

# Urban transformation of Miroslav Krleza Street, Skopje

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## **Abstract**

After the process of privatization in the 1990s, each Municipality in the city of Skopje inherited the responsibility of maintaining the public space. As a capital city in post-state socialist system, in the period of transition toward a politically pluralistic society, the city of Skopje became a subject to physical and social decay, due to poor maintenance, lack of renewal, and instates migration in the 1960s and 1970s. The character of the renewal plan mainly depends on the organizational structure of Municipalities. Urban renewal usually takes place in public-owned properties on public-owned land, mainly with public financing depending on local budget. Following the result-based management, Municipalities rely on a nationally approved plan. Therefore, the renewal of public space is not 'motivated' by any processes managed between stakeholders' interests, and it is not supported by any private sector interests. Engaging of different stakeholders in this project each group has different benefits. Since citizens pay taxes to participate in the state budget, they should also be involved in the decision-making process considering renewal of their neighbourhoods. By accepting an academic research project, the Municipality of Centar - Skopje presents the capacity for Process Management (PM) in accordance with city planning. They express willingness to manage the municipality problems on a local scale, in accordance with the global societal transformations toward resilient cities. During the research process, students involved realized the complexity of residents' psychological correlation with their real estate value and urban planning regulations. On the other hand, they play the role of facilitators between Municipalities as investors, managing the process of creating project paperwork by the operator/contractor. This research paper presents a participatory action project as a method of investigating urban renewal processes. To widen the scope of the investigation, it was realised that facility management is transversal between legal procedures and coherent urban design. This survey presents a social study method, prompting community participation. In the period of decentralization, the responsibilities from the central state were transferred to local governments. The Municipality of Centar, Skopje became the one with the largest budget in the Republic of North Macedonia. Their authorities became the most recognizable

when contribution in the public sector is considered. Urban renewal is recognized as a contemporary concept in transitional societies, in comparison with the 'socialistic' era. It became a strategic policy whenever European integration comes into question. The willingness to cooperate prevails pure political interests when public opinion becomes important in each election cycle.

### Keywords

urban renewal, process management, resilient cities, participatory action

## 1. Introduction

As a capital city in post-state socialist system, in the period of transition toward a politically pluralistic society, the city of Skopje became a subject to physical and social decay, due to poor maintenance, lack of renewal, and instates migration in the 1960s and 1970s. The character of the renewal plan mainly depends on the organizational structure of Municipalities. Urban renewal usually takes place in public-owned properties on public-owned land, mainly with public financing depending on local municipality budget plan.

Post socialist countries have inherited complex urban and building situation regarding the owner properties. In order to realise certain urban plan, local authorities have to expropriate land from the owner. In the period of 1980's and 90's, residential buildings become the subject of privatisation where public buildings and traffic infrastructure belong to jurisdiction of local Municipalities.

Following the result-based management, Municipalities rely on a nationally approved budget plan in construction interventions. Since the renewal of public space is not 'motivated' by any processes managed between stakeholders' interests, and it is not supported by any private sector interests Municipalities are the subject of criticism among the citizens. The result of this transactional logic between local Municipality, design engineers and contractor are usually maintaining public buildings, squares or streets instead of using opportunity to reinvent or improve urban and real communal problems. When the desire for money dominates, then the building culture is organized so that "money" - the modern financial institutions that control credit and to a large extent the standards for building itself - is in charge. In all these cases, fundamental decisions about building make links between society as a whole and the building culture itself (Davis, 2008, p.92). As a result, the citizen's reaction of this procedure of reconstruction is usually negative. Maintaining and reconstruction in public domain, needs public opinion especially when urban renewal comes to question. Municipalities organize public exposure of their plans, organize certain workshops, conduct surveys and in some cases

involve experts in the field. This complex situation is a result of awareness of authorities since they are elected every five years. Partnership plays a key role and is particularly important when considering the scale of neighbourhood within cities. Neighbourhoods are made up by different partnerships, which include residents, commercial industry and political/municipality representatives. The challenge of understanding social needs within the complex environment of the city lays in the intangibility and subjectivity of needs in communities living in different areas of the city (TemeljotovSalaj et al. 2020).

Before the state transition period from socialist to plural society, public space was mainly designed conventionally prioritizing the car traffic and treated as infrastructure. During the transition period, as the main Municipality of Skopje, the Municipality of Centar begin to change the character from uniform treatment of streets from dominantly car traffic toward pedestrian traffic. Public squares become more public also. This contemporary treatment of public space was introduced in order to create difference from other Municipalities local centres in the city. These activities of redesign the public space triggered participatory actions between local authorities and academia, nongovernment organisations to reach the interest of all involved parties in the process. The participatory actions become necessity in any activity regarding public domain.

