open Society Albania, and Rockefeller Brothers Fund.



ABOUT THE PUBLICATION

The publication '**Revival of City Squares in Balkan Cities**' shares the results of the activities that were performed during the course of the project. Envisaged as a means of documenting the whole process of making and disseminating the knowledge and experiences gained through its implementation, this publication comes as an overview of the project, organized in four main parts, with each one dedicated to a particular research field: first, we look at how public space is perceived by all stakeholders; we address the issue of participation in decision-making concerning public space; we focus on each of the four cities and the activities performed during the course of the project implementation; to conclude with a summary of the conference proceedings mainly from a theoretical approach.

It is important to note that, each part is intended as a collection of "short stories" acquired through experiences, reflections, and performances made through various public spaces in Tirana, Durrës, Kotor, and Skopje over the two year-project-course.

LEGEND



General comments



Tirana / Durrës



Kotor



Skopje

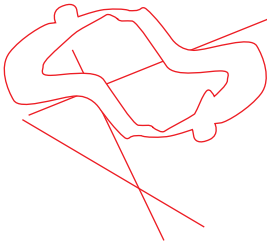


TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	10
PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC SPACE	16
PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC SPACE	26
ACTION IN PUBLIC SPACE	56
REFLECTION ON PUBLIC SPACE	116



REVIVAL OF CITY SQUARES IN BALKAN CITIES

how to transform a city square into a new vibrant place for the community





“Which space do you use a square?”

The project ‘Revival of City Squares in Balkan Cities’ aims to reflect on a new creative idea of the public spaces questioning people who use and live in those spaces about the associated re-use values and problems in order to create new vibrant, creative and livable spaces to use as city squares.

City squares, as places for democratic and cultural expression in contemporary cities and focal points for civil and social relations, are a vital stimulus to entrepreneurship and development of the cities. Over the last two decades however, the urban transformations of Balkan cities under the duress of neo-liberal rebuilding projects and globalization ambitions in continuation, demonstrate a significant neglect of the public functions of city squares as public spaces. This neglect comes in different forms, with the most common ones being those of a physical nature and soft infrastructure: the role that different communities play in the city, the space where exchange takes place, the grounds where people express their identity through culture and arts. Politicians using city squares for (personal) political experiments and as rehearsals for populist politics makes for yet another common form of neglect; such episodes have sparked citizen reaction and on-going debates¹ on the use of the square. Although usually confined to tourist destination cities, a number of cities are faced with the issue of excessive commercialization of public spaces, which similarly to the other cases, exclude citizens from the policy-making process.

Seen the problematic arising, the issue of city squares has to be tackled and discussed in a much broader fashion. City squares, confined not only to the main square but encompassing all open public places /city squares, embody the energies of people and therefore we have to understand what city squares mean for the social and cultural expression of citizens and what is needed to bring life back to these squares. With this in mind, the project seeks to meaningfully add a share towards creating solid bridges between various actors, by facilitating a community-based process that engages a full range of local stakeholders, such as citizens, professionals, policymakers. The project also seeks to initiate dialogue among people

with diverse ideas, producing workable recommendations with significant impacts through an inclusive process.

In all, the project aims to contribute to the revival of city squares as viable public places that foster cultural identity and promote diversity through enforcement of public policies and active community participation. The activities of this project were designed to create an overall framework that encompasses elements of systematic approach: research that provided ground for feasible solutions based on creative energies and community aspirations and strengthened cross-sector and cross-border alliances that will ascertain visibility and on-set of jointly established workable means for enactment. It is also expected that through the actions undertaken during the course of this project, national and regional policy discourse is promoted on how city squares can be transformed into pulsating community places², as well as a platform for transforming open public spaces into vibrant places that serve community needs is developed.

During the two years of project implementation, January 2011 – December 2012, the following activities were held:

- Examination and analysis of the current use of city squares in 4 cities: Tirana, Durrës, Kotor and Skopje and an assessment of potentials for their transformation, through a Survey and a Comparative analysis.
- Survey on city squares, conducted by means of questionnaires, with citizens in 4 cities: Tirana, Durrës, Kotor and Skopje.
- Three Regional workshops for students and young professionals, in Tirana, Kotor and Skopje.
- Consultative process with the key stakeholders (including public officials, segments of civil society and citizens) through meetings, focus groups and round tables.
- Elaboration and publishing of a set of viable Guidelines on city square transformation in

Albanian, Macedonian and Montenegrin

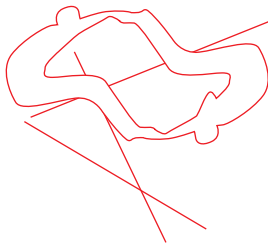
- Mapping and networking with organizations and actors dealing with issues related to public spaces in the Balkan/ SEE region, also through creation of database
- Dissemination of practices and knowledge gained in implementing project activities through: Local websites on revival of city squares, Project pages on facebook, blog, Project E-newsletters, Articles in the Forum A+P Magazine
- Regional Closing Conference and a Contemporary art exhibition on the problematic of city square and public space in general organized in Tirana
- A publication documenting the activities and achievements of this project.

1 Best example of such behaviour of politicians is the latest decision about the City Square in Skopje - Skopje 2014 project, or the debate between the local and central government in the main square in Tirana.

2 Indeed, knowledge dissemination is the first step towards introducing new ideas and approaches.



Co-PLAN & U_POLIS - courtyardgarden, action (July 2011)

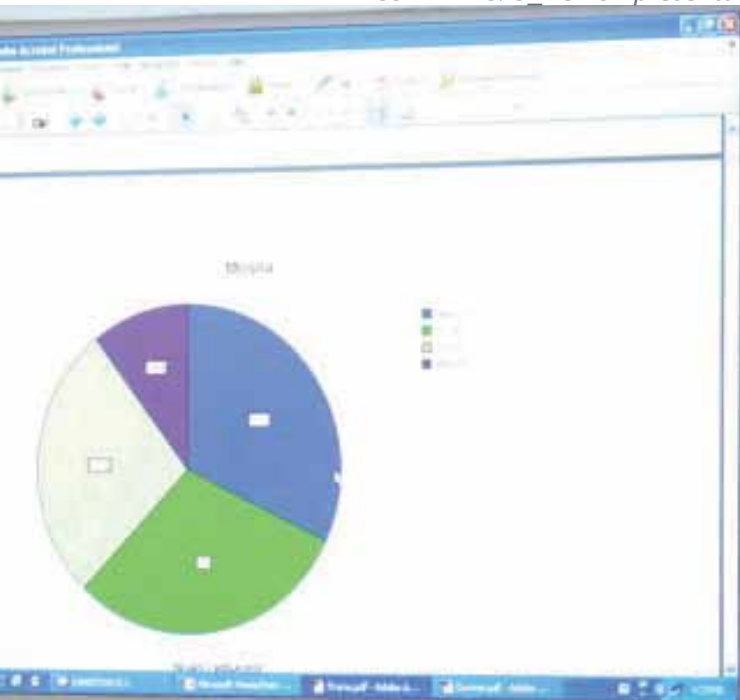


PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC SPACE

OUR PERCEPTION - THEIR PERCEPTION - OUR NEW PERCEPTION



Co-PLAN & U_POLIS - presentation of survey's results (May 2011)



*“Even if nothing is going on in town, someone is always there”
(Comment from the Public survey about city squares)*



Co-PLAN - EXPEDITIO - CSD - documentation of the surveys (March 2011)

City squares embody the energies of people and therefore we have to understand what city squares mean for the social and cultural expression of citizens and what is needed to bring life back to them. Indeed, city squares are not just designed on the urban planners' drawing table considering that the design is but a means to an end, and not an end in itself. Instead, city squares ought to be viewed as creative city making, where all concerned parties play a role, which is why the **project makes a point to promote pro-active citizen participation in developing public spaces into vital community places, with people-friendly settings that build local value and serve community needs and not just passive spectators or users.**

With this in mind, one of the initial project activities was to **investigate public perceptions of public squares** in cities in each of the partnering countries, namely in Tirana and Durrës in Albania, Skopje in Macedonia, and Kotor in Montenegro. Through a widely distributed questionnaire, we asked citizens about their perception of city squares. We were very interested to find out more about how these spaces are used on a daily basis, what are the most significant positive as well as negative sides to using city squares, and what citizens thought could be done to improve them.

The surveys identified a number of diverse comments and perceptions, which made it clear that there is much potential for more detailed and refined research of specific issues related to urban public spaces. However, many interesting conclusions were extracted even from the seemingly heterogeneous collection of answers collected in the first project phase.

The importance of city squares

The analysis of the questionnaire showed that almost all respondents in all four cities perceived city squares as highly important, with over 90% of total number of respondents, while the percentage of those who were indifferent about or uninterested in city squares is negligible. The conclusion to be drawn here is that there is an overall agreement among the respondents that city squares represent important areas for development and recognition of their respective regions, both nationally and internationally.

Characteristics of spaces that are considered city squares

City squares have historically been such an integral part of public life in European cities that the very concept of “city square” is inevitably complex and multisided. The respondents to our survey listed the following characteristics of city squares considered as distinctive: *well organized urban space, places for leisure and relaxation, places with fresh air and green surfaces devoid of traffic, public spaces for people of all ages and for different kinds of activities (business, cultural, sportive), public space surrounded by buildings and pedestrian zones, a promenade, a space in the center of the city where **people gather** and where **local events are organized**, urban space that **serves as a mirror of the nation**, wide space with monuments and greenery, a **point that connects all other points in a city**, a **crossroads of people and events**, a **colorful and diverse place**.*

Interestingly, the question “What is a city square for you?” brought out essential characteristics of a public square mostly in terms of a **decidedly public function**, while fewer respondents answered in terms of a specific form signifying a certain place is important or unique.

Indeed, when asked about places in their cities that are currently not city squares, but had **potential to become city squares**, respondents suggested a wide and heterogeneous range of locations. However, when asked what characteristics these places had that gave them such potential, the respondents were more concise and consistent: *these “potential” squares are those locations that are **public and available to every person**, regardless of their gender, age, religion, nation, race or needs; a **place for gathering and communal activities**, whose ambience is rich in greenery and equipped with benches; a place to **spend one’s free time and feel comfortable**; a place **where one can feel as a part of the city “aura” or “spirit”**; a place filled with history; a place of rectangular shape.* Zones **around business or shopping centers, schoolyards, places around supermarkets, near airports, hotels or highways** were also listed as places experienced as squares. Again, the given answers were overwhelmingly formulated in terms of the public function of a place, and not its form or location within the city – which gave us significant input about possible locations for our project actions aimed at involving the public.

Activities in city squares

Activities in city squares were analyzed through a predetermined set of variables: meeting with friends, attending cultural events, going for walks, spending time in coffee shops, shopping, and playing. The analysis of the received answers showed that respondents in all four cities experienced and used city squares principally as a **place to meet up with friends**, and as a place to **take a walk**; while the remaining answers were dominant in some cities, and almost negligible in others. In the city of Durrës for instance, many respondents listed **spending time in coffee shops** as a frequent activity, while in the city of Kotor many answered that they would come to city squares to **attend cultural events**. Shopping and games were at the very bottom of the activity list in all four surveyed cities.

What makes city squares special?

We wanted to know which of the following indicators affected the perception of city squares as special, unique places: people, atmosphere, buildings, history, memories, events, location or ambience. **Ambience and people** were the most frequent answers across the board. Although there seemed to be an overall agreement that each of the listed elements contributes to the essence of a square, the variations in ranking of each indicator showed that the perceptions of the relative importance of each one was personal and diverse. Although respondents in each of the cities determined specific places as city squares based on similar characteristics, this question showed that elements that affect the experience of a square are not of equal, but rather of individual importance.

What does it feel like to stay in city squares?

When it comes to feelings that people experience when spending time in city squares, the overwhelming majority responds in positive terms – **they feel very good and comfortable**. A negligible number of respondents reported that they felt unhappy, uneasy, unwell or uncomfortable altogether. Although the percentage of negative answers is within a range of a statistical error, these answers can be understood as a signal that has to be taken into

account when aiming to improve city squares and reduce the possible causes of discomfort to a minimum.

Problems and shortcomings

In all the cities where the survey was made, lack of hygiene and basic amenities, as well as lack of **greenery and street furniture** such as benches and garbage bins were listed as problems. Many respondents complained about **pollution, traffic and noise**. Naturally, many of the reported problems were specific to the cities in question: the lack of “space”, “**free space**” to be more precise, was reported in the city of Kotor, and the **lack of cultural activities** in the city of Skopje. It is interesting to note that each city had a very small percentage of respondents who claimed that they were not seeing any problems with the spaces they use as city squares. Although this issue should be researched in more detail in order to get to solid conclusions, one reason for missing criticism might be that the neglect of these spaces has lasted for so long that people are simply too used to public spaces looking and functioning the way they do. Another interesting set of responses are those asking for some kind of historic “revival” in public spaces. Again, this opens up a wide and complex topic for future exploration – the topic of identity and authenticity, and the way they are valued in the Balkan cities.

Suggestions for improvement of city squares

The answers to the question “What kind of activities, which do not exist currently, would you like to see in city squares?” were diverse, creative and specific, to a somewhat unexpected degree. The ideas for possible actions involved: *cultural events (concerts, exhibitions, puppet shows for children, performances, street theatre), sports and recreation, entertainment, facilities for children, language training, park games and places to play, public toilets, a trade center, animating seniors with games like chess and board games, public debates, summer outdoor cinema, outdoor libraries, reading rooms, balloon sellers, ice cream vendors, mobile painting books for children, face painting, street bazaars, cafes, open stage for theatre performances,*

street musicians, a beautiful city tavern, traditional manifestations, revival of historic crafts, shops with authentic local products, intellectual gatherings, information services, spaces for people with disabilities, free internet access. It becomes evident that many of these activities do not require huge financial investment and could be accomplished relatively easily and with involvement of local communities and use of local skills and knowledge.

