Memorials and Urban Identity

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Memorials and Urban Identity-case study Pristina

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Abstract. The various statues and monuments that are part of the urban memorials represent a landmark for each city and create a connection with the surroundings. After 1999 in Kosovo, the phenomenon of reviving the memory of the heroes from their recent history, memorials are being erected which are settling in cities and important urban areas.

In general, memorials create and provide a connection to the community, which strengthens their social and urban memory. Moreover, each monument has its origin in creating the urban identity of urban areas and integrating them into the daily lives of citizens. While this phenomenon in Kosovo, it is the responsibility of urban planners and artists to handle memorials in urban terms so that these works can be better incorporated with their surroundings and context.

Keywords: memorials, community, social identity, urban identity, Pristina

Introduction

Planning and design of public memorials and historical monuments in a city, and especially in capitals, represent significantly the urban identity as well as the identity and values of a nation, giving it both a historical and conceptual meaning. The various statues and monuments that are part of the urban memorials represent a landmark for each city and create a connection with the surroundings.

In democratic states, with an active civil society, the development of memorials is complex. Memorials in democratic capitals are often not initiated, financed or designed by the government itself, but they come from and are derived by civil society. Of course, such memorials are salient investments of not only cultural significance but with long-term consequences on national and local identity as well as on collective memory. The planning and arrangement of memorials, especially in the case of capitals, significantly shape the representation of a nation, urban places, giving them not only historical but also conceptual meaning. These memorials are developed through negotiations between political parties, civil society social, interest groups, designers, historical experts, etc., and most importantly, through gathering the perceptions of the residents of the area or city where this memorial will be built. Such processes reflect and contribute to the democratic traditions of a nation.

After 1999 in Kosovo, the phenomenon of reviving the memory of the heroes from their recent history, memorials are being erected and are settling in cities and important urban areas. While this phenomenon is still happening in Kosovo, it is the responsibility of urban planners and artists to handle memorials in urban terms, so that these works can be better incorporated with their surroundings and context. This paper will focus on analyzing the importance of memorials to Pristina's urban identity. The paper uses an analytical and interpretive approach to memorials and urban identity focusing mostly on analysis of the Prishtina case, as well as a qualitative study of public perceptions various on statues and monuments that are part of the urban memorials in the city of Prishtina.
Public memorials in the context of urban identity

As memorials seek to commemorate not only a historical event but they also induce a wide range of feelings to a society, like conflicting social memories, positive as well as negative emotions, unifying or disputing memories, decision-making processes for planning and designing present opportunities to “work through” and try to solve the difficult issues of change in a society, social responsibility, injustice, and social responsibility. (Vale 2008, Halbwachs 1992, Huyssen 1994, Nora 1989) But Memorials also create and provide a connection to the community, which strengthens their social and urban memory. (Gurler & Ozer, 2013:1)

There is often public dissatisfaction and conflict with the forms, meanings, and locations of various public statues or memorials. In practice, the design of public memorials remains controversial and a difficult process, as its planning processes, can exacerbate society’s internal conflicts over urban identity and history, rather than resolving them. Problems in finding solutions that are acceptable to all suggest the need for a comprehensive examination of the planning processes currently used and used for public memorials. (Gjerde & Petrović, 2014)

Understanding the historical development of memorials in capitals is of great importance in many dimensions, both for the designers, planners, and implementers of these works, because of the values they represent, the intangible values associated with collective urban identity, emotion and memory. (NCC 2006, NCPC 2006) Furthermore, these memorials not only represent the urban identity of a capital city, but they even create an international city identity, as they help tourists associate the image with the memorial and public space, thereby reminding the state and capital about it. (Brett et al., 2007). Moreover, each monument has its origin in creating the urban identity of urban areas and integrating them into the daily lives of citizens, and try to make their connection with the sorrowing more of a plausible experience.

A perfect example is the Berlin Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, Germany. This represents memories in this way not only reminds people of their social history, without visiting a place especially but also provides a correlation and helps to develop empathy with citizens as tourists. (Gurler & Ozer, 2013:2)

Urban identity in Kosovo

Kosovo’s public space has undergone many stages of modification and symbolic changes due to it’s political, social and economic state. In his study on state borders and symbolic boundaries and contested geographical space in Kosovo, the author Krasniqi (2013), has shown how space
Urban identity is little studied in Kosovo. Memorials and statues are often immediate, sporadic, symbolic objects consequence as the legacy of war or the cultural heritage of previous centuries. Nevertheless, the very few architectural elements labeled as memorials, express a genuine urban identity that not only awakens a collective memory but also puts it at ease, creating a public space suitable for all but without losing its purpose, namely its collective historical value. Even less studied in Kosovo is the reason why urban identity is under-analyzed in the complex. There is another reverse problem of these memorial sites in Kosovo.