## **2. Theoretical approach in the research**

### ***The culture of building* by Howard Davis**

In order to explain the meaning of publicness in built environment in particular society it is important to explain that deep interlock between community and environment of identification. When speaking about the correlation between the culture of building and wider society, according to Davis (2008, p.90) in most cultures, building is marked by ceremonies that help reinforce the culture's identity. The persistence of such rituals is indicative of people's need to use the activity of building to reinforce the deeper meaning of their culture.

In the state socialist system from the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> WW till the independence, Macedonia was developed as a modern country adopting contemporary movements in architecture. Industrialisation and modernisation of civil engineering prevail building industry in the country. That period creates discontinuity from the previous building practice and architectural style from 19 century. In the following socialist era the society as culture of building was institutionalised through architecture. That period was characterised by different types and models different from nineteenth and early twentieth century building language. The connection between the building culture and the aesthetic sensibility of the culture at large does not happen only through analogy of global movements trends (Davis, 2008, p. 97).

Today in contemporary society when financial interest is on the first place the common approach toward building is based on gaining profit. This kind of dissociation of building from societal reality results to speculative architecture oriented toward itself. Banks and building societies-began to depend on that development to keep their own businesses going. Building therefore began to become instrumental to purposes completely outside the building culture itself. When the assumption where profit in its own nature is purpose, building activities are socially insignificant where the architecture is shallow in their form and meaning (Davis, 2008, p.93).When the building or public space is created once, they become an artefact and express the meaning, aspirations, and social order of a culture. Like the building culture that produces them, they are at the same time autonomous and interdependent with the culture where they become from (Davis, 2008, p.95).

In the process of urban renewal local authorities anticipate the necessity of bringing identity of the city back again by transforming the character of the public spaceinvolving local neighbourhoods in the building process. In that sense Davis (2008) states that organization of architectural space and the organization of the culture that produced architectural space were both part of a phenomenon that was reordering society during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, putting people into an explicitly understood place. Actual building practice is based on previous results where lack of research and awareness of historical context and buildings of public interest are barely treated. The organization and design of today's buildings parallel the organization and structure of the building culture that produces them. The discontinuous and fragmented character of the contemporary built world corresponds to similar qualities in the building production process. If this relationship is not merely a coincidence, then it stands to reason that improvements to the built world depend on fundamental changes to the building culture that produces it (Davis, 2008, p.100).

### ***Urban and social transformation***

The post-state socialist system continues today as a transition periodtoward contemporary global society. Open trade market attracts investment that used to be under state control in the previous state system. The first and most coming investments that affected the urban space arecommercial buildings such as shopping centres and car reseller stores. They have established consumeristic cultural habits adopted by people very fast without any hesitation. These buildings are convenient because they fulfil our expectations. The aspects of losing social identity from inherited cultural patterns is psychological terms is explained by Davis (2008) in the following sentences... when we enter one of these places, even one that we have not been in before, it is familiar and we know how to behave in it. This familiarity, however, is not the same as deep feeling.They do not result in buildings that deeply touch us.Most people's relationships to these places are functional rather than emotional.The idea of the building as an artefact that has affective possibilities is absent.When the whole building becomes purely an expression of abstract need and vehicle toward profit, and very little is left

that connects people to a familiar past, there may be a large gap between the deep feeling buildings can arouse and the way they satisfy real or perceived abstract needs. The absence of **deep feeling** toward buildings is connected to the fact that decisions about the design of buildings happen in abstract ways: there is no strongly held image or goal to which decisions can be referred, so decision-making itself loses an emotional center (Davis. 2008, p.178). Besides the transformation of traditional way of living in the city the new lifestyle changed the physical environment too. The ability of architectural works to evoke real affection, are not limited to very old or faraway buildings. The prevalent building types of modern building cultures fail to connect people to their past, to their place, and to each other in a genuine way argue Davis (2008). When the built urban environment becomes fragmented in style and architectural language, people begin to create emotional and social distance with their place of identification. It is not the case when a shopping mall is in question. If they disappeared suddenly, we would miss them, but we would not remember them as a part of our individual past.

The importance of building public spaces and building with social significance for community is to establish continuity in building culture which share architectural knowledge. An important part of this knowledge consists of rules about building form itself. These rules are expressed as types or patterns - commonly understood configurations of building arrangement or construction that characterize the buildings of the culture (Davis, 2008, p. 131).