Who should make decisions on city squares?

The most important issue for us trying to investigate through this question was to understand how citizens saw their own involvement in shaping the spaces of their cities. The answers revealed: percentages from Macedonia and Montenegro indicating that **citizens feel they should have more say in treatment of city squares than they do** – percentage of people who felt citizens should have an influence in deciding about city squares, was higher than the percentage of people who felt that citizens actually do influence the situation. In both cities in Albania the situation was reversed, which seems to suggest that respondents felt that some other party should influence the development of city squares more than the citizens themselves. Interestingly, the percentage of people who feel that **all of the stakeholders** (architects and urban planners, businesses, central government, community, municipality) should be involved in the decision making process ranges from 6% in Kotor to over 20% in Durrës. Another interesting observation is that the percentage of those who believed **municipalities** should be the ones to decide about city squares ranged from 14% in Skopje to 58% in Durrës. Percentage of those who believed that city squares were to be left to **architects and planners** was significantly higher in Skopje and Kotor with over 30%, and less so in Durrës with only 6%.

A shift in perceptions

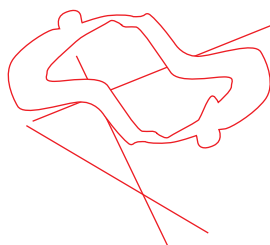
These observations resulting from the analysis of four surveys served as an indication for us that project actions would be most effective if they were to target attitudes and perceptions about the role of various stakeholders in shared urban spaces. We started with the idea that

our actions were to focus only on city squares, but concluded that issues at hand transcend the space of the square and could be well tested in areas such as parks, parking lots or even highway edges – whose unexpected “public-ness” or “majestic-ness” opened up a broad field for creative action and involvement of the public.

The analysis of attitudes and perceptions of citizens in four examined cities, a series of conversations with other architects and planners as well as a revisiting of our own perceptions of city squares, lead us to a preliminary conclusion that **the role – the function – that city squares held historically has expanded to other, additional urban spaces**. These **new places of public function** have become **significant in the life of cities**, and **city-dwellers are ready and willing to be included in shaping of those locations**. This shaping of the places that have spontaneously grown rich in public function represents one of the major challenges in designing our cities in the future.



Co-PLAN & U_POLIS - documentation of the survey in Durrës (March 2011)



PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC SPACE

REFLECTIONS – IDENTITY - PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DUALITY - PARTICIPATORY APPROACH
WORKSHOPS REGIONAL AND LOCAL, ROUND TABLES, GUIDELINES



CSD - Fair-play + Screen-play = Square Play, Regional Workshop (October 2011)



By shifting the point of view of the world, we have the power to change it, to rewrite it completely, so it is “enough” to have a new look at old images, it is “enough” even to move by one step to enjoy a new perspective, one that is neither central, nor accidental¹, but simply unexpected. A perspective that makes us marvel at what we are viewing and discovering. This **new perspective** is what we tried to achieve through **the participation in public space of all people where everybody can share experiences, problems, identities, ideas and differences**. This part of the publication offers a brief introduction with the cities of Kotor, Tirana and Skopje, various perspectives on public spaces from a theoretical lens, in the form of individual reflections, as well as an outline of the approach the project adopted in the course of its implementation.

Identity

Public spaces function as an element that links people, cultures and places. The physical setting and the visual landscape of our shared public environments creates a behaviour influence. Following you will find a concise insight into the cities of Kotor, Skopje and Tirana.

Skopje - a city of fragments

Skopje, the largest city in the Republic of Macedonia, owes its present form to the process of stratification of differentiated layers developed as a result of its urban transformations. These transformations are products of the historical and morphological processes that shaped and are still shaping the city. Discontinuous and unrelated urban concepts, planning policies and construction practices, implemented, or at least used as theoretical ground for its urban development, have eventually created the image of Skopje as “a city of fragments”, recognised as connected or disconnected city parts, more like cities-in-the city, or cities-next-to-a city. So, how to interpret and promote the cultural significance of public spaces and areas threatened by urban congestion? How to defend existing spaces and structures and explore crea-

tive approaches to preservation and revitalisation of public spaces that create the identity of our cities? How to make our cities grow and prosper?

Rather than being exclusively driven by material interest, economic growth is occurring in places that are tolerant, diverse and open to creativity, because these are the places where creative people of all types want to live. Hence, the message is that development policies need to be aware of the benefits of creating an environment in which tolerance of different lifestyles and a good quality of life for everybody living there go hand in hand

Squares in historic areas and outside

Kotor - Squares in historic areas and outside

Kotor is situated in the Boka Kotorska Bay, a part of which is inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage Site List as a cultural landscape of exceptional universal values. Kotor has an urban matrix preserved from the Middle Ages. Although this matrix was defined as early as in the 13th-14th century, it contains the layers of all the subsequent epochs interwoven into it. The urban core of Kotor is an intricate network of narrow streets and squares of irregular shapes. It is precisely this complexity and irregularity of the urban matrix that represents one of the main characteristics of Kotor.

In the area of Kotor municipality, a huge difference can be noted concerning the uses of public spaces in the city centre (Old City), the area outside the Old City and the neighbouring settlements.

Public spaces (squares and plazas) in the Old City have the most intensive use. During summer months, all the major squares are covered with furniture of coffee bars/restaurants. Thus, all free/open areas are transformed into "narrow streets" bounded by the coffee bars' terraces. From such bounded spaces, it is impossible to perceive the architecture and sights of the Old City because the view can only reach to the height of parasols. At the same time, because of such a situation, the basic role of squares is neglected – instead of places where events, gatherings and interaction between citizens and tourists take place, the squares are becoming the places where people only pass by, except for those using coffee bars/restaurants.

The autumn/winter picture of the Old City is quite the opposite: all the squares become open spaces again, freed off the coffee bars' furniture, but, at the same time, they become spaces without any activity. With the exception of few traditional events, during the winter period, the city, according to its inhabitants, "reflects monotony and boredom".

Outside the Old City, even in the contact zone, the situation is considerably different from that in the city centre. Public spaces there are unused, quite often neglected, and therefore unattractive for both the residents and visitors. A similar situation exists in the coastal area, as well as in the upper parts of settlements, usually situated on the mountainsides, characterized by a beautiful view of the Bay. With some inspirational ideas and the involvement of different stakeholders, it would be possible to activate some of these spaces and thus improve the quality of life of the local residents and tourists visiting the towns and settlements in the municipality of Kotor.

Tirana – the [in]formal city.

The fall of the communist regime in 1991, marked Albania's shift in focus towards a European path. The opening of the borders was suddenly seen as an exit into that world, which until then was confined to the radio aerials that used to cast images in secret, and saw thousands of Albanians flow on the other bank of the Adriatic Sea, Italy. Italy was indeed always the main point of reference of this State (thing that is clear if one looks at the fact that at least 90% of Albanians speak or at least understand Italian language). Migration to Italy was not the only movement started in those years, as Tirana constituted an important destination for Albanians, who considered the capital a possible solution to their problems of survival. From cities and countryside a great mass of people flowed in the small capital, which did not have the adequate structures to welcome such masses. The shock caused by the new upcoming democratic process and by the amount of information arriving within the borders of the small country in the south of Balkans, resulted in producing confusion in individuals that did not know how to deal with this new committing word, namely "democracy".

The euphoria of freedom turned into anarchy. There was no longer a strong government that could lead the way. The clearest aspect of the rapid and violent change is the architecture of the capital. It actually started a wild urbanisation, made of crumbling huts, a kind of metaphor of the willing to being nomad and of the fragility of the new status. The huts in the city were everywhere: On the banks of the Lana river, which cuts Tirana into two parts, buildings and shops were built. This resulted in a thread of connections difficult to disentangle between the two banks. The park was yet another huge conglomeration. The huts were also along the pavements, forcing the people to walk in the middle of the roads, a habit that to date is difficult to take away.

In 1999 Edi Rama, an artist and professor in the Academy of Arts, was elected mayor of Tirana, having previously held the post of the Minister of Culture. In no time, the mayor started to demolish the illegal buildings of the city, starting exactly from the huts. In his capacity of mayor, Rama used his artistic genius to mask the tired building façades in Tirana, through paintings and bright colours. This phenomenon triggered a trend in the use of colour and shapes, which is now followed by different builders and which has been the reason of a great attention over Tirana, not only from an artistic point of view. During the second edition of the Biennale of Tirana, some artists developed a project aiming at colouring some of the buildings of the city, which contributed to a change of its socio-political image at an international level.

The urbanization continued to develop chaotically; new buildings constructed in a very short time find themselves almost competing for height and colour. Owing to this new development, the whole city is divided between the centre and suburbs, that even when really close, are difficult to access. In these areas, soon to be incorporated in the urban circuit, new houses have been built, thanks to the migrant remittances. An with these new houses being constructed, a new phenomenon of wish for belonging or identity developed, reflected through owners hoisting on the roofs of their houses, the Albanian flag and the flag of the State where members of the family had migrated.

From the suburbs of the cities, the race to construct buildings with the most kitsch and col-

oured architecture, did not include investing in physical infrastructure, which in the majority of cases was inexistent or insufficient to accommodate the increasing needs.

In the middle of Tirana there is the so-called “blloku” (the block), the core of the regime power, which during the communist regime was completely isolated and closed to ordinary citizen access. This part of the city, that people keep calling the Bllok, soon turned into the most outwardly exposed part of the city to embrace the foreign elements. As a result, it became home to most of the trendiest bars, and most youths as well as tourists. Yet, despite its openness to recreational alternative, to a certain extent, this area keeps still to date the characteristic of a place where important decisions are taken, as a good number of international organisations are located there. In addition, in line with the new Albanian way of life, many business related discussions seem to happen in the bllok.

In this chaotic context, culture and visual art development made no exception, leading to a hectic development. Nevertheless, if art professionals together with architects, urban planners, intellectuals, local stakeholders, and decision makers will work together, it will be possible to develop new city squares much more close to people’s needs and expectations.

1 According to the Renaissance concept of a picture plane perpendicular to one axis of a Cartesian scene.



Images from the cities involved in the project

Reflections

Urban Notes – by Divna Penčić

Squares (public spaces) are undoubtedly the main element that unites urban formal and informal actions of many citizens, and are the main generators of city life, affecting social, economic and environmental processes of the city. Historically, they are indivisible from the city, as all major events that deserve to be remembered have taken (and are still taking) place at the squares. The squares are the most impressive and most likable spaces of cities, as visiting any city cannot be envisioned as complete without having visited its main square.

However, for citizens, and even more so for the development of healthy and democratic civic life, the concept of city squares extends beyond the well known squares, to include all neighbourhoods, blocks and all other small local public spaces, which is where citizens spend part of their time and interact with others.

Preservation of open city spaces and the quest for new ones are among the key tasks of today's urban living. Ideas for use of public spaces (squares) as generators of renewal, healing and revival of cities are challenges of the 21st century that will undoubtedly provide answers to many questions such as: Why is public space is important?; Who is responsible for public spaces?; How to assess the quality of public spaces?; and finally: How to create great public spaces tailored for and by the people?

The concern to understand the meaning of the squares is not only in defining their spaciousness and the elements that outline them (buildings and streets), but also in understanding the term "urban public space." The use of this term is more suitable because of the need to recognise various urban spaces that meet citizens' needs for public space, where they can freely move, stay, communicate, and act.

As pointed out by the Lennards (Public Life in Urban Spaces, 1984): "a public space ... is at once both stage and theatre, for in public the spectators may at any moment choose to become actors themselves. Successful public places accentuate the dramatic qualities of personal and family life. They make visible certain tragic, comic and tender aspects of relationships among friends, neighbours, relatives or lovers".

Public and Private duality

The relationship between public and private is one of the key concerns of the modern society, especially the way it is manifested in the urban space with its social, cultural and emotional significance.

In the city space duality between the public and the private, the public is often under threat to be controlled, taken and hedged, which is in a direct contradiction to the concept of urban life and civil society. The pressure by the neo-liberal bulldozers for cancellation of that "for all" urban space is even bigger. Public space, in transition countries generally unrecognised as amenity and as main achievement of civilisation, is considered to be a space that belongs to those in power or authority. The public interest is eroded by the economic interest of the government to increase income by capitalisation of the public space.

A Quest for Public Space - by Divna Penčić & Jasna Stefanovska & Biljana Spirkoska

Skopje, like many of the cities in the neighbouring countries, underwent major societal changes over the past century, a period in which its population grew more than tenfold, and as a result the city was transformed by a diverse set of dynamics.

Skopje, today a capital of a newly independent country (The Republic of Macedonia) with an estimated population of over 600,000 inhabitants over the past twenty years, has been undergoing processes of radical transformations that were not only of a societal, political and economic nature, but also of a spatial nature, inevitably affecting the planning system and further influencing the city's built environment.

The last twenty years of Skopje's development are marked with a long and painful transition, a process through which the city is adjusting to the new complexities. The crisis, in which the city is trapped, has led to the deterioration of the quality of the built environment and the creation of fertile ground for speculative developments. While at the same time being clear that planning is no longer able to operate as an instrument of control and development primarily protecting the public interests. Through these speculative developments beating

primarily with the pulse of the capital, a fragmentation of the tissue of the city was inevitable, the public space was ignored and the position of the planner was undermined.

