

Urban mobility planning as a frame for urban design of squares and streets, the Peja case in Kosovo

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1 ABSTRACT

Urban streets and squares have a dual function: as links in transport networks and as places for accommodating urban life. In this paper an *integrated approach of urban design of the public domain* is developed, highlighting the layers multimodal mobility planning can provide for the design. The approach is shown on the basis of some cases for the **city of Peja** (Kosovo). The designs of two strategic elements in the urban network, the railway station boulevard and the Haxhi Zeka Square as well as a district collector street within the Zatra living area are described. These design projects were elaborated by a mixed international and local team, working together in design studios within the frame of the **‘MOBKOS’ cooperation project** (www.mobkos.eu). This project was co financed by the Flemish and the Kosovar Governments in the period 2009-2011. A well the structured *road categorisation* system and *urban parking strategy* are determining elements of the design. But even so a ‘soft spine’ accommodating *walking and biking routes* and a new system of *urban bus routes* are important layers of the design. The paper doesn’t call for a traffic engineering dominated design. It is gradually understood that the prevailing ‘city for cars’ practices in Kosovo (that had already shown its limits in Pristine) would lead Peja into a dead end street. That is why concepts such as urban boulevards, ‘shared spaces’, green trails... are used in the designs. The same international team is preparing design studios in the city of **Shkodra** in Albania.

2 CONTEXT AND FRAMEWORK

2.1 The challenge

Peja /Pejë/Peć (circa 100.000 inhabitants) in West Kosovo is a gateway to the Albanian Alps, to Montenegro and to North Albania. At the time the Flanders grant project on urban mobility started in 2009, the municipality had adopted a mission to become the ‘vital and green town’ in Kosovo mainly aiming at tourism’ (Peja/Peć, 2006).

Living up to this ambition, Peja municipality is to put a great deal of effort in spatial planning and sustainable urban mobility. It is gradually understood that the prevailing ‘city for cars’ practices in Kosovo (that had already shown its limits in Pristina and, indeed, in Tirana) would lead Peja into a dead end street. Peja and all other secondary Kosovo towns, as well as the capital Pristina, are increasingly facing the impacts of urban *car traffic growth* and corresponding *problems* such as congestion, road accidents, loss of public space, pollution. Strengthening the economy of cities and towns while improving quality of life, safety and health for its citizens by promoting sustainable urban mobility is a challenge that central and local authorities in Kosovo have yet to jointly prepare for. Peja’s assets are above all its natural setting, its compact urban form and its cultural heritage and these opportunities do not match with a town congested with cars.

A crucial factor towards restoring quality of life and a multimodal accessibility in the Kosovo towns will consist of developing a new style of urban design, replacing the prevailing concepts based on a ‘*car euphoria*’ attitude with as well citizen, policy makers as road designers. *These concepts are not only eroding quality of life* in newly redesigned streets and squares, *they are dysfunctional as well*.

These dysfunctions are illustrated in fig. 1, showing **Queen Teuta road** in Peja (reconstructed in 2010). One can notice that the intentions of the designer are not followed by the users of the street: cars are parked on the sideway, whilst pedestrians are using the right traffic lane for passing the street. The picture shows the need for other than the prevailing ‘express road’ style concepts in Kosovo towns.