Transformation in the culture of building is unavoidable and usually leads toward coherency of program and architectural and urban form. The most important aspect of urban continuity is sustainable building and planning. The task of the present generation is enabling the next generation to fulfil their own needs in the future. Most significant aspect to preserve inherited quality is that quality to sustain. Through the patterns of cultural behaviour, culture of building and furthermore verbal talks about the places in the city, transformation becomes socially sustainable. According to Davis (2008) today, rigid zoning rules may prevent useful innovation. However, it has proven almost impossible for such changes to be introduced within zoning laws that require a strict separation of uses - an example of how typological innovation that may have been natural in another time is prevented by the institutional structure of the contemporary building culture (Davis, 2008, p. 153).

There is a necessity of changing building rules according sustainability preservation goals in a way to avoid speculative architecture and city planning. Architects and city planners, in a way to fulfil investors' profits, could usually become part of this urban decay. Urban renewal of city fragments with particular new scopes regarding neighbourhood necessities are tools for transformation according sustainable preservation. In that sense Davis (2008) will state: when the rules that are known and shared about buildings - the patterns and types, knowledge of craft techniques and commonly used autochthone building materials - are appropriate, there

is a good fit between buildings and their context. As we have seen, such a fit does not happen automatically but is supported by the free movement of ideas and by the lack of inappropriate restraints against making good rules work. When rules are appropriate, they lead to everyday buildings that enhance culture and place and evoke strong positive feelings and deep affection toward them (Davis, 2008, p.154).

### ***City as an artefact***

Modern architectural movement and urban planning for decades has emphasized individual creativity established insubjective abstraction of reality. Also, rationalism and functionalism were the inventions regarding to social dwelling and building industry. Standardisation was account dwellers as a statistical number. But effective craftsmanship requires a response to reality, not to an abstraction of reality. In the case of a building culture, whose job is the creation not only of individual buildings but of the city as a whole, this means that its various institutions need to be working in ways that are consistent with each other, that represent some common intention with respect to the reality of the built result, and that can respond to the entire reality of places and situations (Davis, 2008, p. 237).

The city of Skopje through its history inherited buildings and urban fragments from different building styles and planning regulations. But the **city as entirety is an artefact** as much as the building. Local authorities play an important role according the planning of the city. The institution such as main City architect was abandoned since the particular Ministry and city Major took the power to care for the Municipalities build environment. This particular fragmentation of power reflected the coherent image of the city. In this sense Davis (2008) states... if the building culture is fragmented - if its various institutions are working at cross purposes, even if they are individually effective - there is no reason to believe that "craftsmanship" can be effectively applied to the artefact as a whole.

It all depends on architects, city planners and civil engineers to act as an autonomous profession by resisting the pressure of investors and obsolete building regulations. They should adopt the fact that the reality of building culture is the creator of the city. This is the certain way that built artefacts will be socially significant for the community where its descent from. The cityscape should be modest and readable for its citizens. Like in craftsmanship objects the city should be described in few sentences and as Davis (2008) states, the city is built through the culturally shared competence of craftsmen, not the individual invention of architects.

### ***Design process based on objective reality***

Architects who are concerned with objective reality usually inquire design participative process in their work. They emphasize preparatory research before they start to articulate the

design project. The project starts with discussion with future dwellers on a local scale. Overall number of people, even educated ones, expresses their visions in verbal images. According to Davis (2008) these images, taken together, formed a strong overall vision for the project and guided the development of the design when it began, on the actual site. This **overall vision** guaranteed that everyone involved in the project was seeing the same thing and that the real wishes of the community would be translated into buildings.

Common people who are not educated about the role of architects in city building make the analogy with craftsmanship. The most fundamental characteristic of craftsmanship is that thought ("design") and action ("building") are so intimately related that they do not represent two separate phases of a project (Davis, 2008, p. 246). This process of articulating the residents' vision gives the architect an opportunity of creating program which represents the shared values of a community. People are not trained for creating mental images of something which follows in reality. This process inquires the sense of participant's belonging of when the building or public space will be finalised. But unlike modern architectural programs, which tend to be more abstract and leave the vision of the whole in the control of the architect, this program resulted in architect and client working toward the same goal long before the actual design began. This drawing out of the reality of the community, culminating in a program that represented a vision of its life, followed by analogous work with respect to the design of the site (Davis, 2008, p.248).

