

# Disability and Public Space – Case Studies of Prishtina and Prizren

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## Abstract

Independent movement is a precondition for independent living and full participation of disabled citizens, which is guaranteed by the United Nations Convention and applicable laws of the Republic of Kosovo. Disabled citizens should have the equal right of access to public spaces as all other citizens. Discrimination occurs when they are not treated equally with others. Denial or restriction of access to public spaces represents limitation of basic human rights. This research is part of a broader study on public space and accessibility for disabled and aged persons in Prishtina and Prizren, which final purpose is setting principles and guidelines for designing future inclusive public spaces that offer basic conditions for disabled and aged population in cities in Kosovo. To date, the focus on the matters related to disability and accessibility was centred on isolated buildings. With this research, among other things I would like to shift the focus to issues related to accessibility and public spaces and the city design in general. The present article focuses on a research which objective is to identify the major problems arising from bad planning, design and management of the city, that results in manifold barriers disabled people confront on daily basis when trying to access and navigate public spaces in Prishtina and Prizren.

For the purpose of research two surveys identifying physical barriers that impede the movement of different disability groups in public spaces in Prishtina and Prizren were conducted in November and December 2013. The methodology of the survey is based on walking along the trail of ~ 1.5 km with representatives of seven different categories of disabled persons in Prishtina and 12 categories in Prizren. All through the movement through the selected paths, the encountered physical barriers in public spaces were marked on the map, analysed in terms of spatial and physical characteristics, presented graphically and quantified based on the typology of disability. As a result of these two surveys, two maps containing barriers and illustrations of various obstacles disabled people met during the survey. Analysis of the results of two surveys helped in drawing some general recommendations that have to be taken in consideration when planning and designing inclusive public spaces.

Keywords:	Public space, Persons with disability, Physical barriers, Mapping
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## 1. Introduction

The built environment can contribute to a more equal, inclusive and cohesive society if the places where we live, the facilities we use and our neighbourhoods are designed to be accessible and inclusive [1]. Despite the fact that it is relatively well organized in different organizational bodies that endorse the rights of various groups of this community, disabled people of Kosovo continue to confront daily with numerous barriers in the society. There are many problems of accessibility that disabled people encounter on daily basis. At present, urban environments in Kosovo do not offer any basic conditions for this particular community to be an active participator in the society. Social inclusiveness represents a challenge that should be met by the design of urban environment and it should bring up many questions regarding mobility and participation in everyday life. Among other things accessibility signifies the opportunity to reach a number of social, educational, recreational and work destinations. This too, implies the opportunity of accessing the basic transportation system (pedestrian and vehicular).

In the Guideline Framework for Achievement of Equal Opportunity and Social Inclusion for Every Person in the European Union (2004), among other things, it is maintained that, with the aim of empowering people for participation in society, EU institutions are required to guarantee the eradication of physical barriers (restrictions) that impede citizen participation, and installing respect, dignity, autonomy and independence for everyone [2].

UN Habitat program defines inclusive city as a city that endorses growth and development based on equity and justice (UN Habitat 2011) [3]. Equality and justice for all are principles based on which a city should be produced, which according to A. Madanipour, entails as well that the city should be accessible to all and managed through democratic and inclusive processes. Democratic and inclusive processes promote improvements in physical

environment and social development in the city as well [4].

People using walkers, wheelchairs, and crutches, (...) or people dealing with debilitating arthritis as well as hip and knee conditions may have difficulty navigating a home, a neighbourhood, or a community. Lack of sidewalks, barriers to entranceways, narrow hallways, the presence of steps, and busy streets can all make mobility more difficult and less safe [17, p.5]. As indicated by Robin Paul Malloy, "a key to making communities safer and more inclusive is in recognizing that mobility issues relate not only to the functional ability of individuals but also to the design of the natural and built environments in which they live". In view of physical access and based on the principles of inclusive design compiled by CABE in 2006, inclusive environments and spaces, are the ones that with their initial design fully accommodate the diverse and variable requirements of people using them. Inclusive environments offer alternatives to ensure equality and dignity to all [1].