The processes of urban change and restructuring in the case of the city of Skopje had a different dynamics and pace; as a result of such processes, the public spaces and public life in the city of Skopje are slowly disappearing. The new propositions resemble more to leftover spaces designed to connect, rather than spaces that provoke interaction. Such spaces do not contribute or enhance the city's qualities; they are empty and unarticulated spaces emerging in the in-between realm producing permanent strangeness calling for an immediate rethinking and action.

Stefano Boeri refers to such a space as a 'nameless' space that is "without a sufficient number of distinguishing features", Ignasi de Sola Morales uses the term *terrain vague*, Roger Trancik uses *lost space*, and Skopje seems to have plenty of them.

Re-thinking the public spaces in the city of Skopje means to re-consider a realm that is present and its reconsiderations should emphasize their potentials, but also define the totality of the city. Public spaces should be considered as an essential feature for the image of the city representing key places where the manifestation of the integration of the city is commenced. Improving the conditions of the public spaces in Skopje will mean improvement of the living conditions in the city. The public spaces in Skopje are therefore an intelligible realm for shaping the capital, and in the case of Skopje, it is a realm that is waiting to be rediscovered and reactivated.

A well researched participatory approach

Mapping of public spaces in Kotor

City squares, like all other public spaces, make for important resources of an area. They are, at the same time, cultural, social and economic resources. As an important step in the process of their activation city squares should first be identified, recognized and mapped.

“Mapping the town’s cultural resources focuses the attention on the wider elements, dimensions and possibilities of acting in the cultural field. Mapping is, at the same time, a process of identification, systematisation, registration and possible re/utilisation or vitalisation of cultural assets.... Mapping should pay attention to the urban space as a resource.... The ultimate goal of mapping is to change cultural life and practice into such a direction to ensure common and broad utilisation, and the enjoyment and celebration of cultural diversity and richness, concentrated in the city and in the surrounding urban area.”

(“Guide to Citizen Participation in Local Cultural Policy Development for European Cities”, Jordi Pascual i Ruiz, Sanjin Dragojević)

The project “Revival of City Squares in Balkan Cities” included the mapping of city squares and other public spaces primarily in the Old City of Kotor, which was a pilot area. However, the mapping extended in order to include public spaces in a wider area of the Boka Kotorska Bay.

The mapping of squares and other public areas in the Old City of Kotor was done based on the following: identification of squares in available historical sources (books, old maps, plans), architectural and urban analysis in the field and inputs provided by the citizens by means of questionnaires. During the mapping process, the following spaces were identified: spaces already identified and named as squares, other recognized squares and other public areas. All the squares already identified as such and all the newly recognized squares were analyzed based on the topics defined in advance. This resulted in creating a database of squares.

Public spaces and cultural development in Kotor

As previously mentioned, in addition to mapping the squares in the Old City, the project included the mapping of public spaces in a wider area of Boka Kotorska Bay. This mapping was conducted in the territories of Municipalities of Kotor, Tivat and Herceg Novi, as a part of the project SOSTENUTO - Culture as a Factor of Economic and Social Innovation. In 2011 Expeditio coordinated the process of creation of Local programs for the development of culture for the Municipalities of Kotor, Tivat and Herceg Novi for the period 2012-2016. In this process, Expeditio was a partner to the local governments of the said municipalities. Believing that public spaces are indispensable topic when the cultural development of cities and places is concerned Expeditio decided to create, through a mapping process, a database of information necessary for the further activities aimed at activating and better using of public spaces in Boka Kotorska.

Through the mapping process, we tried to recognize different sites that already are or can be used as public spaces or can contribute to improving the life of concerned towns and places. The public spaces have been mapped according to their use, accessibility, physical characteristics, available information about them and facilities/equipment present in them. The mapping involved the identification of public spaces that are used on a daily basis and have facilities encouraging people to spend more time in them, as well as those that are currently not used or are used in an inadequate way despite their obvious potential to be public spaces. Under public spaces, we implied squares, open spaces in front of churches and public buildings, parks, playgrounds, etc.

The analyzed material, map and database of public spaces have been posted on the website www.strategija.bokabay.info, and they were also used in order to prepare a catalogue of selected public spaces. A number of 175 identified public spaces give evidence that Boka Kotorska has a great potential when public spaces are concerned. It also implies that this potential could be used in a more imaginative way.

Identification of stakeholders dealing with planning, usage and management of squares and public spaces – the case of Kotor

The first step in a participatory process is to identify stakeholders. It is necessary to identify all those who influence or are in any way related to planning, shaping, usage or management of city squares and public spaces. Forming of a Database of stakeholders dealing with planning, usage and management of squares and public spaces can be very useful for all the further activities in this area. The database should be regularly updated and available to all.

For the pilot area of Kotor the key stakeholders were identified within the following categories: Municipality of Kotor – municipal departments, Institutions (local, regional, state), Non-Institutional stakeholders, Business sector and Religious institutions. A total number of 52 key stakeholders were identified and entered into the Database of stakeholders dealing with planning, usage and management of squares and public spaces of Kotor, including also contacts persons for each institution/organization.

Four cities – one participatory approach

The term “participation” refers to an organised process by which the public communicates its needs and values to influence institutionalised power. The aim is mainly related to influencing those whose decisions affect large numbers of people, ensuring accountability from public officials.

Public spaces in general and city squares in particular, are by nature participatory sites. People perceive a place through feelings and human actions, attaching values and identity that distinguish that particular place from others. With this in mind, the survey questions aimed at gauging public interest in the form and meaning of public spaces / city squares, through questions such as: How do public spaces / city squares support public culture and outdoor life? How does public space affect people’s overall experience and satisfaction of living in towns and cities? What role do public spaces / squares play in lives of the city dwellers? How

can public spaces / city squares be best designed and managed to satisfy human needs and expectations?

Because 'Revival of City Squares in Balkan Cities' promotes participation of citizens as active stakeholders and not just passive spectators or users, great attention was paid to the vox populi segment, the survey. The latter aimed to "check the pulse" of citizens of Skopje on their perceptions and preferences / aspirations regarding the city squares, showed several very interesting aspects:

- People's perception of what the squares are: it is somewhat different from the traditional definition of what the square is (place for gathering, resting, events, orientation point, place for meetings and socialising; peaceful meeting place for rest, recreation and walking, wide, open space, public space, distinguished space)

- Which quality matters the most: the need for "(human) interaction and atmosphere that gives a special mark to the place" were readable in almost all answers

- Who does and who should have influence on how city squares / public spaces look like: citizens feel excluded from the process of designing public spaces, as "local authorities, as the sole designers of the public space do not involve planners (architects, city planners, professionals, educated architects and city planners who do not listen to (obey the orders from) the government, artists and all competent persons) and citizens (citizens, those who live around and use it; the citizens of course, according to their needs, they should decide, it belongs to them; all those potential users no matter what part of city they come from; the people (citizens) through surveys like this) "
(in general)

Although the same questionnaire was used for the research in four cities (Kotor, Skopje, Tirana, and Durrës), during its distribution it was necessary to consider the specific features of each area and based on that organize a context-specific distribution. Having in mind specific features of the Kotor local community, and the fact that there are many people who do not live in Kotor but love the city, are attached to it and visit it from time to time, the questionnaire about Kotor city squares was distributed in two ways. An on-line application was cre-

ated and posted on Expeditio website, together with information about the research. This enabled all those attached to Kotor squares to complete the questionnaire on-line. In parallel, the questionnaire was distributed directly in the streets of the Old City of Kotor. Considering that Kotor is a relatively small town, with a well-connected local community, a number of questionnaires were left to the owners of various businesses (shops, coffee bars, beauty shops) in the Old City who filled them themselves and distributed them to their customers, which proved to be a very good way to ensure a high outreach through to the local community. Exchange of ideas how public spaces / city squares can be transformed into pulsating community places that meet citizens' needs is critical for fostering new perspective and awareness about the idea of "city culture" (the way people think about public spaces, how they conceive and how they use them).

Images from the surveys and activities realised during the project



Building the future- educating new generations

A good education has always been the base of the development of a society, but this need and the integration of the pragmatical needs of the society with the academic research and education becomes even more necessary in the Balkan context. During this projects this approach became a reality due to the collaboration with POLIS University in Tirana.

“Urban Design Studio at POLIS University, Tirana”

The course was developed in accordance with the general idea of the RCSBC project. The course was held during the 2010-2011 academic year at POLIS University in Tirana and leaded from the Professors Besnik Aliaj and Sotir Dhamo.

The aim of the course was to develop urban design projects and practical tools of interventions in the contemporary Balkan cities. Tirana and Durrës were chosen as the areas where to focus the design interventions.

The work started by participating in the initial surveys of the RCSBC project which gave a strong input in a better definition of the term “square” and understanding how the perception of the square did not necessarily have all the features of a conventional meaning and how strongly related to the context. For this reason the work of the course was focused on more than 30 sites which showed “square-like” potentials in the two cities.

For each of these spaces an urban design project has been developed with the approach that the potentials are already in place, but through a good urban design the inhabitants could receive the best from their neighborhood.

Along with a good urban design, the second key element that would revive the squares is the human activity and interaction. In order to promote such interaction, more than 30 artistic performances were proposed, each dealing with one key element that would enhance the interaction of the inhabitants with their physical space. Six of these actions were actually performed attracting the attention of the public to the real social issues of our contemporary cities and pointing out the potentials hidden in the underused “squares”.



Images from the work and design projects of the Urban Design Course at U_POLIS

Creative workshops - sharing new ideas

Creative workshops, organised in each of the three counties, Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro reflected the regional dimension, and stimulated sharing of fresh ideas, so essential for this process.

“Suburban Exchange” (July 2011), which was moderated by Ivan Kucina and POLIS University staff, in Tirana, was used to analyse the suburban disintegration as a result of the imperatives of the speculative urban development, which is orientated toward maximizing individual profit and abandoning common interest. As a consequence, suburban space becomes collection of fragmentized, non-related, self determined constructions that appear everywhere along the infrastructure corridors, at any levels, shapes and scales, encompassing the major territories of the contemporary city.

“Old Town City Squares” was developed by its moderator, Dr. Ružica Božović Stamenović, and coordinators from EXPEDITIO. This regional workshop was held in Kotor during the period August–September 2011, focused on a network of squares and other open public spaces in the Old City Kotor, their planning, use and management. The 26 participants in the workshop were mainly architecture students and young professionals from almost all Western Balkans countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia). After acquainting the participants with the location and the survey results, and based on their personal impressions, the key topics of the workshop were defined, and they included: Reading the Space, FUNction, Connections, Walkscape and The Poetics of Space. During the workshop, the students held several performances in the Old City in order to examine how the citizens and tourists understand and respond to their ideas. At the final presentation, open to the public, the students presented their ideas and possible guidelines for the improvement of Kotor city squares and their life, sharing them with the local representatives.

“Fair – play + Screen-play = Square-play”: The same approach was used in the implementation of the Regional Workshop held in Skopje, in October 2011 (Fair-play + Screenplay = Square-play) hosting 56 young people from the three countries: Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro. The location where the workshop was held (the plateau in front of department store "MOST") was deliberately chosen as it bridges the center with the old part of Skopje – the Old Bazaar. Starting from the main idea of the project, to promote citizens as active participants in developing public spaces into vital community places, the aim of the workshop was to encourage regional exchange of ideas regarding the discourse on city squares / public spaces and how they can be altered into vibrant places that meet community cultural, social and economic needs. The workshop managed to provoke young people (architects, artists, sociologists) to voice their ideas, aspirations and solutions for open public spaces and city squares and to inspire them to consider potentials in taking an active role in future development of urban and cultural policies, both locally and on a wider regional level.

Images from the three Regional Workshops (July, August/ September, October 2011)



Engaging key stakeholders – roundtables and focus group discussions

Current practices and challenges – the case of Skopje

One-to-one communication and round table discussions with representatives from the local governments in Skopje were part of the strategy to introduce different and more inclusive approach in dealing with public space developing strategies. The forum, held on 8th June 2012 in Skopje, served to present the approach of the project and the Skopje survey findings, as well as to share and exchange information on the practices and challenges faced by the local governments in the process of planning and shaping of the squares and public spaces in the city.

The round table discussions gave insights to several aspects related to the current practices, but most importantly, to challenges that local governments are facing with regards to planning and transformation of city squares and public spaces. Whilst space under urbanisation pressure within a municipality might be an issue, what is more challenging is the bordering area between municipalities in Skopje. The latter are viewed more as dividers, rather than spaces with potential to connect, as municipalities do not consider making urban plans for the border areas together. Although border areas should not be divided and should be perceived as a unique space to be regulated by all concerned municipalities, each municipality regulates and is concentrated only on the space in their territory. Practice has shown that public space makes it on a local agenda if there is a need, which could be challenging when it comes to reflecting it in the local budget.

If the municipality wants to make a square, then they have to make amendments or enact a new Detailed Urban Plan (DUP). For small neighbourhood gathering places it is easier for their revival as such actions do not always need amending or a new DUP. Here it is important to emphasise the problem of people alienation that becomes ever more evident, especially in urban areas.

>>Earlier, in the villages people communicated with their neighbours when going to fetch water from the common well. Nowadays, we fetch out water from water taps, so this custom

is abandoned and people are more alienated ... <<

This means that municipalities need to consider creation of “modern wells” - public places that will stimulate socialisation of people.