### ***Tactile sensibility by Anni Albers***

Speaking of architecture as an urban craftsmanship the question of material and constructing patterns becomes relevant. According to previous discussion that aesthetic qualities arise from culture of building, the role of an architect is to recognize particular patterns of subliminal and coherent work. According to Albers, (1974) surface quality of **material**, that is, matter, being mainly a **quality of appearance**, is an aesthetic quality and therefore a medium of the artist; while quality of **inner structure** is, above all, a matter of **function** and therefore the concern of the scientist and engineer.

The genuine aspects of architectural design are founded on its dual nature of signifier and signified. In order to have cultural meaning for particular cultural group, architectural form has been developed in particular styles through the history. The architectural form as signifier has the symbolic meaning described by signified meaning of that form. For instance, if we say the paving is made by ceramic tiles, usually they signify modest bathroom or kitchen. But if we assume that the bathroom or kitchen is tiled with marble or travertine, we assume immediately that these spaces belong to some luxurious hotel or baroque palace (Eko, 1973). The intention in architectural conceptualisation through material surface and form/shape creates the communication relationship between the work and its recipients. Material surface and its particular formal properties could become the phenomenon of particular cultural

identification. Beside these semiotic aspects of architectural language, there is also an engineering approach.

In the period of the modernisation and industrialisation of craftsmanship such as weaving industry, design of textile patterns become part of the modern movement in sewing industry. This new era of industrial design introduced important techniques in the architectural discourse.

The experience from weaving industry influenced the engineering logic also. Albers (1974) will state that sometimes **material surface, together with material structure are the main components of the work**; in textile works, for instance, specifically in weavings or, on another scale, in works of architecture. This new aesthetic experience to this overlapping of outer and inner characteristics in a work is the overlapping of artistic, scientific and technological interests on the part of the weaver or the architect (Albers, 1974, p. 63).

These experiences drawn from the weaving industrial design has analogy with vernacular culture of building where traditional way of building is spread through the generations without architects (Hartmann, 1979). The analogy with construction logic according to Albers (1974) is obvious between building and waving, where the similarities in the **structure, as related to function**, needs our intellect to construct it or, analytically to decipher it. **Matter**, on the other hand, is mainly **non-functional**, non-utilitarian, and in that respect, like colour, it cannot be experienced intellectually. It has to be approached, non-analytically, receptively. It asks to be enjoyed and valued for no other reasons than its intriguing performance of a play of surface (Albers, 1974, p. 63).

The culture of building is based upon objective reality as sediment of collective experience. We touch things to assure ourselves of reality, we touch the objects of our love, we touch the things we form, states Albers (1974). The analogy between perceptions of touch in waving is similar to creating paving on public urban squares and painted facades of the oriental buildings. Two aspects characterized tactile sensibility; first, activating of our latent perceptivity of matter, second, how a proposed design will look in its tactile properties argue Albers (1974). The coherency between the knowledge of textile construction as essential for matter effect and organisation of a weaving as a whole is complementary to the architectural principles of design process. Such aspects explained by Christopher Alexander are fundamental principles of good form introduced in architecture through longer period of time (Alexander, 2002). Different surface "qualities" leads to the use of such qualities graphically produced that is modulated line. It has a structural appearance and can be used to produce the illusion of tactile surfaces (Albers, 1974, p. 65). An architect is a craftsman, the process of creating a good city form relies upon the ability and knowledge to connect people with the work, built artefact or place.



### 3. Current research methods/techniques

#### ***Process management (PM)***

The purpose of involving students in the research process is to train their ability to consider the complexity and specificity of urban transformation of Miroslav Krleža street in Skopje as a case study. Besides, the role of the students in the project was to act as facility managers who can enhance the level of participation, by building on variables such as trust, efficacy, competence, responsiveness and legitimacy (Temeljotov Salaj et al., 2020) between local authorities and dwellers.

On the other side, according to dialog and brief survey of satisfactory future character of the street, the students should estimate the next step regarding the architectural and design interventions. Besides that students investigate residents' psychological correlation with their real estate value and urban planning regulations consider their rights. They express willingness to manage the municipality problems on a local scale, in accordance with the global societal transformations toward resilient cities. On the other hand, students play the role of **facilitators** between Municipalities as investors, managing the process of creating project design by the operator/contractor.

The process management relies upon understanding of cultural and habitual meaning of space by the community members. It strongly relies upon culture of building and identity differences of habitants on a local scale. On the other hand, the public space influences the living habits of its residents. This complex dialog was the problem to solve in participatory action held between Municipality of Centar and students from the Faculty of Architecture in Skopje. Considering the disparate understanding of same problem each part of stakeholder, the students were facing reality as generators of architectural design, recognising the nature of their profession regarding financing, client, building codes and public meaning of the space.