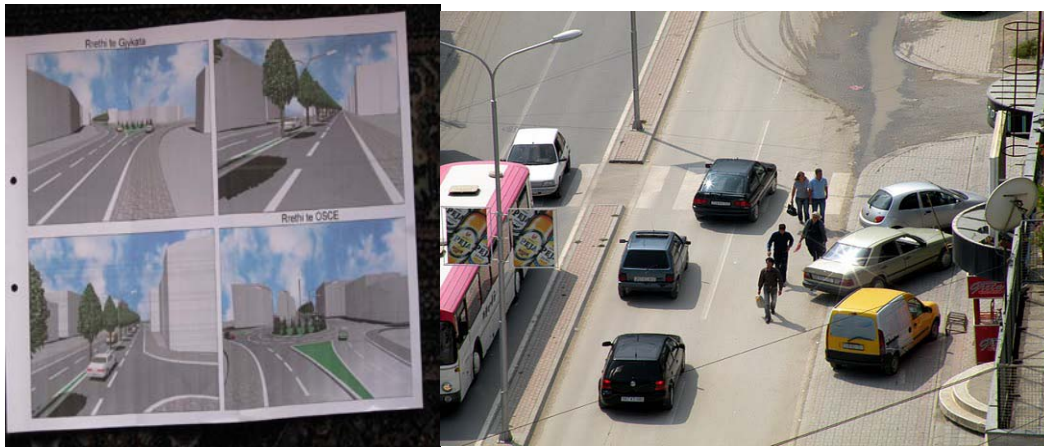


Fig. 1: 'Express road' style designed Queen Teuta road in Peja (left: the designers view, right: how it functions).

2.2 Object, mission and performers

In this paper an integrated approach of urban design of the public domain is developed, highlighting the layers multimodal mobility planning can provide for the design. The approach is shown on the basis of some cases for the city of Peja, elaborated within the frame of the 'MOBKOS' cooperation project.

The MOBKOS project (MOBKOS, 2012) (ELTIS, 2012) initiated a sustainable urban mobility planning process in Peja in cooperation with the municipal departments of urbanism and public works and indirectly also with UNHabitat that focused on the Korso city centre pedestrianization project. The MOBKOS project team consisted of Jos Zuallaert (Mobimind), project leader, prof. Dirk Lauwers (Ghent University and Artesis Antwerp University College), dr. Kobe Boussauw and researcher Reen Simoen (both Ghent University). This team paved the way for two design ateliers, respectively in September 2010 and September 2011 in Peja. Hereto three strategic locations in the urban network, namely the the **Railway Station Boulevard** and the **Haxhi Zeka Square**, as well as **Brigada Kosovare**, a district collector street within the Zatra living area, were selected.

The Flemish design team for the station boulevard consisted of Veerle Schoutteet, (urban design and spatial planning Master student Ghent University), Frederik Elsermans and Hans Van der Heyden (urban design and spatial planning Master students Artesis Antwerp University College). Members of the Flemish design team for Haxhi Zeka Square were Elke Durnez (urban design and spatial planning Master student Ghent University), Dries Ceuppens, Jeroen Sneyers and Nina Reyntjens (urban design and spatial planning Master students Artesis Antwerp University College). Nina Reyntjens elaborated also on the design for Brigada Kosovare, a district collector street in the Zatra settlement. Both design ateliers were coordinated by prof. Dirk Lauwers and Jos Zuallaert, project leader. The first atelier was also coordinated by dr. Kobe Boussauw.

The ateliers were organized in the offices of the Urban Planning Service of Peja city administration. The first one took place in September 2010, the second one in September 2011. Both ateliers lasted for two weeks.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sustainable urban mobility planning and design

'1 city, 2 hands, 10 fingers' is a metaphoric way of stating that a city that offers good practice solutions for its urban mobility (one hand) and for its public space (other hand) is a well managed and well functioning city:

- one hand is the urban mobility, transport network and urban mobility culture;
- the other hand is the public space or network of street and squares;

The body functions with both hands; so does the city.

While the 2 hands are the working programmes; the fingers are the strategic projects with which the common vision and goals become closer at reach. Both hands work in close coordination. Within the frame of the MOBKOS project (MOBKOS, 2012) the municipality of Peja in Kosovo is applying this, '1 city, 2 hands, 10 fingers' integrated approach.



Fig. 2: Banner of the MOBKOS project, based on the EU CIVITAS programme

The above banner represents the European promoted approach to urban mobility planning (CIVITAS, 2012) and consists of assets of eight key interrelated measures or *working areas*, all of them have been tested in the Demo Peja. All applications are largely documented on the MOBKOS website (MOBKOS, 2012).