Engaging key stakeholders - the case of Kotor

In order to involve the citizens and stakeholders in the process of use and management of squares and public spaces it was necessary to first find out: how they perceived the city squares; in what ways and how often they used them; what problems they perceived; what they proposed in order to improve the situation; and how they saw their role in that process. Starting from this, in addition to involving the citizens through research, it was important to involve the key stakeholders individually. For the Kotor pilot area it was done by means of: individual meetings, round table intended for all stakeholders and focus groups intended for the key stakeholders.

Individual meetings were held with representatives of the Local Government and state institutions having a special role in the planning aspect related to city squares.

In order to involve all the stakeholders, EXPEDITIO organized the round table “City Squares and Open Public Spaces of Kotor”. The aim of the round table was to discuss the key issues, problems and possible solutions related to the planning, use and management of squares and other open public spaces in Kotor, especially in the Old City. Following the process of stakeholder identification, all the relevant stakeholders to have a direct influence of the planning, use and management of squares and open public spaces, were invited to participate at the round table. The event was attended by 25 participants representing various sectors, institutions and organizations. The discussion touched on various topics crucial for the use and management of city squares, and the participants agreed that some of these should be further elaborated during the next phase.

- Normative and institutional framework /procedures (legislative framework, plans, studies, strategies, bodies; roles and responsibilities; clearly defined procedures; transpar-

ency/visibility, implementation of the Urban Project)

- Contents/facilities/uses (procedures and criteria; implementation of the Urban Project; users / use by different target groups: local residents, tourists, children, old persons ...; the dynamics of use: summer / the rest of the year; multifunctionality)
- Management (who performs management? Are all stakeholders involved?; In what ways? (mechanisms, procedures; incentives; safety)
- Appearance/Atmosphere (elements; the Old City Planning Study; availability)

In order to discuss in detail some key issues identified during the round table additional focus groups were organized, intended for representatives of different sectors (state, business and civil sectors). It was important to consider from different stakeholders' points of view the key issues related to the use and management of public spaces.

Assisted by a moderator three focus discussing different issues related to city squares and open public spaces in Kotor were organized:

- 1st focus group – intended for representatives of the Local Government and public institutions
- 2nd focus group – intended for the business sector representatives
- 3rd focus group – intended for the civil society/NGO sector representatives.

The focus groups were attended by 21 representatives of the public, business and civil sectors. The results of discussions during the round table and focus groups were analyzed and prepared as a report with recommendations for the planning, use and management of squares and public spaces.

Public Artworks, Public Speaking in Tirana

During the First Round Table “Public Artworks, Public Speaking” held in Tirana on May 2nd, 2012, the Italian curator Claudia Zanfi shared her experience on how to deal with art in public space, and its utility in order to transform city squares into vibrant communities.

A short reflection on Public Space / Public Sphere in the Balkan cities – by Claudia Zanfi

The existential ‘function’ of the act of creation leads to the affirmation and the creation of a territory, a group, a singularity, a meaning. But it is only possible to articulate the meaning of a situation in relation to an action undertaken to transform it. To situate oneself somewhere, to create a territory or new modes of subjectification and articulation, is both a political and an existential question, and it concerns social practices as much as artistic ones. (Maurizio Lazzarato: Art and Work)

The public space is open to many different influences, as some actors might have a strong interest, whilst others have no chance to make their opinions heard, to play an active part in the shaping of their community and of their urban surroundings. Over the last 10 years, we have witnessed the strengthening of artistic practices in public spaces (through the reworking of concepts that first came to light in the 1970s), such as actions in a highly specific social, relational or community context. Yet in this sense, public art may now be understood no longer as art in public spaces, but as art for the public sphere.

Arcipelgo Balkani, a project by aMAZElab, ‘navigated’ along the various trajectories of contemporary thinking with regard to mobility and territory. Zygmunt Bauman states that “the ‘fortress continent’ (Europe) is closed off inside itself; it is growing old, yet it remains a mobile continent”. Public space is made for being crossed; the EuroMediterraneo pact brings together a range of different civilisations, for this is the only area in the world, which has always shared a space with so many languages, cultures and diversities. Here we can find the route between Trieste-Istanbul, a mix of peoples, languages, cultures East of the port of Venice. Peter Sloterdijk, maintains that “the border is the limit between knowing and not knowing, in which the frontiers of knowledge must be open and accessible”.

According to Slavoj Žižek it is important to be able to “change bearings, points of view. This is a solution to contemporary problems: if a question cannot be answered, it should be re-formulated”. Lastly, Alain Touraine, one of the most prestigious contemporary sociologists, states that three fundamental positions may be identified today: “the studies on the working conscience, reflections on new social movements, and research into a subject”. The subject may be legitimated only by defining individuality, defining rights, not exclusively social or political but also cultural. In order to “start over” in contemporary society, we need to think in terms of a “community of mutual respect”, says Touraine, in which the capacity for individual action interfaces with a multicultural community through cognitive and affective relationships. Increasingly, the themes underpinning social reconstruction will no longer be bound up with political or economic power, but with culture.

Let’s take the concept of ‘Social Sculpture’ conceived by Joseph Beuys to refer to creative acts that would engage with the community and affect the world around them. The concept of ‘social sculpture’ helps ideas to keep ecology, sustainable development, archetypal studies, imagination and intuition as legitimate modes of apprehension and thought.

Finally, to re-think a Public Art program, is not only to create a display for ‘outdoor’ installations, but to move - for example - to public places of mobility (stations) and culture (public libraries). Also, it is to open a debate connected with urgent subjects such as sustainability for territories and communities, for democratic process, transformative art practice and an ecological social development.

General recommendation from the round tables and one-to-one meetings with the local government representatives can be summarised as a suggestion to amend legislation related to spatial planning: first to detect public spaces, and then to design urban plans. It was recognised by all participants that it is necessary to strengthen the process of citizen participation in the process of urban planning.

Me-Us-ALL OF US – the case of Skopje

The city is an experience in itself. What are the physical aspects of Space? What is Personal and what is Public Space? What is the role of the Local Squares? What types of neighbourhoods we have? What is the vision for “My perfect neighbourhood”?

Me-Us-All of Us was introduced to promote the idea of public spaces to high school students and encourage their creative spirit and understanding of different aspects of the built and natural environment. The aim was to provide opportunity so they could examine the elements that make up their experience of the spaces that surround and define them.

“Me” is related to their personal space where they have the most creative freedom.

“Us” is related to the spaces they share with their family (Key question: what is a home and how do we share space?)

“All of Us” is related to the relationship between the public spaces and the people who share them.

Looking at their own local areas and comparing them with other community models, 48 participants (students and teachers together!) from 16 high schools from Skopje were put in a role to investigate and then to create a model of their “perfect neighbourhood and a local square”. They were encouraged to think about people’s relationship with natural resources and habitats, and how the future cities might be planned, tailored by and for people.

Starting from December 26, 2012, the exhibition of the works will “travel” in all high schools in Skopje. What we are hoping for is to inspire other high-school students to think creatively about the city, the public spaces and the people (all-of-us!), who use them and share them.

Place-making in Skopje

In order to ensure the continuation of an open-dialogue process between the local governments and citizens, a workshop with representatives from the municipalities in Skopje and citizens and students was held on June 29, 2012. The intention was to “merge” local government representatives with the citizens in an effort to find the best and most efficient way how to reach a “win-win” situation in which both (conditionally opposing) sides would be

satisfied. The workshop was structured in three parts: introductory part followed by outdoor activities, and presentation of the results. Following the introductory presentation about what Placemaking is, the concept of “11 principles of Placemaking”, and the “Power of 10”, participants went out to the site - the Fountain Square in Karposh 3. Implementing the “11 principles of Placemaking” and the “Power of 10”, the participants, divided into two working groups, were asked to draw their vision for the site.

Finally, the groups presented their views and ideas about the location: what it was offering to its current users, but also what could be done there and with it. The workshop participants were local government representatives from 5 municipalities and the City of Skopje, in the role of “virtual municipality” that intended to “deal” with that specific square, and citizens and students of architecture, in the role of both citizens and future designers and planners of urban public spaces and squares.

It is worth mentioning that some of the ideas and visions of the participants were incorporated in the final design for renovation of the square in Karposh 3.

Moving Round Table in Tirana

During the Second Round Table, the “Moving Round Table” held in Tirana on June 28, 2012, we went to the city square in the centre of Tirana inviting people to sit on some stools and join the discussion. The round table was moderated by an Albanian journalist, Valbona Sulçe Kolgeci and through the intervention of some professionals, a sociologist, an architect, an artist and a urban planner, we discussed on how to turn city squares into vibrant places to stimulate people socialisation.

During the discussion we collected also people comments and needs on that specific square. The suggestions were given to Tirana Municipality to help the reflection on city squares transformation.



Round Tables in Tirana, Kotor and Skopje

Guidelines and inputs for policy changes

In order to assist the key stakeholders at a local level, who influence the planning and management of city squares and public spaces, based on the project activities and findings we have produced a set of guidelines in local language. Overall, the guidelines are intended to give a broad overview of possible approaches to enhancing the city squares in Balkan cities, bringing experiences from both the region and other parts of the world. The guidelines contain a selection of translated texts we think can be especially useful when considering the future square enhancing actions in Balkan cities. Although primarily intended for professionals in the field of spatial planning and design employed in the state institutions and local governments, the guidelines can serve as a source of inspiration for all citizens who want to use their city squares to a greater extent and in a better way.

During the project implementation, valuable material was collected in all four cities. Believing that this material should be further used and available, the study and recommendations will be distributed to decision-makers, relevant state institutions, and the Local Government. They will be prepared so that they can serve as the basis for strategic plans, spatial and urban plans, and other strategic and planning documents.

Platform for the Revival of City Squares in Balkan cities

Participative approaches and partnerships were instrumental to the project, hence a database of organizations and actors dealing with issues related to public spaces in the Balkan/ South-Eastern Europe. The database aims to present, in one place, various organizations and actors dealing with issues related to public spaces in the Balkan/ SEE region. The database can be viewed at www.public-spaces.expedition.org. There are numerous projects and initiatives all around the Balkan/ SEE region treating issues in this field. Different civil society organizations and other actors give considerable contribution to addressing public spaces issues. We hope that in this way, by involving all actors, we contribute to creating a valuable database/ platform for the Revival of City Squares in Balkan cities.

Conclusion - End of the Beginning

Through this two-years initiative and our work with a wide variety of stakeholders, it becomes evident, that the revival of city squares and public spaces in the Balkan cities is closely connected to actions that engage directly with communities and can collaboratively begin to reconnect cultures and convey messages for creative place-making.

In addition to this, many of the grassroots initiatives, such as this one, seek to establish relationships with and between all interested parties in the process.

We believe that there are ways and means of establishing partnerships that will advance working with the community at large (that is, with a wide range of stakeholders) to ensure that every project fits with the needs of those that will ultimately be benefiting from it. What does this mean? To us, it means, quite simply, first, to introduce new approach to policy makers and show that our projects aren't "pie-in-the sky" ideas – but are practical, based on the needs of citizens, sustainable, in some cases essential, for the growth of the city, as well as, in a way, to demonstrate that this inevitable growth is to be managed in such manner that citizens' requirements and their quality of life are duly incorporated.

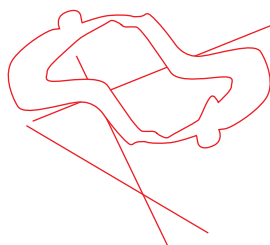
Of course, it takes a collective effort to move conceptual ideas into the more refined process of public policy development, and then from policy to land the ideas back in the "real world." So, should we question and challenge existing systems and perceived norms; and find ways to do things differently? Do professionals have the ability to conceive new tendencies and communicate these discourses through their practice?

What citizens (organised through community groups and NGOs), professionals and designers, as well as governments (both local and national) must now focus on, is how to inspire recognitions of the contributory values that will be so integral to our much needed shift in understanding how to transform city squares and public spaces into places that foster better quality of community life.





CSD - Regional workshop in Skopje - Fair-play + Screen-play = Square Play (October 2011)



ACTION IN PUBLIC SPACE

ACTIONS, ACTIVE PART OF THE WORKSHOPS (REGIONAL AND LOCALS)
THE PYTHAGORAS' (UN)COSTANT EXHIBITION



LEGEND

RW

Regional Workshop

LW

Local Workshop

AC

Action

FE

Final Exhibition

FC

Final Conference

Co-PLAN & U_POLIS - Armando Lulaj Never City, Local Workshop in Tirana (April 2011)



*“Landscape” means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.
(European Landscape Convention, official English language version of the Council of Europe, Chap. I, Art.I)*

Shifting the perspective on public space and city squares, enabled us during the 2-year course of the project implementation to take actions, provoke re-actions, change the views and range of what people consider a public space, widening the possibilities of interacting with it and transforming it into a new place to be explored. This part will focus on the various forms of action undertaken in all four cities, part of the project.

Armando Lulaj - Never City workshop
(Tirana, April 2012)

LW



The workshop, which was held in Tirana together with POLIS University in April 2012, built on the following theories and philosophical perspectives.

Nowadays, the so-called “virtual time” when the rights of information and the obligations of citizenship are exercised, the essence of public space itself is comprehensive and summarizes in any collective physical space. In political theory, sociology and philosophy stands to Arendt, Habermas and Bauman common knitting over public space where citizens gathered and discussed the fate of the city using argumentation and dialogue.

In “Vita Activa: The Human Condition”, Hannah Arendt links the public space dimension to the meaning of collective political action or active life, where political obligation of participation is the essence of freedom of expression.