#### ***Urban Facility Management (Urban FM)***

Sustainability as mentioned earlier depends on global state politics implemented on a local scale. Transformations of urban and architectural artefacts are unavoidable, therefore have to be socially and environmentally sustainable. This is why refurbishment projects are important as the communities exist and may already have an established culture that require certain social needs to be recognized in sustainable refurbishment, but at the same time requires change that encourages sustainable behaviour for a future oriented approach on how areas evolve (Temeljotov Salaj et al., 2020). Urban renewal is a transformational method that fulfils the ongoing change in the culture of building.

#### 4. Transformative concept

The urban transformation of Miroslav Krleža Street recognizes it as a semi-pedestrian street, meaning that the whole area belonging to the street has no elevation jumps. This method of transcription recognizes strong centres as focal points, tied together coherently, defined by clear boundaries. Every part of the street is treated separately, depending on its location and functional aspects, altogether a concept with no leftovers.

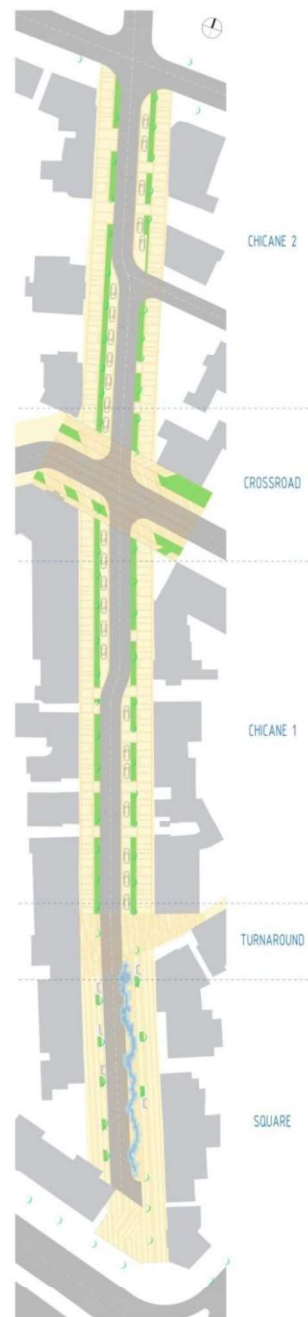
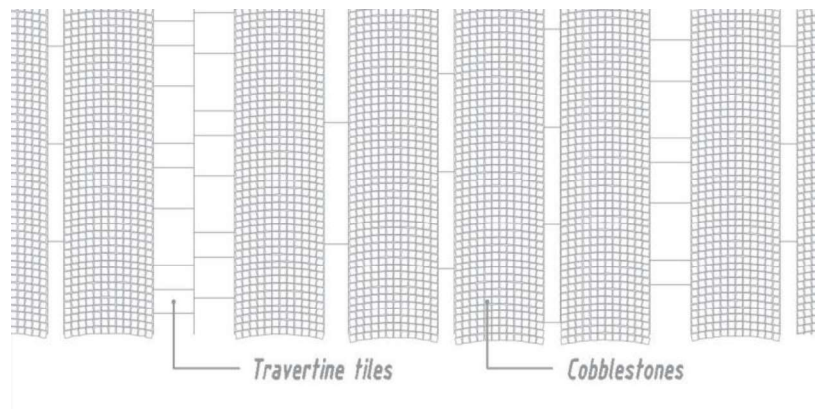


Figure 1 – Miroslav Krleža Street

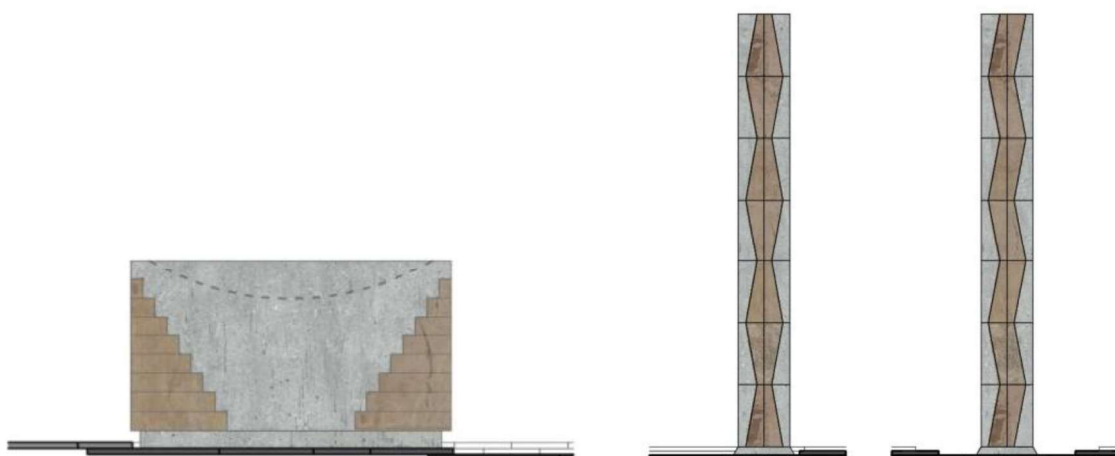
### ***Public Square – a linear concept strengthen by tradition***