Given the urban pattern and resulting from five surveys, it is indeed understood that Peja cannot match its urban quality and tourism ambition with ever growing traffic in town. As a result of the surveys the team acquired realistic data on urban travel per household, traffic volumes of all transport modes on peak hour, home to school trips, parking place occupation and turnovers, road accidents. A bottleneck analysis of traffic flows in Peja (2009) sparkedled the discussion about growing congestion and alternative urban (mobility) scenarios and measures.

Five *strategic actions* (as the fingers of one hand) have been selected namely :

1. Road categorization and diverting transit traffic through the bypass road
2. Parking management,
3. Raising awareness for sustainable urban travel,
4. Traffic management and
5. Preserving and promoting walking and cycling in town.

The structured road categorisation system and the urban parking strategy are determining elements of the public space design. Road categorisation (D. LAUWERS, D. GILLIS, 2010) refers to the classical functional urban roads and streets hierarchy as well as to urban design categories as shopping and green boulevards, residential areas... (see fig. 3). So the *'link' function and the 'place' function* have to be considered (P. JONES et al., 2007) in defining a *road category*. For Peja an inner ring system, radial collectors and bypass roads were identified as the main elements in urban road *'linking'* network. On the lower scale loops and district collectors give acces to neighborhoods and urban districts (see fig. 3, right).

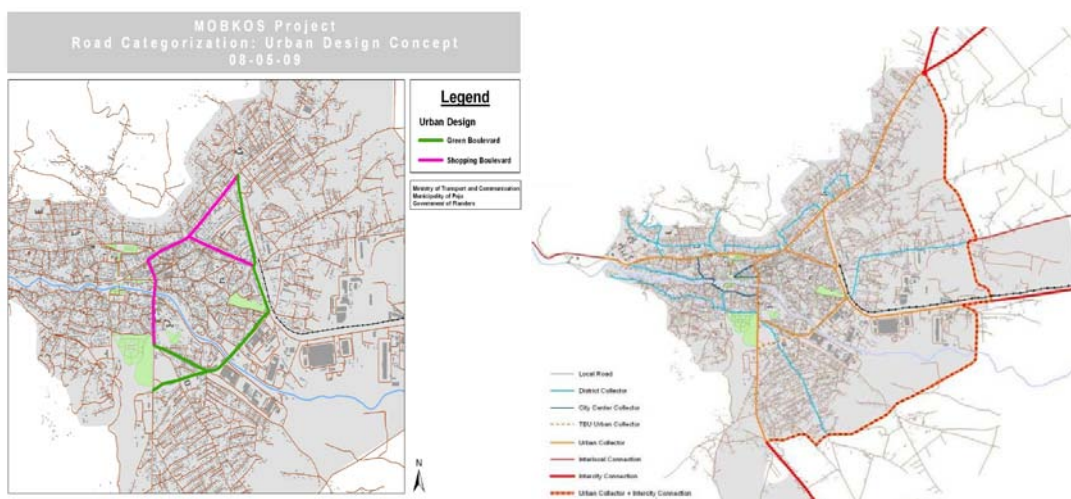


Fig. 3: Peja road categorizations (left: boulevard concepts for inner ring, right: urban network hierarchy)

The *'place' function* is aimed at by developing a *'boulevard'* concept for the inner ring and *'shared spaces'* for the more local streets (see fig. 3, left). For car traffic also the parking strategy results in a typology parking facilities, framed within a parking management scheme (see fig. 4). Additionally a *'soft spine'* (see fig. 5), accommodating planned walking and biking routes in Peja and a new system of urban bus routes (see fig. 6)