Jürgen Habermas in his work “Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns” speaks about public sphere and for the democratization of active action and public opinion – in other words the parliament of everybody – by using the logic of the appropriation of public areas controlled by the authorities transformed them into a critical field against state power.

Bauman in “Liquid Modernity” describes a closed world surrounded by barbed wire surveillance and cameras with an intense control over neighbor. Bauman argues a world controlled by popular magazine and investigative journalist, conspiracies and ghosts that inhabit public space, which return to a leit-motiv for the explosions of phobia, fear and anger.







Armando Lulaj - Never City workshop in Tirana - Milk and Water (April 2012)

The Power of 10 (Skopje, 29.06.2012)

LW

The Power of 10 is a concept Project Public Space (PPS) uses to start off a Placemaking process. The idea is that it's not enough to have just one great place in a neighbourhood – you need a number of them to create a truly lively city or town. A great place needs to have at least 10 things to do in it or 10 reasons to be there. Most of the uses and ideas have to come from the people who would use the space and hopefully be somewhat unique to that place. Wishing to test this tool, we asked representatives from 10 municipalities of Skopje and a group of students and citizens to “feel the place” (the local square in Karposh 3) and ask the residents who live around, to think about the place, its quality at present and how to make it more eye-catching and meaningful to meet the needs of their community. Some of these ideas were incorporated in the design of the new local square in Karposh 3 that was formally opened on 3rd November, 2012.





Regional Workshop: “Kotor City Squares” - 1° topic: Reading Space (Kotor, August - September 2011)

RW



While walking through the Old City of Kotor, it is impossible to miss squares packed with people having their rest sitting in a shaded café or restaurant. The tables and shade provided for café users intensely occupy the public space leaving narrow communication lanes to others. In this awkward situation public space serves well those who look for leisure while excluding those who can't or won't afford it. For them, the city square becomes a merely frustrating experience filled with visual and physical obstacles.

On the other hand there are a number of smaller, unnoticed and neglected squares, with unexplored great potential to evolve into a real vivid public space. One of them is the Prison Square, along one of the most important streets of Kotor- Craftsmen Street. The main objective of our action was to raise awareness of real public-ness and bring attention to this interesting space

During our first tour through the city of Kotor we felt like we were walking from one square to another in a fast forward mode. We questioned ourselves what differentiates these squares from one another? Well, from the perspective of the cruising tourists, nothing! With this in mind, we came to the idea: to make the square a place to stay, not only to pass through.





CSD - The Power of 10 (June 2012)



Regional Workshop: “Kotor City Squares” - 2° topic: FUNction
(Kotor, August - September 2011)



In Kotor, a few squares are named after the function they used to have in the past. We decided to “rediscover” the function of the squares, while using the “old” one as a general concept.

One of the squares is called “Flour Square”. Flour is a powder, a fluid, a cookie. It is white and basic. It’s changeable! We organized a small performance to find out what makes people stay and remember the place as the Flour square. We used flour and pastry as mediator - dwellers were free to touch, try, smell, feel and play with[IN] the space in order to remember the place!



Regional Workshop: "Kotor City Squares" - 3° topic: CONNECTIONS (Kotor, August - September 2011)

RW

Kotor is a city well kept within its walls. Narrow streets, compact houses and irregularly shaped squares come all together creating its urban matrix. However, on the other side of the walls it's an entirely different sight. During our city tours, we noticed that the three gates only serve as boundaries for the two distinct parts of the city, the one that lies within the walls, and the other one, outside. The two parts are actually very different and not just opposed to each other but disconnected. Acknowledging this (dis)connection between the two parts of the city, we made our task to work on strengthening it.

We decided to organize a test project performance, at Osanna's Square, considering it as our sample. Our goal was to try to have people's attention and make them come to this particular point. During the day people were informed that in the evening there would be an open cinema at Osanna's Square, by posters displayed in various points in the other squares and some streets, and also arrows pointing to the square.



Regional Workshop: "Kotor City Squares" - 4° topic: WALKSCAPE (Kotor, August - September 2011)

RW

Kotor should emphasize more its beauty. Different parts of the city should be identified as distinct linear walk-scapes. That is why we identified this particular path connecting the sea with fresh water and steep hillsides. We wonder if somehow this path could slow down people that are rushing to places; make them stop and stay in one spot; interact among themselves and with locals, as well as with the town itself; look and discover more; notice details; discover more sights and stories; just enjoy more.

In historic times there was a custom of leaving weapons before entering the city. Since we noticed no substantial interaction between locals and visitors, we are suggesting here a new custom: leaving something very personal while entering the town. Certain spots for exchanging gifts and thoughts between tourists and inhabitants could be provided.

Therefore, we proposed to make an exhibition to show this relationship, by displaying personal belongings gathered from visitors and inhabitants and hanging them on the walls, like a drying laundry, as the manifestation of everyday life. It is a usual thing for locals and like a decoration for tourists. Let them all be a part of it.

Kotor has always inspired people and it might continue to do so by building coordinated and unique walk-scapes. Living experiential exhibitions of commonness. The ones built by both visitors and locals, belonging to both too.



Regional Workshop: “Kotor City Squares” - 5° topic: The poetic of Space (Kotor, August - September 2011)

RW

In the 20th century, distinction between public and private domain was driven by rationalist architectural approach and town planning. Poetics of space was introduced to challenge and explore the thin line that divides those two worlds, the two domains and their distinctive dreams.

Poetic image emerges in our conscience as a direct product of a heart and soul. If such emotion is provoked by the surrounding space, encountering it for the first or any of the subsequent times makes no difference - it is bound to be remembered forever. Poetics is investigating how to create such provocative spaces that will be imprinted on people's minds. Then, we found the perfect place for our experiments.

Square of salad is a very intriguing space. It has to offer a lot to people, based on his unique shape and multiple levels and layers it has. Perfect place for bringing troupes of children or artists of every kind, and letting them be inspired by its quiet dynamics. Bringing people to square like this, it brings new waves of life and creates life itself, since space is a life form.



Regional Workshop: "Kotor City Squares"

"I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space, someone is watching him, and that is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged."
(The Empty Space — A Book About the Theatre: Deadly, Holy, Rough, Immediate, Peter Brook)

Fair-play + Screen-play = Square Play
 (Skopje, 14th -19th October, 2011)

RW

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There are many unused public spaces and plazas located in city suburbs and urban areas for collective housing, and even in the centers of the cities that people pass by everyday, not even taking note they exist. Interventions in public spaces are one possible way how we can get citizens to take action and participate in the appropriation of public space and draw their attention about the potentials and functions of public space.

The idea derived from two significant and quite inspiring words: Fair-play and Screen-play. The word Fair-play, (which means equitable or impartial treatment), when applied to the users of public spaces / city squares and their right to use the space, means that no one has the right to deprive or threaten other people from using it freely and without limitation. In other words, the right we ask for ourselves obliges us to respect the rule of fair play – that is, the very same right of others to do the same (conformity to established rules). The other word, Screen-play, (defined as an outline or synopsis of a possible course of action or events), is closely connected and relates to the premise that in order to create a place in which many people / as users and actors / will be attracted to spend their time, it is necessary to envision variety of possible ways in which that given space can be used, and based on that, to create a setting (screen-play) for its use. This play presupposes interface of many actors and many actions, therefore the screen-play should foresee numerous scenes for different potential "drama" (a state, situation, or series of events involving interesting or intense interaction of partakers) that may take place. Reading these two words as such provides us with a framework for a new "play" we are pleased to call a SQUARE-PLAY.

Open stage Theatre



Living room



Approach:

Space = Stage;

Surrounding environment = Scenery;

Citizens (users) = Actors;

Action = Drama

RW



Sating a stage for different themes, the actions on the plateau in front of the Department store “MOST” in Skopje (a bridge between the city and the Old Bazaar) were aimed to involve citizens and create a dialogue about the uses and functions of public space.

And it was fun! In 6 days the plateau was transformed into

A playground... to remind us of our childhood

A living room... to meet people and have a chat over a cup of coffee or tea

A park... to connect with nature

A market... to stimulate communication and exchange

An open stage theatre... to encourage interaction and creativity

And all that for showing the citizens of Skopje the potentials of the plateau to serve for different purposes - a public space that belongs to them.

Regional Workshop: “SQUARE-PLAY” - (October 2011) - Topics: Drama, Living room, Market, Park, Playground

Market



Park

Playground







Regional Workshop: "SQUARE - PLAY" - moderator, Kor - CSD (October 2011)

Regional Workshop: “Suburban Exchange” (Tirana, July 2011)

RW

This workshop explored potentials for creating public spaces along the Tirana-Durrës highway, linear suburban conglomeration whose rapid growth during the last decade has been determined by infrastructure development and exclusive privatization. The workshop aimed to stimulate the creativity of the participants through a structure, articulated in series of actions. The process started with collecting information from the site, the creation of evolution scenarios and ended with the definition of the design and the public presentation of the project. The entire creative process was stimulated by the request to create a story from the spatial phenomena and from the human activities found in the site. The elements used in this story were the forces that deformed the diagrammatic material creating strategies and the design of converting disintegrated private spaces into places for positive social exchange. All of the projects, despite their local and contextual characteristics, show behaviors that can be injected even in the consolidated city. In this particular moment, when the cities are used as guinea pigs for experimenting extreme approaches of design, including even *monumentalism* and historical revivals, this experience can be considered an impulse towards perceiving the urban context as a ecological system where, from the complexity of interaction a virtuous way of intervening in the city can emerge.



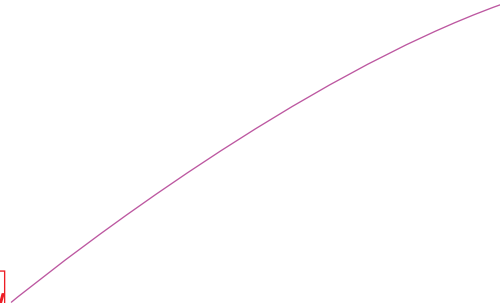




Regional Workshop: "Suburban Exchange" - moderator, Ivan Kucina (July 2011)

POLIS University - TIRANA URBAN BUNDLE (TUB)
(Tirana, October 2012)

LW



Urban Bundle is common space that provides initial condition for people participation in the process of producing and managing their urban environment. It is a political tool of the people that seeks to exert influence on the development of relations between private and public life in the city.

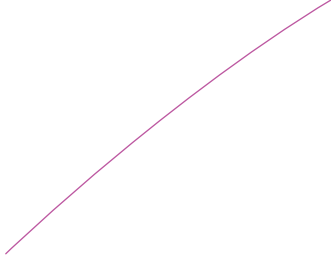
TUB is transparent construction without doors and walls, composed as particular modular system combining wooden, metal and other recyclable elements. These elements are designed to be manipulative for transportation and easy for construction.

This structure is also a simple example of how towards a small cost, the urban furniture and scene play a role in animating public life, avoiding the rigidity in the “official” squares, provoking and bring life in transit spaces and stimulating culture and art. TUB is a temporary installation in the public space that encourages transparency and facilitates gatherings of the administrators, citizens, investors and experts in order to maintain their discussions and negotiations on developing Tirana urban conditions. This urban bundle served as an urban catalyst and as a stationary open structure for different events during the Tirana Architecture Week organized by Polis University.



POLIS University, Rikkert Paauw - NË LAGJE (IN THE HOOD)
(Tirana, October 2012)

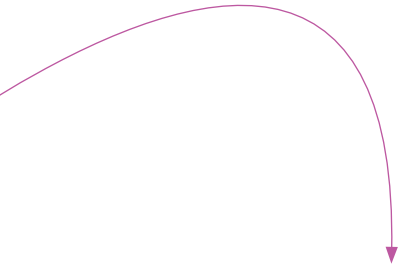
LW



Albania's capital has changed dramatically over the past 25 years. With the transformation from a socialist to a market economy, private property became a prime concern and public values declined. How can the public realm be reclaimed through architecture? Can private waste and leftovers – both mental and physical – provide a starting point to be turned into a public good?

The starting point is provided by what there is in abundance in every city: private waste. Taken both physically as well as mentally, the leftovers of private households were reworked by students and inhabitants into valuable contributions to public space.

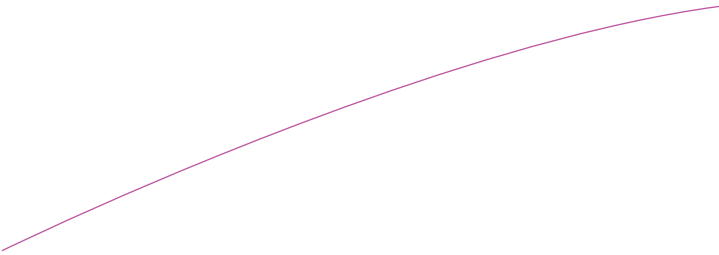
Në Lagje or In the 'Hood is the title of a workshop held in two centrally located though somewhat isolated neighborhoods. The first one is the perfect place to live and feel the community interaction, the second one is nothing else than the alter ego where there is nothing but emptiness. In collaboration with the local population, twenty students transformed inhabitants' waste into architectural structures and corresponding activities in the public space. The aim was to create a social impact through these physical and programmatic interventions, but even more important to create a mental and physical interaction between these two contradicting neighborhoods of the city.