In Kosovo, by now there are laws and administrative directions that prohibit discrimination based on disability with regards to citizen participation, which in addition regulates active participation in education, employment of disabled people as well as technical parameters that enable access and free movement of these people. However, there is a lack of control mechanisms for application of these laws and regulations in the planning process. There is a lack of quality control during the implementation phase of special technical parameters as well. Therefore, recommendations that will ensue from this paper apart from technical suggestions emphasize the immediate need of establishing of the above mentioned mechanism that will ensure execution of these technical parameters in all phases of architectural and urban project.

## 2. Research premise: City and disability

### 2.1. Right to the city:

#### Equality and justice for all

The city is a collective space that is characterized by wealth and cultural diversity that belong to everyone [5]. The city is not merely a physical mechanism and an artificial construction - it is involved in the vital processes of the people who compose it, it is a product of nature, and particularly of human nature (Ambrose 1994) [6], hence it is supposed to provide everyone with equal opportunities to enjoy its resources, goods, services, etc. This is also called the Right to the City, and it is regulated by the International Charter on the Right to the City, adopted at the World Social Forum in 2004

[7]. Among other things, this charter states that Cities should constitute an environment securing full realization of economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights, assuring the dignity and collective well-being of all persons, in conditions of equality, equity, and justice. The right to the city is the term established by the French Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre in 1968 [8], and interpreted by other Marxist philosopher David Harvey. Among other things, this right entails the right to change ourselves by changing the city [9].

When we talk about the right to the city, according to Peter Marcuse, it is not merely the right of consuming the city, but by continuing further the terms of H. Lefebvre, it is right to produce and enjoy the city. Further, Marcuse continues, that it is not only the right to a choice to what is produced after it is produced, it is important as well to participate in its production [10, chapter 3]. In this spirit, the movement The Right to the City was founded, which, launched initially in the US, and already widespread in many countries, inter alia, is committed to racial justice, urban and human rights and democracy [11]. This movement highlights marginalized groups that rarely find political representation and which are overlooked by institutional practices and policymakers. These groups are the ones usually facing spatial barriers and obstacles in everyday life unable to actively participate in the economy and society [12]. This movement states that everyone has the right to have control and share in decision-making on planning and governance of the cities they live in and work; everyone has the right to shape and design their living spaces [11].

All the above represent basic goals of inclusive city vision, in which, by eliminating physical, social, cultural and political barriers for participation in the decision-making process in the city, citizens are enabled to contribute and communicate actively, and focus their energy and their ideas for the city [13].

### 2.2. Inclusive city, sustainable city

Inclusive city promotes development based on equality and justice. Equality and justice for all are the basic principles on which producing a city should be based. This city, according to Ali Madanipour, should be accessible, created and managed through inclusive and democratic processes [4, p.2]. Democratic processes should provide improvement of the physical environment and social development. When talking about equality, we are dealing with accessibility for all, as a principle that must be exemplified by an inclusive city. Therefore, the city must be equally accessible to all citizens, regardless of their physical disabilities, age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, income level and social status. Equality is often equalled or found within

the notion of social justice, which on the one hand stands for equal opportunities available to everyone in the society, and on the other hand it is defined as one that "... promotes fair society, challenging injustice and valuing diversity".

In the era of concerns over environmental pollution, depletion of energy resources, increasing urban population, economic, social problems arising from them, and what dark future these developments are keeping in store for us, the only prevailing idea in which we seem to take rescue is encapsulated within the notion of sustainability. The city (political community) according to Aristotle (Book 1, Politics) (...) stems from basic human needs and continues to exist for the sake of the need for a better life. While sustainability as a paradigm, according to Nan Ellin [14], aligns with the needs-based approach (of the community), since it begins by identifying a need or problem and then proposes a solution, establishes goals and attempts to implement them. Therefore, a city as a common good, aspiring sustainable development arises from an inclusive society through participatory processes. According to David Harvey, this city supports for the full development of human potentials or capabilities, to all according to their needs, and from all according to their abilities [10, p.53].