Following the urban regulations of the Municipality, stating that the maximum length of a dead-end street must not surpass 120 meters, the appearance of a public square at the southern part of the street was inevitable. Treated as an open public area, the concept recognizes a longitudinal pattern created with an alternating repetition of only two materials – travertine tiles and cobblestones. With the application of this traditional pattern, recognized in folk embroidery, the goal is to create a close historical bond. (Fig. 2)



*Figure 2 – Pavement Pattern*

The square is also comprised by certain amenities that shape the place and define its character. The southern end of the square is enriched by the appearance of a circular stage and a drinking water fountain. The falling water flows north, inside a two-level channel alongside the square, defining its own pattern depending on the amount of accumulated water. The stream ends with a 3 meters high obelisk as a new symbol of the place (Fig 3). Besides creating a synergetic area embracing social interaction, the flowing stream of shallow water acts like a natural cooling system in the warm summer days in the city of Skopje. (Fig 4).



*Figure 3 – Fountain (left), Obelisk side and front view (right)*

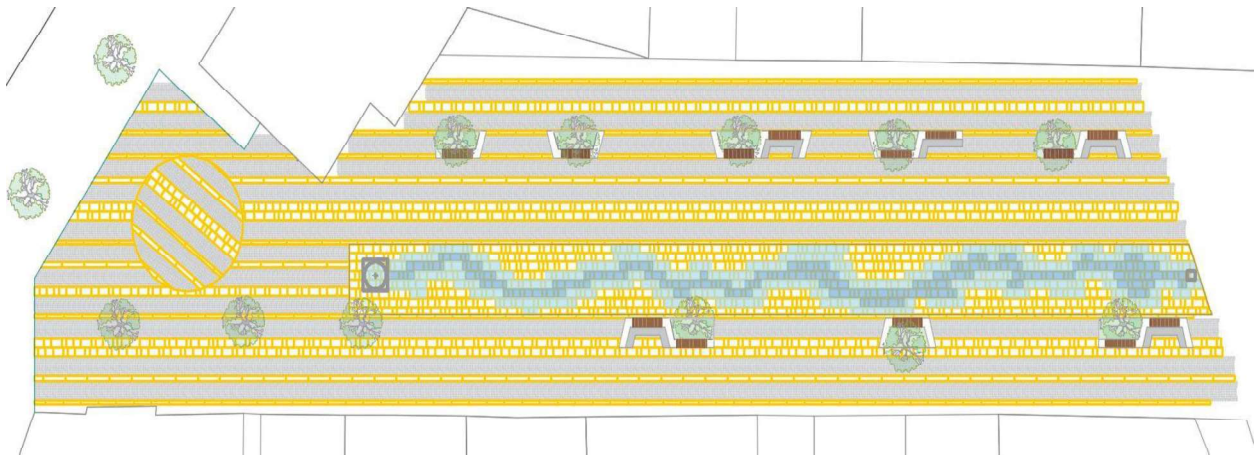


Figure 4 – New Public Square

### Turnaround

As a result of an organic network of urban development, Debar Maalo is a neighborhood full of intertwined alleys that create crossroads as they overlap. Considering functional aspects, a dead-end street should have a turnaround point, with proportions suitable for an emergency vehicle to have an uninterrupted operation. The positioning of that point is defined by the opening angle of a pedestrian alley from the eastern side of Miroslav Krlezha Street. This particular area has a shape shifting pattern comprised by the same two materials – travertine tiles and cobblestones. (Fig. 5)