City Actions

(Tirana, Durrës, June 2011)

AC



Students from the urban design course were divided into groups of three and four, and began a research and analysis of urban territory that brought them very soon, into conflict with the issues of space to which they had not thought of before. Each group was then encouraged to think, assisted by Stefano Romano (artist, coordinator of the project), of an intervention to realize in the investigated space; an intervention that was a metaphor for the current situation and a look towards a possible future offered by their architectural projects; an intervention that was a key point of contact for citizens; an intervention that spoke of potential, something that belonged to public space in general as area of sharing and conflict. What was derived is a new temporary place, not physical, but mental. A space of reflection in which going into with the unconscious fear of not recognizing what we are looking at. Losing references leads to feeling dizzy, what we're not able to recognize forces our brain to make us look differently, in a new way, inside the image in a far and wide journey towards a new perspective, a new reality, a new poem; a journey through a global space, along with urban and natural, real, realistic and imaginary.

The actions moved through different problematic and realities such as the problem of integration for the Roma people, the unhealthy habit of some people satisfying certain personal needs along the Lana River in the middle of Tirana, the re-utilisation of space leaved by older factories from communist regime, the responsibility that every person got as inheritance from History, the problem between formal and informal areas of Durrës.

courtyardgarden



tableaux vivants



on the bridge



lightsewing



traces of the mosaic



inheritance





Stefano Romano and students from POLIS University - On the Bridge (June 2011)

Tirana Creative Spaces (Tirana, Summer 2012)

AC

“Tirana Creative Spaces” started through an open call for the students of Polis University. The idea is to try to build a creative map of the city. The aim of this activity is to discover if it is possible to re-create a map starting from spontaneous unconscious creativity of people and in which part of the city it is more dense this kind of appropriation of public spaces.



Interaction with Space

(Skopje, 10th November, 2012)

“Interaction with Space” is an example of one slightly different urban interaction of the citizens in Skopje with the space... and nature

Location: the new local square in Karposh 3 (the same space we used to test the “Power of 10” tool)

Time: one beautiful and sunny Saturday, starting from early morning, till late afternoon.

Recipe for success: Land art, hand-on-work action, artists, “real-time” performance and most of all, lot of vigorous people, local residents and citizens, kids, parents, grandpas and grandmas, youth... all together for better and livelier local squares and neighbourhoods.

It was a real pleasure to see the children and their parents,(and grandparents), together, rolling up their sleeves and “joining forces” to “improve the space”. Using natural materials - stones, dry leaves, branches, grass ... they made a variety of images and figures on the surrounding grasslands. Flower tapestry of pebbles, pictures of straw, chestnuts, stones, branches and leafs, a wooden board on which they made mosaics of pebbles, “green apple” made of soil and grass...

Most interesting for the children and the adults, however, was the colouring of dozen of bird-houses, which, together with the members of the CSD team, later on they placed (mounted) on the nearby trees.

The performance of the students from the Faculty of Drama and Arts was exceptional experience in itself. The central theme - interaction of the residents and passers-by with the space - attracted plenty of interest among the citizens, especially the children. All expressed hope that in future in this place, as well as elsewhere in the city, similar civic initiatives will

be organised.

AC

It is obvious that such actions that involve the citizens are recognised as improvement of the quality of community life and re-appropriation of public space. What is more, being part of the process of creation (feeling that they are indeed the stakeholders), gives people the sense of ownership. And our mentality is “if it is ours, than we will look after it!”

How do we know that such approach works? One may say the land art works are meant to be temporary installations and their destiny is to be naturally destroyed. Well, all they made was long after still in place: the pebble stone tapestry, the wooden board, the birdhouses, even some of the images made of branches and leafs. And the “green apple”, of course!

Yoga in the Park (Kotor, summer 2012)

AC

Within the project “Promoting the Principles of Sustainable Development in Public Spaces of Boka Kotorska, during the summer 2012, Expeditio organized a “Yoga in the Park” event. The activity was aimed at promoting healthy lifestyles and different possibilities for using parks as public spaces.

Yoga exercising included various warm-up and body stretching techniques and different body poses (asanas). Many people experienced their bodies being lighter and more flexible after exercising. In addition to physical exercises, yoga sessions included different breathing techniques, which have a beneficial influence on energy increase and mind (thoughts and emotions) calming. A final part of the sessions usually consisted of meditation or relaxation, resulting in deep rest. This resulted in many people reporting afterwards of feeling well and relaxed and of reaching a pleasant inner state which they had not had for a long time.





Kor CSD and students from Drama and Art Academy



- Interaction with space (November 2012)

Stories under the Vault (Kotor, 22 December 2012)

AC

In the middle of December 2012, Expeditio invited the citizens of Kotor and surrounding municipalities, to lend them for several days their old lamps, chandeliers, lanterns, lampshades and flashlights. The idea was to use those lamps to light one small public space in the Old Town Kotor. We wanted to show that, through engaging citizens in a simple and creative action, a public space can be improved and made more interesting. This activity was realized in cooperation with the members of the artistic association Prostoroz from Ljubljana. Prostoroz explores, examines and opens new possibilities of public space use in accordance with the needs of its inhabitants in Slovenia and abroad (www.prostoroz.org).

As for the action in Kotor, the citizens responded to the call and we have collected about 25 lamps. They have been recycled into one bigger chandelier, which was then installed to light a semi-public space near St. Tryphon's cathedral in the Old Town Kotor. The promotion also included a small performance prepared by the children attending the local acting school led by Montenegrin theater director Petar Pajaković. For this occasion, children have prepared some legends and stories about Kotor and Boka Kotorska region. At the end, all the guests were served tea, warm wine and cookies.



POLIS University, Chris Luth (NAi) - DEBATE ON [BUS]TOUR
(Tirana, October 2012)

AC

Reclaiming public space starts with claiming mental space. What better place to do so than while moving through Tirana's neighborhoods on a special bus tour? Inhabitants, students, architects, planners and politicians were asked to introduce their neighborhood to fellow Tirana citizens. Through this series of tour guided interviews, a diverse mental map of the city emerged, what are they proud of, what places do they recommend, what can and should be done more, etc.



POLIS University, Chris Luth (NAi), Rikkert Paauw - GREEN PLUG-IN
(Tirana, October 2012)

AC

Green Plug-Ins are conceived as green carpets of grass, flowers or even agricultural installations that can be placed in areas of the city that lack in green. This is also an urban activism that can show to the local population of the different areas of Tirana and the potential of such public space, and bring to these empty space of their hood the life back. The statement of this specific event was achieve through an exchange of gifts between the two areas that took place, so to reappropriate the city a sarcastic exchange of waste and greenery .The essence of this event was to make people understand how important for our life is nature/greenery and how a small gesture could completely change and reactivate the space.



POLIS University - Provo[actions]

(Tirana, October 2012)

“The public spaces in Tirana are occupied by people that live in the city, those spaces at the moment seem to serve different activities, cars, bars, etc. serving the personal interests. People in the city suffer the lack of the spaces needed for a normal life, and all the development after the '90s didn't help a lot on creating a more livable city.”

This activity is organized with staff and students of Polis University, because we think that it is important for the developer of tomorrow to live, understand and face the problems of the people, as part of them. As architects and planners, we plan and design projects for the people, so it is important to know their concerns. The aim of this interaction is to be focused in the close relation between citizens and various specialists, for any solution we have to act together. Everybody in the city has to be concerned about what happens around the city, what happened around us, we all live the public/common spaces and everything happens in those areas touches us directly, and we don't have to be indifferent, all together we have to act. The Provo(Action) was structured in four different interactions:

Urban inter[action] / 1: “Let's read the past and write the future!”

In Frashëri Brother's Square, a well designed and constructed place, is noticeable that people just pass through, how can we revive a square in the core of the city? The idea was just to identify some activities to develop in the square to make people aware about the public spaces. The square was dedicated to some famous Albanian writers and the idea of reading in the square was the first intention. We built a totem to be placed in the square where people could write quotes from different books and writers, we all met there, each of us with a book, and the impact with the people was interesting. People stopped there and were part of the idea, they wrote some interesting quotes and some of them joint us in reading books. That day the square was a vivid place.

Urban inter[action] / 2: 'Facades, IN or OUT'

The building facade marks the transition between outside and inside, between the building and the urban space. When seen in context, they characterize the face of a city or town. The facade gives a scale to the entire space around it. Urban space is defined by the building facade, the neighboring building facades, the streetscape, and the environment.

When examining old facades or considering new construction, building use, historical value, and aesthetic impact must be taken into account. Existing building facades can be added onto, altered, or completely rebuilt. New construction must be designed to fit the character of existing structures. The aim of this activity was to create a more dynamic and interactive façade in some dismissed buildings in the city center.

AC

let's read the past and write the future!



facades, IN or OUT



Urban inter[action] / 3: Pyramid - [TIME, SYMBOL, EVOLUTION]

This activity aimed to provoke the attention of the people and make them sensitive towards certain problems. The place chosen for this activity was in front of the Pyramid, which represents an object that lies on the border between the past and the present. The idea that this action wanted to transmit relates to the continuity of time, with the discovery and evaluation of the past which affects the development of the future. The activity was conceptualized as building some models of other pyramids, to be further destroyed on site. The pyramid is chosen as the object that will transmit the message because in our country it represents a symbol of the past time that has created a very wide debate regarding its preservation or its decay. With our idea we want to express that time itself decides on its developments, past and present should interact with each other, should be evaluated in the same way so in the future we can realize different artistic works.

Urban inter[action] / 4: "The Cinema in your Yard!"

In the urban area of Tirana the in-between spaces of the residential areas do not offer any quality of life, as those spaces are not used by people. The interaction between people of the same block is really missing and nobody knows who's living next to them. The idea was to create an open cinema in one inner yard of a new block in Tirana, and to show a very popular film. People really enjoyed the film and invited us to do it again, for some moments some of them were seating together, watching a film and socializing.

Urban inter[action] / 5: "Different Parking Space"

Through such activities, we wanted to provoke the attention of the citizens and try to increase their sensibility towards some problems that people seem to have grown insensitive. One of the problems we wanted to highlight was that of parking areas, cars stops/stay everywhere;

we want people to interACT with us and to bring the space back to them. The idea of the intervention was to furnish one parking car space and change the intended use, in this way, for some moments, we gave people some more space. People begun to ask how this can be implemented in all the city. Can this really happen?

AC

[time, symbol, evolution]



the cinema in your yard!



the cinema in your yard!



different parking space



POLIS University, Co-PLAN - A plastic bottle bus shelter in Kashar
(Tirana, October 2012)

AC

As part of Tirana Architecture Week/Public Events/Tirana Urban Bundles TUB/ TUB 2, – “The use of recyclable materials in architecture and design”, October 2012, Co-PLAN in collaboration with U_POLIS built a whole structure made of 0.5l plastic bottles – A bus shelter in Kashar, close to the U_POLIS building. The aim of the project was to promote the use of recyclable materials in design among the communes and municipalities of Albania.

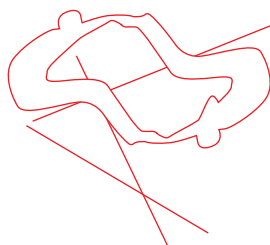
The idea and design of this project, which dates back to the start of 2012, made use of 12.000 plastic bottles for its construction, which were collected by U_POLIS. The building of the structure started in September 8, 2012 and lasted until October 5, 2012, engaging 16 U_POLIS students and 7 experts.







POLIS University, Chris Luth (NAI), Rikkert Paauw - Green Plug-in (October 2012)



THE PYTHAGORAS' (UN)COSTANT

A CONTEMPORARY ART EXHIBITION THAT QUESTION THEMSELVES ON CITY SQUARE AND MORE IN GENERAL ON PUBLIC SPACE



The Pythagoras' (un)costant, Final Exhibition in Tirana (October 2012)



There is only the way you can count on | the road is the only salvation | there is only the desire, the need to go out | to be exposed in the street, in the square. | Because the Universal Judgment | does not pass for homes | from home you cannot hear trumpets | from home you walk away from life | the struggle, pain, bombs.
 (Giorgio Gaber, "There is only the road," from the album "Even today we cannot fly")

Cities play a key role since antiquity as they represent power and politics (characteristics often exercised by the people and then a prerogative of citizenship), as well as a place of economic activity. The space within them that represents all these issues is the square. In fact, we can see this in ancient Greece, where the square, called "Agora", was not just the 'center' of religion and commerce, but was also a symbol of democracy (e.g. the assembly of the polis gathered there to talk about politics).

Even in ancient Rome, urbanism and the building of the cities was very important for both reasons mentioned above, as well as for the role of the monument of Roman civilization. Thus, the concept of the "Ideal City" (Vitruvius) was born, which was supposed to respect the "imago urbis" of Rome, meaning that the buildings must have contained all the typical structures of the Roman world: thermae, amphitheater, theater, basilica, temple and forum. In this model of Roman culture, which takes much from the Greek, the central square, the Forum, was representative as in the "Agorà" of the heart of community life. It was a symbol of the entire city and had to be majestic, as well as connected to the temple portico and thus assuming the role of true geometric center of the historic city.

The square is therefore always a primary element in the genesis and in the image of a city and has always been the catalyst of the expression of the citizens' will. People gathered at the square to buy and sell goods, and to express their political feelings. With the industrial revolution at the end of the XVIII century social life and the appearance of the city itself changed radically. With the insertion in social and economic fabric of a completely different way of working and living, where the life rhythm was starting to get the factory work rhythm, the needs of people in their city life also changed profoundly. The transformation was continuous and included every sphere of public and private life. Since the Fifties started in Europe the development of the type of society or civilization in which we still live today. This was the beginning of the "industrial society at the stage of advanced capitalism" or the "mass civilization" or the "consumer society" that has led to the homogenization of the collective taste and to the commoditization of any kind of values. This type of social transformations

*My mobile house will still have two legs and my dreams will not have borders.
(Ernesto Rafael Guevara de la Serna, from "Works", v. 3, pt. 2)*

*The win will be of those who have been able to cause the disorder without loving him.
(Guy Debord, from "The Situationist International")*

converged in a series of reflections which found their climax in 1968.