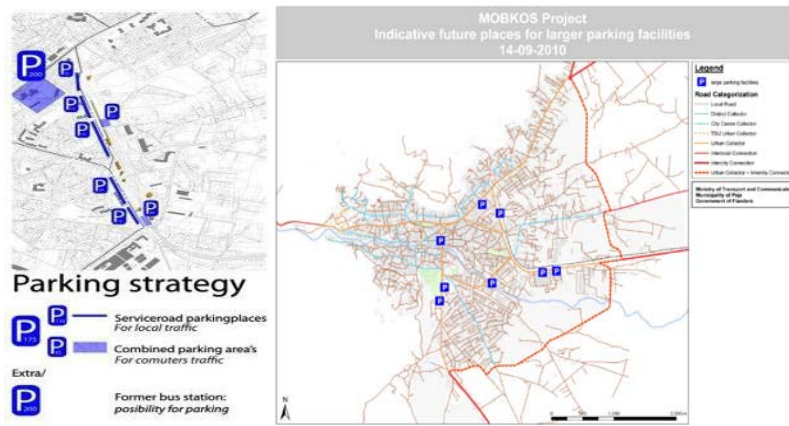


Fig. 4: Peja parking strategy concept (left: at district level – railway station area, right urban scale level)

are important layers of the design. The *soft spine* is an urban planning concept as well as a mobility concept. Indeed this spine connects the strategic green and natural areas in the city. So it can be seen as an ecological urban structural planning layer as well (B. SECCHI, P. VIGANO, 2009).

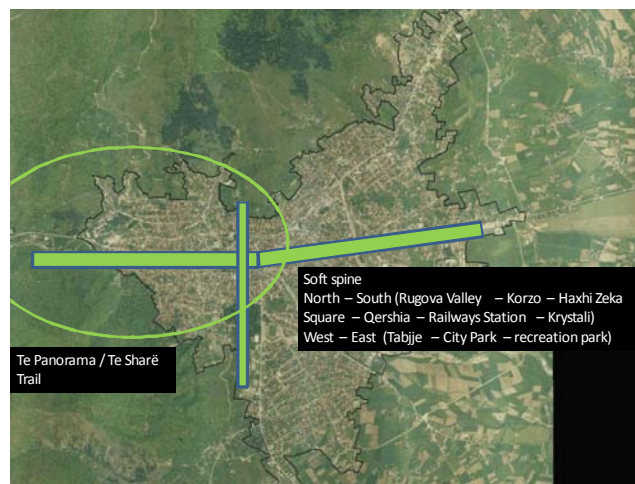


Fig. 5: Soft spine



Fig. 6: Proposed urban bus routes scheme

All of the above strategic planning frames are particularly relevant for raising the quality of the public space. One of the first and most important decisions taken by the Municipality was the car restriction for the city centre. The project of the car free **Korzo** was elaborated by UNHABITAT – Peja and the Department of Urbanism and supported by the Flemish team. The immediate success of the pedestrianization of the KORZO had some remarkable effects (see fig. 7). There’s a willingness to continue the public space rehabilitation programme towards other urban areas in Peja.



Fig. 7: Korzo: a former main car axis, now the urban meeting and promenading area in Peja

3.2 Research and design ateliers

The design projects were elaborated by a mixed international and local team, working together in design ateliers on the premises of the Municipality, each of them lasting 2 weeks. They were held respectively in September 2010 and September 2011. During these atelier weeks several feedback moments with the Urban Planning Department, Public Works UN Habitat and other stakeholders were organized. In particular Mr Modest Gashi, the young urban planner of Peja made his mark on the designs. The final results were presented to the directors of the Municipal departments of Urban Planning and Public Works and other stakeholders (such as the director of Kosovo Railways).