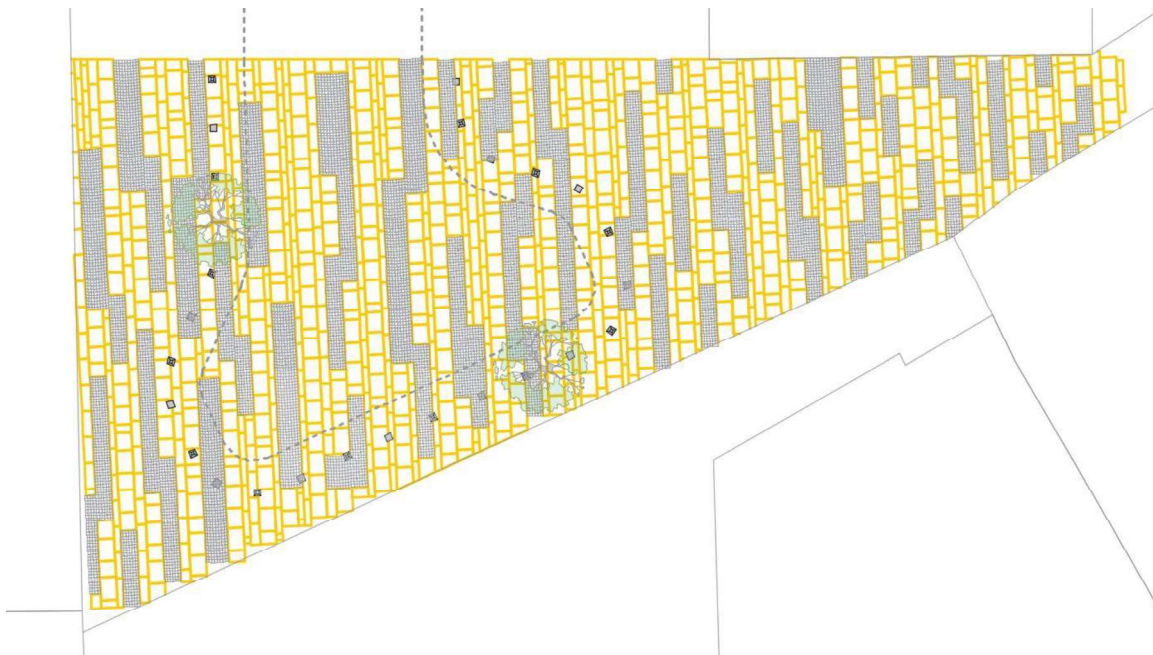
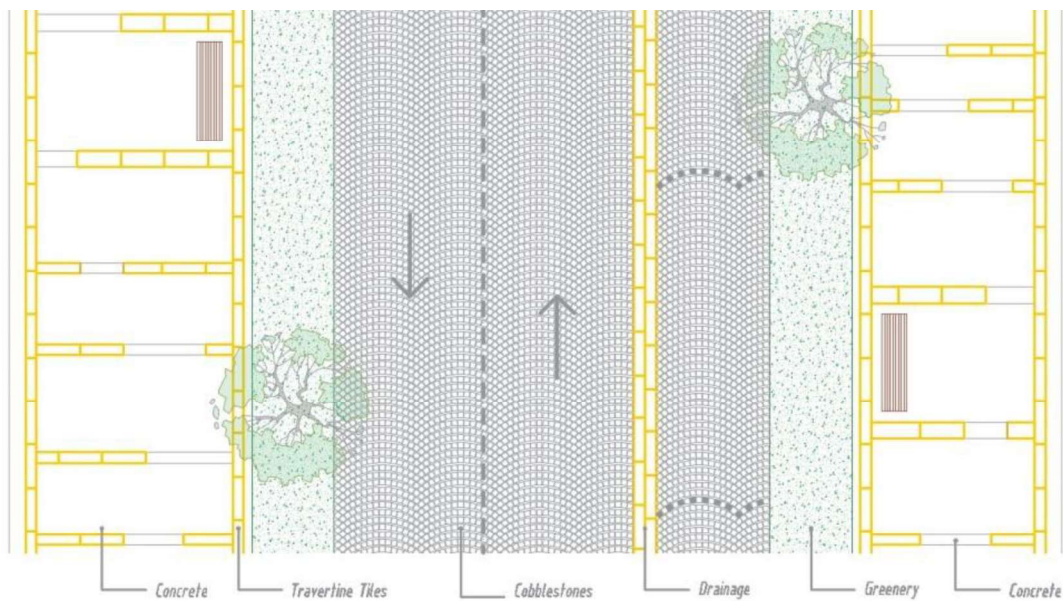