Although we have not always appreciated the past, which is identified with the memorials and artifacts that every society institutionally preserves, we often forget the historical and architectural values of these objects that have disappeared. These memorials run the risk of losing their urban identities altogether. The question of the identity of urban space is important for experiencing any city in the new global world. With the development of the globalization process, urban identity has become an important factor in the spatial planning process. (Ylli, 2019) Cities are facing the threat of losing their identity while at the same time being able to change it and create a new identity. And yet we must be careful, as we are aware that the loss of urban identity, intertwined with elements of historical heritage, is at hand. This issue is not just about individual cases, it is also related to the life philosophy of the environment in which we live and operate. (Ylli, 2019)

**Prishtina Memorials**

The Newborn Monument is an iconic sculpture and tourist attraction in Pristina, Kosovo. The monument was set up on 17 February 2008, the day that Kosovo formally declared its independence.

"Newborn" was chosen to describe the birth of a new country, aiming to make Kosovo look like a new, contemporary, trendy country.

The design and colors of the monument changes in accordance with the events that unveils in Kosovo. It now has become a changing concept.
The main purpose of public memorials are to “remember” people by linking them to the past, present, and future. They often witness power struggles to underline different statements in all these processes in the context of social memory.

The memorial Martyr cemetery in Prishtina was designed to serve several functions to the residents and has been subject to protests in Prishtina because of the poor maintenance the memorial is losing its function and urban identity. (https://prishtinainsight.com/prishtinas-yugoslav-monuments-remain-in-limbo-mag/, n.d.) 02/2020
The 20,000-pin Heroin memorial presents the tangible memories and contributions of women survivors of sexual violence during the Kosovo War in 1999. The contoured face has double meaning, depicting a surviving woman and a war heroine. The memorial as a whole does not contain individual qualities or personal iconography. (https://oralhistorykosovo.org/points_of_interests/the-heroiniat-memorial/, n.d.) 02/2020

After the 1999 war in Kosovo, in the city of Pristina and other cities, public squares and spaces began to identify with the busts of the last war heroes, who as a message depict the character of the warrior and their weapons in their hands.

One of the many examples of war heroes we encounter in the city is that of Zhir Pajaziti, who holds a gun (Fig. 6).

Public perception

This paper uses a quantitative methodology, with a questionnaire as the basic instrument. The questionnaire consisted of 7 closed questions, with 3 alternatives to answer (Yes, No, Other). The selection of the respondents was random. All the participants were residents of the city of Prishtina. Respondents were asked if there should be any memorials or statues across Pristina's city squares, where public opinion was split almost into two parts. Most of the respondents, citizens of Prishtina (55%) stated that they would not like to have memorials or statues in the squares in Prishtina that represent the faces of the heroes or warriors of the last war, while 45% said that yes, they would like to have more memorials or statues of heroes in the city. Asked whether these statues give an identity to public spaces, 55% of them again answered no. These statues are not specifically those which give an identity to public spaces, only 45% of them think so. 57% of respondents stated that they do not think that in the city we should necessarily have traces of post-war heroes. Only 43% of them said yes, that this historical trail must be left in the city. Respondents were then asked what was the message conveyed to them after seeing a statue with a gun. 58% of the respondents claimed that the message was completely historical, while
42% of them claimed that they received a completely different message from these statues, and none of the respondents felt that these statues had an educational character in themselves.

The next question was referred to as the transmission of positive or negative messages of these statues in the city. 55% agreed that they did not receive a positive message from these busts but had a negative perception and memory of them, only 45% claimed that the message they conveyed was, in fact, positive. Despite the fact that most respondents did not receive a positive message from these statues when asked if they transfer the statues to other possible locations from Pristina city squares, 61% of respondents indicated that no, they would not want this memorial removed from their locations in the city. While 39% of them would like these types of monuments to be removed from their locations to more convenient locations. The majority of respondents (79%) strongly agreed that these busts would be better replaced by a sculpture or a memorial that would have a meaning and also have other functions in public space. While only 21% of them disagreed that these busts would be transformed.

**Conclusions**

Public perception regarding memorials, function, location, etc. seems to be mixed and divided among Pristina citizens. Although they are aware of the importance of these monuments, statues, they appear to be opposing to the transitional forms of their appearance (e.g. traditional statue, a man standing with a gun). Citizens are divided between the values they also represent, only half of the citizens receive a historical perception of them, most seem to receive a completely different perception of these statues located in the city. Although they want these monuments or statues to stay where they are but to transform them into objects and sites not only of historical value, but of cultural, social, and to make a new urban identity which does not necessarily appear to have clear forms of collective memory, but forms which, although reminiscent of historical value, be environments that relate to the whole community and not only, serving multidimensional functions, and giving emotional peace and spiritual for city of Pristina.

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