1968 was in many ways an important year, in which a large mass of socially heterogeneous movements (workers, students and minority ethnic groups) formed by aggregation often spontaneous, crossed almost all countries of the world with their dissenting charge and seemed to shake governments and political systems in the name of a radical transformation of society. The square was the obvious place of the complaints, requests, clashes. The course of events in a relatively concentrated and intense time, helped to identify the name of the movement, precisely with the year 1968. The movement originated in the mid 1960s in the United States and reached its climax in 1968 in Western Europe. In the West (Europe and the United States) a vast coalition of students and workers took a stand against the ideology of the then new consumer society, which proposed the value of money and the market in the capitalist world as a central point of social life, against the Vietnam War, by binding to the battle for civil rights and philosophies that express a radical rejection of the principles of capitalist society (counterculture). At the same time, some populations of the Eastern bloc rose up to denounce the lack of freedom and the intrusiveness of the party bureaucracy.

Despite being spread throughout the world, the youth protests died down in the early 1970s, anywhere without having apparently reported significant results. Merit of the youth movement of those years was, especially in the West, to put as focus of interest values which had been the interest of a few. Topics such as pacifism, anti-racism, rejection of power as a form of domination of the privileged few, women's rights and an interest in the environment, became a permanent part of the political debate and the socio-cultural world as a whole.

After many years, in which the world was shaken by protests - all taking place at the square (remember the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989), we are now faced with a new global crisis, a crisis that many are calling the biggest so far, as it has affected the whole world in a chain reaction. Slowly, one after the other, many Western countries have found themselves on the brink of failure, which has triggered (once again) the squares to revolt

and spontaneously gave birth to a new “occupation movement” in which one can find links with the 1968 movement, the social heterogeneity, and the fight against a) inequality (now even more pronounced), b) the economic market, and c) the use of war as an instrument of dialogue. Perhaps a movement born away from the square, or rather born into a new typology of square, the virtual one. The Internet, the virtual space, is a place where people can share information and organize themselves, has revolutionized the idea of public space and it has appropriated terms that originally made sense only in the idea of physically meeting people, such as “forum” (from “Forum” square in Latin). The Internet has thus assumed the shape of the contemporary square, summarizing in itself some characteristics such as that of meeting people from heterogeneous layers of society with the opportunity to express their own opinions, to form groups of thoughts and to give people the opportunity to organize protests or to make their voices heard. But as much as the virtual space has acquired a tremendous force as a “place” of complaint, dialogue and expression of ideas, it is still difficult to get to “see” through the network; to read that a forum was attended by 300,000 people, it is still different than to see them all gathered together in a physical, real space. What space then if not yet the square? This place that the “Strong Powers” wanted to plunder of all its most important functions because they have understood its power; this space more and more conceived in the new “Imago Urbis” of contemporary cities as accessory, decorative space and whose new shapes were drawn and conceived to prevent people from meet there forming a “ thinking mass “; because capitalist society and its market need masses, but only as a shapeless mass of people in front of their TV choosing new goods to buy, not as a mass of people spontaneously gathered to demonstrate their dissent or their will.

From these considerations we can understand how the square is an element whose physical peculiarities are easy to describe, but the use of which is difficult to characterize. Perhaps it is still stronger to use a megaphone for people’s voices. It is with these interpretations that the exhibition titled *The Pythagoras’ (un) constant* can be understood.

In the English language the word “square” is the same term for a square (the architectonic

element). In geometry the diagonals of a square are $\sqrt{2}$ (about 1.414) times the length of a side of the square; this value, known as Pythagoras' constant, was the first number proven to be irrational. The value of the diagonal of a square (even of a city square) is defined by a constant number, irrational, but constant, namely immutable; all the other values changes but not this one. Speaking in real terms, when you work in public space, how could you define a constant, immutable, independent value? When artists have begun to deal with public space, they have somehow violated an unsafe space, where the role of chance, the reaction of ordinary people, institutions, time, and a thousand of other variables were and are totally unpredictable. Violating this space and accepting the risk of leaving a part of the production of their artwork open to the chance, has made art in some way a complex tissue, in which the final result not only is not guaranteed but is also absolutely incalculable, inconstant, because it is subject and object to all the variables that operate in that space. Hence the need to bring the Pythagoras "constant" again to unknown, into a changeable number, an (un) constant value, because there are too many variables involved in order to calculate a priori the result with mathematical (or political) precision.

[] The protest in the square

Oliver Ressler, Take the square

The video installation by the Austrian artist can be read as an analysis of the movements of the squares that begun in 2011 as a reaction to the social and economic inequality that the new global political and economical system is provoking in an always more accentuated way. The video is based on discussions conducted with activists from "15M" in Madrid, the "Syntagma Square Movement" in Athens and "Occupy Wall Street" in New York. Three cities, three different Countries where people arrive to the same operating mode in a kind of "Spirit of the Time" of Kant memories, covering issues of organization, horizontal decision-making processes, the importance and function of occupying public spaces and how social change can occur.

[] The time in the square**Zimmerfrei, Panorama_Bologna**

The artwork realized by the group Zimmerfrei is a living portrait of a city. It's a portrait made by compressed time, realized with a fixed camera turning in circle as a clock. Piazza Maggiore, the very earth of the town, is populated by every kind of people but between tourists and cleaning workers, we can especially recognize old men, students and immigrants' families, the only ones who still use the central place as a social meeting point. Among unaware passers-by there are some who take their time and build up a bigger place for their own figure and attitude, making self-portraits or group portraits as sculptures of time.

[] The change in the square**Verica Kovacevska, The Last Pioneers**

This work was supposed to contain one hundred people in their late twenties and early thirties, wearing jeans, white shirts and a red pioneer scarf. The artist wanted to tell the story of the last generation of pioneers of Albania, who equipped with the dresses to perform, but left without the system for which to perform, found themselves in turbulent times of change. The Skenderbeg Square was chosen as an important historical reference - a place that was formerly used by the pioneers during various ceremonies. By placing them "back at the square", the artist wanted to look back to their pioneer experience and the radical social and political changes since then, putting them at the front as the forthcoming generation that will take an active role in creating the new Albanian society.

Unfortunately, the artist's permit to complete the work at Skenderbeg Square was revoked upon her arrival in Tirana, as any references to the country's socialist past were no longer welcome.

However, this did not stop two pioneers, who nonetheless came to the square at short notice and re-claimed their history and the public space.

[] The dialogue in the square

Network Nomadic Architecture, Breaking the borders

The Greek artistic - architectonic collective perform an action in one of the three key points of the Boulevard of Tirana, "Mother Teresa" square. The action consists of a long table laden with Greek and Albanian food to which passersby are invited to sit and eat a meal prepared especially for them, to help the spontaneous discussion and dialogue on issues such as borders, public space and their use, ethnicity, poverty etc ... The discussion will be aided by a video made earlier in the historical center of Athens that tells of people, their stories, their experience and all the issues that can be addressed in the discussion in Tirana.

[] The politics in the square

Armando Lulaj, FECAL JUSTICE

Albanians still do not ask for the bill for their problems, people educated by this policy today continues to remain motionless and under pressure. For this we must look as an example the story of E.D. the child who was only 7 years old when he died of burns on 80 percent of the body following the explosion of the arms factory of Gerdec. Him that he was there accidentally, as each child pushed by curiosity, friendship, the desire to go out, stay out and experience new thrills, sees life through his eyes curious as a child. He was founded still alive after the explosion and whispered to his father, "Sorry dad that I go out without permission". This phrase, recorded with the artist's voice will be heard in Scanderbeg Square.

[] The economy in the square

Studio203, Sum to zero – (Tirana's Unveiled Archive#1)

Tirana's Unveiled Archive is an archive of images, on public spaces in Tirana, spaces, which use and identity no longer coincide, for this become the object of reflection of studio203, to create an overall view of spaces revealed again in their own identity. Specifically "sum to zero" reflects on "Avni Rustemi" square called "Pazar i ri" (the new market). This place exists only as a venue for this local market, people no longer even remember the name of the



square, and without it the square itself completely lose its identity. The work starts from this identity acquired from the square, according to an economic law called the “Law of Walras”, in a market excess demand is zero. The photograph shows an attempt to keep in balance on a counter of a stand of the market at “Pazar i ri”, in the cold light of the night and the warm lights of the stands left on by the merchants, in contrast to the hustle and bustle of the day.

[] The vision in the square **aMAZElab, Open City Balkani**

The project of aMAZElab developed throughout 2011 intended to reflect the city as an open space, a space of exchanges and encounters, freedom and social equity, a crossroads of cultures in which every individual can become a “citizen”. For this purpose “Open City Balkani” has developed in all Western Balkans different activities and the realization of a series of posters exhibited in many of the cities where the project was hosted. Each artist has created an image that was an expression of the search for a new identity of the Balkans that was expression of hopes, resources, and visions.





Stefano Romano - 42° 25' 48" N, 18° 46' 12" E



- photography (2010 - The Pythagoras' (un)costant October 2012)



Zimmerfrei - Panorama_Bologna



- video (2005 - *The Pythagoras' (un)costant* October 2012)



Verica Kovacevska - The Last Pioneers



- action photography (2012 - The Pythagoras' (un)costant October 2012)



Network Nomadic Architecture - Breaking the Borders - Fotovolida



- action videodocumentation (2012 - *The Pythagoras' (un)costant* October 2012)



Studio203 - Sum to zero - Tiranás' Unveiled Archive#1



- photography (2012 - The Pythagoras' (un)costant October 2012)



Oliver Ressler - Take the square



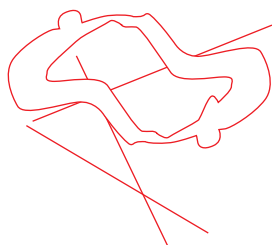
- 3-channel video installation (2012 - *The Pythagoras' (un)costant* October 2012)



Armando Lulaj - Parallels and Parabols



- sculpture (2011/12 - *The Pythagoras' (un)costant* October 2012)



REFLECTION ON PUBLIC SPACE

VIBRANT SQUARES - REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON PUBLIC SPACE AND CITY SQUARE



Vibrant Squares, Final Conference in Tirana (October 2012)



As a culmination of the various events organised independently in all four cities, we organised a regional conference focusing on the transformation of City Squares into new vibrant community places. Balkan cities were at the focus of the conference's theme with particular attention drawn on the cities of Tirana, Durrës, Kotor and Skopje. The conference also aimed to initiate a discussion on identifying the position of these four cities in the international arena. The conference was held on October 12, 2012, at the premises of POLIS University in Tirana. This section will focus on the various issues raised in the conference in the form of reflections by each participant.

Cities have always been a crucial moment in civilization and creative development. Contemporary cities are facing enormous changes and challenges. Over half the world's population already lives in almost-megapolis-cities, with districts as large as entire cities. There are new movements of people from "centers" to the immediate suburbs of the cities to seek new standards of living in a "human dimension". This human dimension seems to be precisely one of the points on which contemporary cities are questioning themselves, and in this framework city squares are a central element in the discussion, more precisely, we could say, the re-appropriation of squares, as a moment of metaphorical representation of the unique identity of the city; as a moment of expression of discomfort or a need for the population.

In a globalized world the physical square, cannot yet be replaced by "virtual square" offered by the web. We are thus confronted with the need to rethink the contemporary square using creatively, empowerment practices, and questioning what are the tools and facilities that professionals have to offer to citizens to enable them to interact in the square giving back information, gestures and creativity to the entire community.

The Final Conference of the project "Vibrant Squares", held in October 2012 as one of the key events of the Tirana Architecture Week, aimed to share with the audience the results

of the activities made during those two years of the project and to support a fertile debate on how to define city squares, as a fundamental element in the re-thinking of contemporary cities. The conference tried to explore arts-based approaches to public engagement and interdisciplinary research on public space.

From Center to Periphery and the way back - by Nahid Majid


 FC

In the cities of the most industrialized areas the world has witnessed over the last twenty years, to an emptying of the cities... People prefer to live in the immediate suburbs and move to the city to get to work. In this context of shifting, the central square from Renaissance memory has been abandoned in favor of new “centers” new “squares” like shopping malls or the virtual space. Today’s movement back to cities central squares could be seen as a new need for appropriation of central spaces of the city to make people voices heard, as Nahid Majid argues using the cases of the cities of London and Manchester, England.

In 1998 the then Great Britain Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, invited Richard Rogers to set up the Urban Task Force (UTF) to identify causes of urban decline and establish a vision for cities in England, founded on the principles of design excellence, social well-being and environmental responsibility within appropriate delivery, fiscal and legal frameworks.

The establishment of the UTF was a response to the;

- decline of regional inner-city areas and communities.
- official prediction of a requirement for 4 million additional households.
- suburban sprawl consuming greenfield sites at an alarming rate, causing social and economic decline within inner-city areas

Therefore, it was tasked to recommend practical solutions to bring people back into cities towns and urban neighbourhoods in England. In the UTF report ‘Towards an Urban Renaissance’, over 100 recommendations for change were proposed, covering design, transport, management, regeneration, skills, planning and investment. These stated that towns and cities should be well designed, be more compact, better connected and support a range of diverse uses within a sustainable urban environment.