A cyclic and multilevel design methodology was used. Different scale levels (urban scale, district scale and micro scale) and urban structure elements (nodes, lines and areas) were considered, top down and bottom up approaches alternated. The urban mobility and spatial planning provides the starting point for formulating a vision of the form, dimensions, significance and use of the places to be designed. Controversely a design can also begin with the vulnerable aspects of urban life: they include, for example people walking, promenading, meeting, biking... and those elements that provide the perceived quality of a place, such as historical buildings, trees or other elements of natural beauty, vistas, Boudewijn Bach calls a design approach that starts with this vulnerable aspects a *'reversed design'* (B. BACH, 2006).

4 THE MOBKOS STRATEGIC PUBLIC SPACE APPLICATIONS IN PEJA

4.1 The Green Railway Station Boulevard

The 'Green Boulevard' design foresees new urban development in the railway station and bus terminal area. It was also recommended to put much more emphasis on the urban link between the Krystali district and Peja centre across the railway station emplacement. With the Green Boulevard project, MOBKOS re-introduced the *'boulevard' concept* and design in Peja. The design proposal (see fig. 8) combines central lanes for through car traffic with separated parallel lanes for buses – including a bus stop- and for local car traffic, including parking. But also walking and biking is facilitated. Above all the design seeks not only after modal urban mobility but also after an environment aiming at contributing to quality of urban life. That is why the boulevard design is combined with the proposal for a reconversion of a part of the railway yard into a park.