Figure 5 – Turnaround

### ***Chicane 1 and 2***

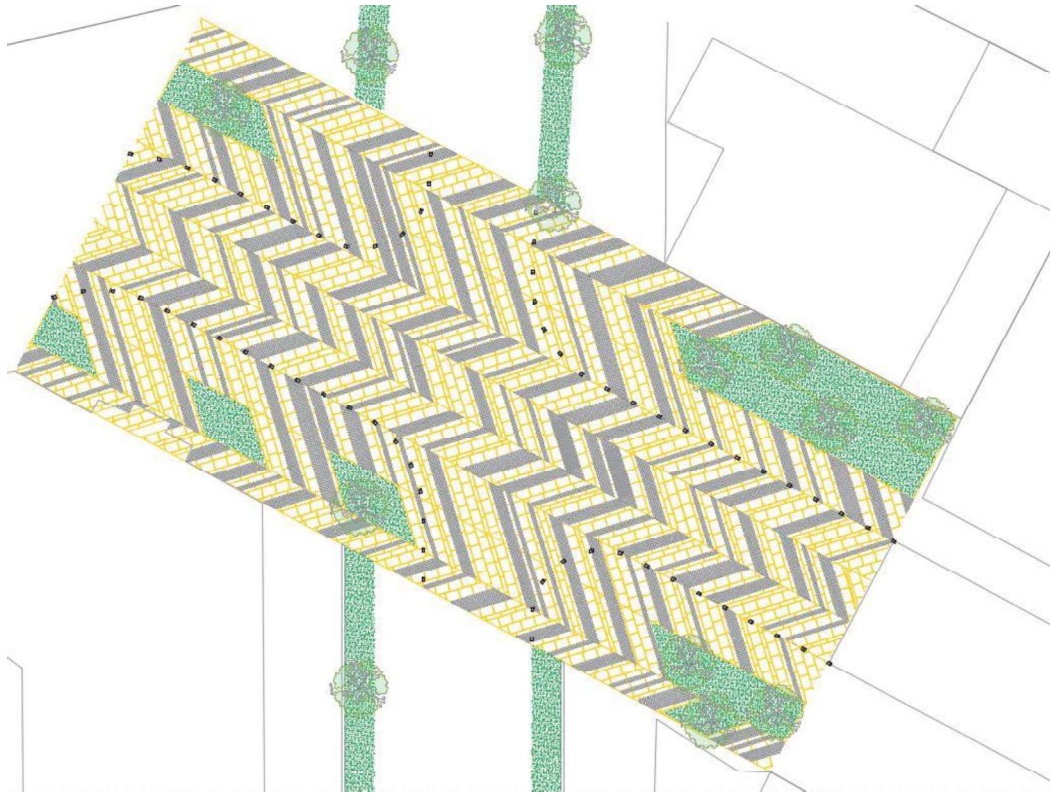
This part of the street is comprised by two traffic lanes and one stationary lane, in the middle, bounded by hedgerow greenery and a pedestrian-only patio on both sides, all while every part of the street is grounded on the same level (Fig. 6). Emphasizing pedestrian movement and safety measures, the street is diverted – as a driver reaches halfway the street a chicane occurs, with the intention of slowing traffic down. The sidewalks have a dynamic pattern – rectangular shapes poured in concrete that are framed by travertine tiles. Each horizontal travertine line has a missing piece replaced with concrete which is alternately repeating, creating a wave-like path for the user.



*Figure 6*

### ***Crossroad***

As a strongly expressed center, this part of the street merges chicane 1 and 2 and intersects with a subsidiary street. Embracing folk embroidery, the pavement gets a traditional treatment, while marking the direction of movement for vehicles coming from the side street (Fig. 7). The usage of the same two materials in the emphasis of each center of the street, defines the architectural language of the authors.



*Figure 7 – Crossroad*

## **5. Discussion**

A home is the place of intimacy and describes human's individual understanding of the notion of dwelling. On the other hand, the city public space is a domain of cultural identification of particular community. Public space is created to last and through its material properties, configuration, physical proportions and tactile sensibility of the surface, resembles a transversal, between cultural past and present. The process of creation of good city form is in relation to the culture of building of particular community. Including habitants to participate in that process of creation strengthens the bond between the individual, and his feeling about that form or place. By engaging in the decision-making process, people realize their visions articulated through program. The aim of the research project presented in this work is to describe the design process which begins with understanding the problem of transformation, the dweller's vision of the street on a local scale but at the same time to meet the building standards. The aim of this research is to participate toward knowledge about the culture of building.

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