The best form of city is one that is environmentally sustainable, a well-designed compact city organised around transport hubs. Well integrated with public transport and adaptable

to change.

The process of change should combine strengthened democratic local leadership with an increased commitment to public participation. There must be an increase in investment in urban areas, using public finance to attract the market. All government initiatives, which affect towns and cities should demonstrate a shared commitment to an urban renaissance. In addition, the report noted that this renaissance requires a change of culture – through education, debate, information and participation. It is about skills, beliefs and values, not just policies.

The necessity for urban growth provides an opportunity to reconfigure English cities and communities and the Urban Task Force's report was conceived as a comprehensive package championing an holistic approach to urban regeneration and informing future Government policy in urban development.





The Inclusive Square - Speakers: Stealth Unlimited (Ana Džokić – Mark Neelen), and Elvan Dajko

FC

“Public places are the space in which diverse groups of people, in terms of their class and ethnicity, gender and age, are brought together, with the possibility for interaction and communication.” The role of city squares and public spaces in general as places accessible to all, that every citizen can and is entitled to use, is broadly recognised. Squares are places for social interaction, open to all people and their freely chosen actions. But then, who is responsible for the planning, design, using and managing of city squares and public spaces? Do we all have the same role, the same right and responsibility? Usually the responsibility for planning of public spaces is given to urban planners and architects, but who is really shaping their usage: local governments, market or citizens? Nowadays, citizens, civil society organisations, an independent art scene and other interested parties can play a major role in the very creation, shaping, preservation and maintenance of public spaces.

Some of the challenges we are facing in this process include: How to design or redesign a square for all, a space that respects gender, age, abilities and needs? How to involve everybody /all citizens, all different stakeholders, including local governments, decision makers, businesses, NGOs, as well as visitors / in the planning, using and managing of city squares? How to manage this process and its implementation, and make it transparent and visible to all citizens? What are the possible methods and tools that can be used? Are there any restrictions that need to be defined? What are the benefits from the involvement and participative process? Are Public Goods = Public Welfare? Are there examples of good practice?

In his presentation Elvan Dajko addressed these questions and used illustrative examples from a number of actions, projects and interventions developed by POLIS University and his partners within the public space discussion.

With two of their realized interventions in public space, STEALTH.unlimited added to the



discussion of designing squares in Balkan cities recent experiences from Sweden, involving citizens in imagining and making their common spaces.

The first intervention, the 8.500 m² Fruit and an Energy Farms is a schoolyard that doubles as a public space made for Thunmanskolan in Knivsta, a town close to Stockholm's Arlanda airport. Designed with artist and architect Marjetica Potrč and in collaboration with landscape architect Ingall Nahringsbauer, it displays the processes of harvesting energy from the sun and the wind, through man-made technology and photosynthesis. An important aspect of its design however has been to provide the school children with an over-dimensioned structure of sorts, a wooden deck that stretches 140 meters, and that forms the base to anchor these teenager's outdoors activities without prescribing the precise uses in its design - inviting them to freely and inventively interpret it for playing, socializing or relaxing. Due to its central position, Thunmanskolan's schoolyard also offers an important public space for gatherings of the community. The design for the schoolyard has been made through an exchange with the school children and has been juried by them.

The second intervention, (Dis)assembled has been made on invitation of the art center Röda Sten in Gothenburg. To pioneer the not-yet-planned surrounding of the art center, (Dis)assembled hijacked the format of an exhibition and for nearly three months involved citizens of Gothenburg in testing the possible uses and functions of this area of the city. On the floor of Röda Sten's main exhibition hall, people could find a collection of materials and equipment to go ahead with to their ideas - through a direct, think-on and hands-on format. With that, it laid out the possibility to take the making of the city into our hands - as a common effort. The project relates to an ongoing interest in the urban development of the contemporary city and responds to the trend of citizens 'participation' in such development processes that is overly present in Sweden, but with often disputed results. (Dis)assembled managed to claim the area as an urban commons of sorts, bringing it into the hands of the citizens before investors and developers could have taken the lead. Currently, the city is in further negotiations with the users of the area to come together to a common approach in defining its future.

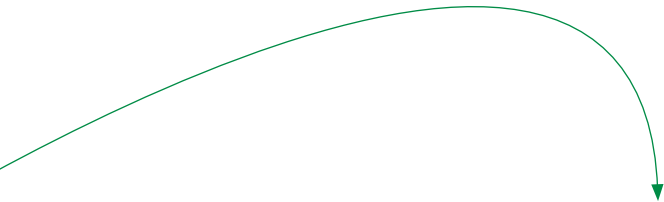
Public Art, Art in Public Space - Speakers: Network Nomadic Architecture, and Claudia Zanfi


 FC

The traditional boundaries between art and architecture are increasingly blurred in work that has been variously described as site-specific art, public art and urban intervention. In art, such work has been variously described as contextual practice, site-specific art, public art, and in architecture, as conceptual design and urban intervention. Art and Architecture redefines such work as 'critical spatial practice'. Rendell visits works produced by galleries who operate 'outside' their physical limits, commissioning agencies and independent curators who support and develop 'site-specific' work and collaborative groups who produce various kinds of critical projects from performance art to urban design, asking crucial questions about the nature of public art and about the notion of 'function' in art and architecture. Art in Public Space has a concrete possibility of re-appropriation of the space and the possibility to raise social issues and problems related to the connections between people and possibilities.

OPEN CITY BALKANI, aims to identify the city as an open space, a place of exchange and encounter, of freedom and equity, a crossroads of cultures in which the individual may become a 'citizen'. This program explores the borderlands between city and community, featuring eyewitnesses and researchers into narration and its links with the oral tradition, as well as international artists committed with installations in public space.

"Open City Balkani" is therefore an arena of potentiality, multiculturalism and interdisciplinary.



The Spontaneous Square – Challenges and Practices Speakers: Vangel Karaivanov, Stefanka Hadzi Pecova, Silvi Jano

“The highest and best form of efficiency is the spontaneous cooperation of a free people” (Woodrow Wilson).

The way we look at city squares nowadays in the Balkans certainly is subject for understanding how these habitats are being transformed in functions and roles to meet various community needs. On the other hand, it is exactly these various and diverse communities that influence the conceptual shape of these squares through their energy. The understanding of this reciprocal influencing energy and furthermore the use of it for the welfare of citizens and city life would bring us in creative and spontaneous city making process for Balkan cities.

As defined, spontaneous applies to what arises naturally rather than resulting from external constraint or stimulus. Inspiration, creativity and spontaneity are the driving forces of development in any value oriented system.

Therefore, the issue of city squares has to be understood in a much broader fashion. City squares (and here we think not only of the main square, but of all open public spaces and small city squares) embody the energies of people and therefore we have to understand what they mean for the social and cultural expression of citizens. Making great public spaces and places the norm rather than the exception is closely connected and depends on introducing policy-makers at all levels (state, and city governments) to new ideas and approaches. Indeed, city squares are not just designed on the urban planners’ drawing boards (The design is a means to an end, not an end in itself!), but they should be seen as possibility for spontaneous and creative city making, where all concerned play a role.

Due to the informal and unplanned development that Tirana experienced after the 90’s, a lot of empty ‘gaps’ were left between buildings. Most of these gaps have no function except a negative image that they bring for the specific neighborhood they are located in. They have quickly become dumpsites and shelters for the homeless and unsafe zones to walk by at night.

They are spread in almost every corner of the city instantly creating a 'gap' network of them. In the western world these gaps have been identified to a certain extent, and transformed into successful public places called "Pocket Parks". Now it is Tirana's turn to bring these gaps to life and potentially create its own identity as the only pocket park city not only in the Balkans but in Europe as well. Pocket parks are an urban open space at the very small scale and work in improving the quality and aesthetics of our environment in order to create a healthier and more beautiful place to live, work and play. Only a few house lots in size or smaller, pocket parks can be tucked into and scattered throughout the urban fabric where they serve the local population.

(Silvi Jano)

The contemporary concepts of cities or urban structures should be based on a system of open urban spaces and squares. In that respect, to create, organise, revive and manage open urban spaces and squares there are several aspects that we should be aware of. First of the planning aspect: We need to understand the landscape and its values (environmental aspects of the landscape) to offer and design a harmonious relationship between the natural aspects and the built environment. Secondly, the designing aspect: We need to understand important sociological aspects of the urban community to create suitable, attractive environment and space that will be useful; furthermore, it is necessary to shape the space in a way that will make it to be unique, authentic and tailor to people and the social community (or all of this to create the social community). Finally, the realisation aspect: Do we have financial resources? How much we want to spend and how much we can afford to create new or set up the existing squares? Does the community have control over the decision-making and money spending? (Professor Stefanka Hadzi Pecova)

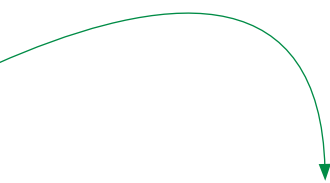
The creative team in the Municipality of Karposh was established on the initiative of the Mayor, Mr. Stevcho Jakimovski to act as a key link between the citizens and the municipality. The team is composed of young architects who in addition of treating issues from a position of their primary vocation, architecture, consider and study the problems also from social and

psychological aspects. Talking with people is inevitable, and only in direct contact with those who will consume the urban space, one can get the information needed in order any square plateau or open public space to work in harmony with the aspect of socialization. Each newly detected public space is a challenge in itself. Considering the fact that a public space is used by people of all age structures, professions and interests, the goal of this creative team is to make an effort to meet their different needs.

(Vangel Karaivanov, Municipality of Karposh, Macedonia)



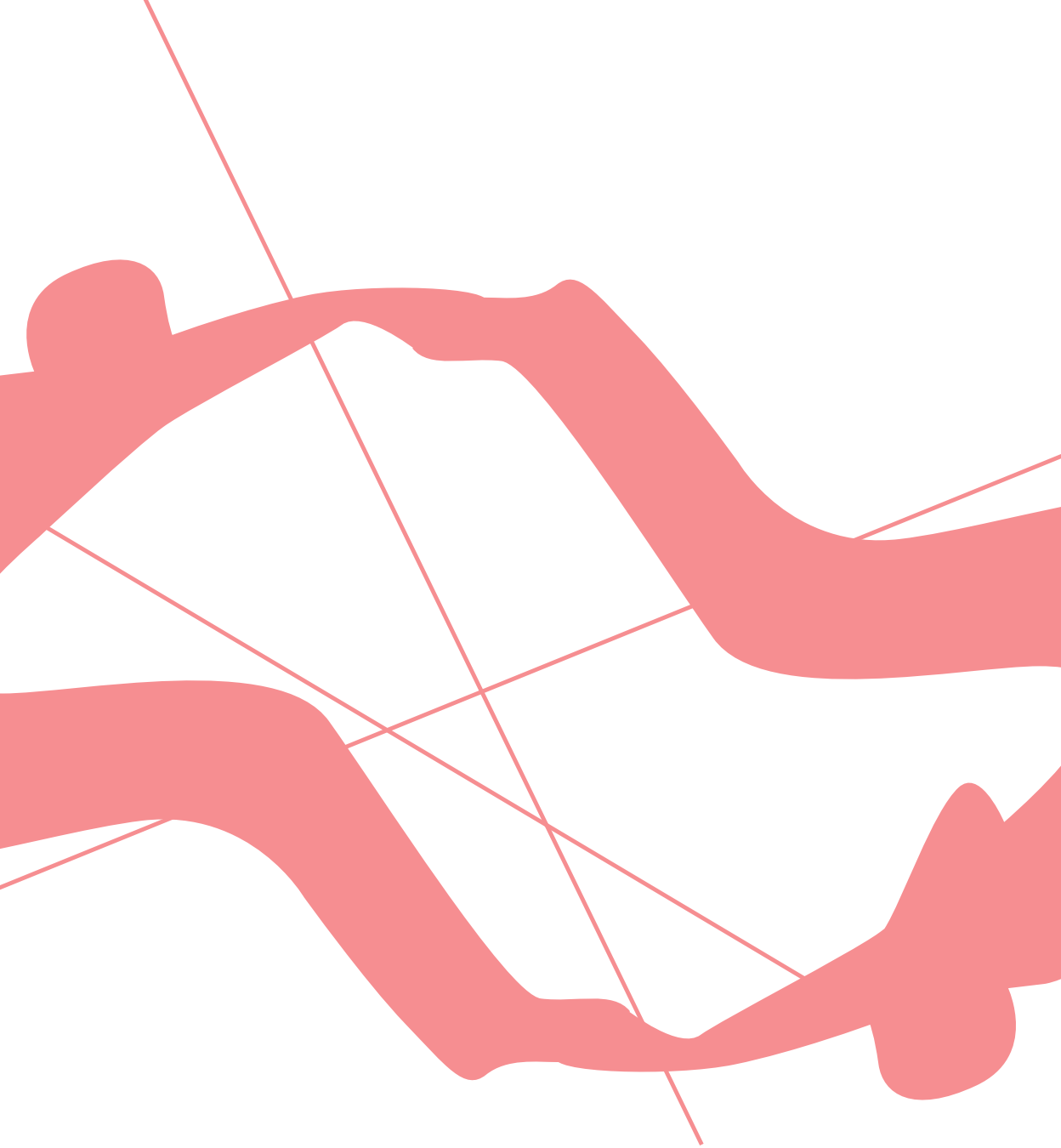
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Vibrant Squares - Conference (October 2012)



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