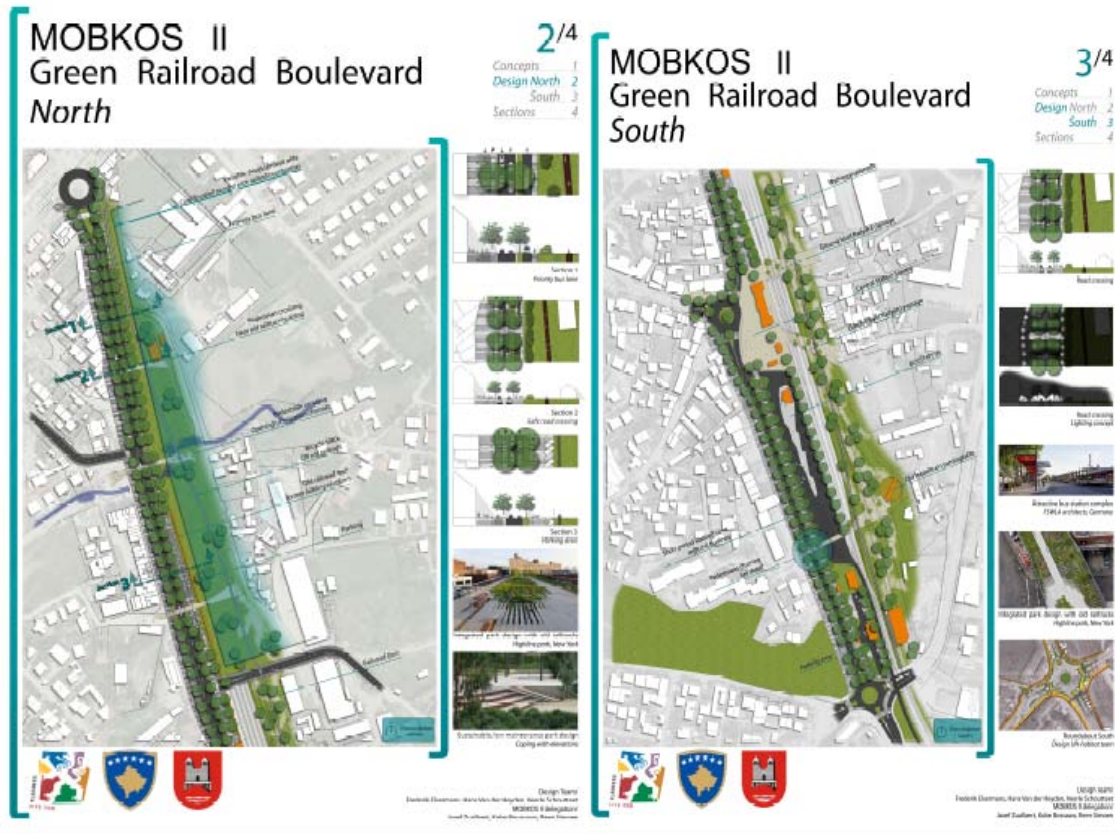


Fig. 8: Green Railway Station boulevard design

4.2 Brigada Kosovare, a district collector street in Zatra living area

The design of the Brigada Kosovare is based on the ‘shared space’ concept. It tries to valorize the central water canal, and the natural and recreational potential it offers. Also the steep topography and the spontaneous settlement structure are important preconditions. The design aims at an harmonious sharing of the public space by urban (mini)buses, local car traffic, biking trail users, pedestrians, children playing and people of all ages promenading or just sitting along the canal. It rejects an urban bypass road concept, that has been considered for several years by the Municipality. This bypass concept is in no way compatible with the carrying capacity of this delicate environment.

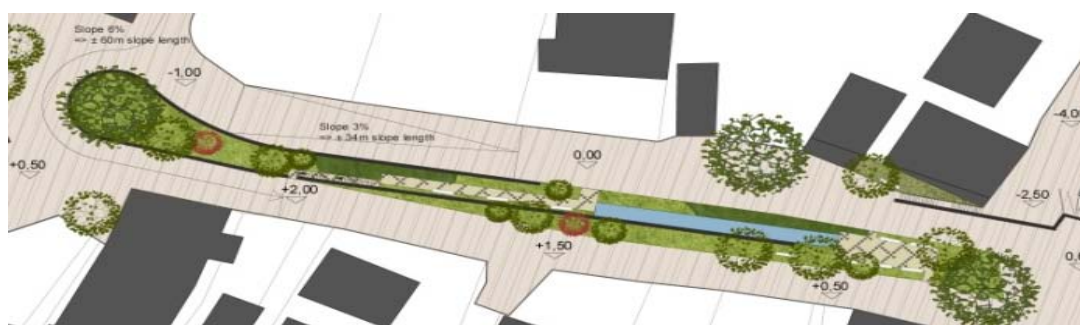


Fig. 9: Brigada Kosovare design

4.3 Haxhi Zeka Square

The third strategic project is central Haxhi Zeka square that is to link the Korzo with the old market (Qershia) and Krystali new urban development. It is seen as a strategic project because the traditional commercial, cultural and residential zone in the old Peja has to challenge the new commercial and urban developments at the edge of town. The design team expressed the ambition to expand the pedestrianised public space in Peja over a larger area and build step by step an urban spine throughout the inner city. Hereto one also needs the introduction of urban buses and a innovative parking scheme. Another ambition was to create an urban river bank in the north and a green river bank on the south side of the river. The design also recognizes the importance of keeping the historical references in the area. And last but not least the whole

project can and has to be implemented in phases. With these ambitions the Haxhi Zeka square was redesigned using the *cyclic, multilayer methodology* described in this paper. If implemented the city center of Peja will look a lot different in a time span of a couple of years.



Fig. 9: Haxhi Zeka square design

5 CONCLUSION

The design and research ateliers were the capstone of the MOBKOS project in Peja. A cyclic design process alternating the urban mobility planning strategic frame as well as the Municipal Development plan in a top down approach with ‘reversed design’, starting from the vulnerable aspects of urban life, was used. Of course this included also a multimodal approach, including not only car traffic but also public transport, walking and cycling. As the end products of the MOBKOS project in general and the design ateliers in particular were highly appreciated by the Municipal administration and political decision makers a perspective has been created for a new – less car dominated – design approach for Peja, and maybe for Kosovo and Albania. The methodology used, combined with the planning and design skills of the MOBKOS joint expert team involving students from Flemish universities, offer an opportunity for other cities and towns in the region. Maybe the MOBALB project in Shkoder will offer the next challenge.

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