In democratic societies it is expected that every persons say is represented in decision-making for the city through their elected representatives in assemblies and city councils. In reality these representatives in most cases do not represent the voice of marginalized groups, which, according to A. Madanipour do not have access to financial resources and are outside political processes [4]. Many spatial problems of the cities are actually rooted in economic, social and political interest [12]. Current institutional practices giving the exclusive rights to produce the city to clusters of narrow economic interests that have strong political representation in municipal councils, epitomizes the main barrier with which marginalized groups are confronting today. These barriers in everyday life appear as physical barriers in the urban environment, barriers that hinder integration in the market, civil society, education, culture, etc.

Physical environment resulting from current practice of decision-making in municipal councils, areas of the city continuing to develop by prioritizing needs of the "mighty" neglect the needs of pedestrians and of those who are physically weaker, shorter, slower, older, using aids for moving, caring for children, etc. The same political representation, furnishes construction industries a priority to ply areas of the city, imprudent towards public spaces, green areas, parks and other public content [12].

Ideal city life, according to Iris Marrion Young (1990) [12], should be represented by an environment that is

ready to accept individual and group differences in the population, and to support the variety of activities and the use of public space. Promoting social justice in the city, 'represents setting up institutional mechanisms (...) to recognize positive and confirm various social groups and (...) their distinctive characteristics. This policy, in an ideal situation, that values difference and diversity rather than similarity.

At the conclusion of this part, I recall again Aristotle: "the city is composed of different man; similar people cannot bring a city into existence" [15] to highlight that heterogeneity and diversity are fundamental features of the city and urban life in general.

### 2.3. Disability

Robin Paul Malloy (2015) discusses that the discourse of disability is itself somewhat unsettled as to the best or most term to describe certain conditions or relationships. (...) Mobility impairment is itself complicated, as it may be related to low functionality in a limb or to visual or hearing impairments that make navigating the built environment more difficult [17, p.19]. People may be born with an impairment, or develop one later in life; it might be chronic, variable, or short-term. Many people may show no obvious physical symptoms, or can keep their exhaustion or medication 'hidden' from others [16, loc. 643–645]. For a long time disability was qualified as a medical condition; it mostly saw various impairments as personal tragedies, personal problems that needed medical intervention or special care. In this spirit, urban planners and architects excluded the needs of disabled persons from their design practice, as they considered that disabled people's places were in special care institutions and asylums. The shift from the medical model, to the social model, which focuses on disability as a socially constructed concept framed by the barriers to everyday life in the external world, has been very important in the history of disability activism. The social model of disability argues instead that the problem is not with individuals but that it is the barriers, prejudice and exclusion by society which is the ultimate factors in defining who is disabled and who is not in a particular society [16, loc. 741–744].

### 2.4. Accessibility

According to Robin Paul Malloy, modern communities have many planning needs, and it is important to think in terms of planning for mobility in the broader context of addressing a wide range of other needs, such as those related to housing affordability, poverty, sustainability, education, transportation, health care, and financial stability [17, p.15]. Social Inclusion presents a particular

challenge in the design of urban environment and raises a number of questions related to mobility and participation in everyday life. Accessibility can be explained as the opportunity to get from home to a number of destinations (social, educational, recreational and employment). It also signifies having good access to pedestrian and transportation system [19].

Tanya Titchosky (2011) states that it is obvious as it is that the physical environment is materially organized so as to make participation difficult, if not impossible, for some people, it is not obvious how this exclusion sustains itself" [18, p.7]. Access, she continues, "is tied to the social organization of participation, even to belonging", and she continues that access not only needs to be sought out and fought for, legally secured, physically measured, and politically protected, it also needs to be understood – as a complex form of perception that organizes socio-political relations between people in social space [18, p.4]. She even declares that fighting for access represents the beginning of living more intimately with the interpretive material reality which has perpetuated so much exclusion; therefore, access initiatives come with the uncomfortable task of needing to ask, 'What does inclusion mean?' [18, p.28].

## 2.5. The situation in Kosovo

The UN Disability Rights Convention asserts that every disabled person has the right to live completely independently and participate in all aspects of social life, (...) therefore appropriate measures are to be taken to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to physical environment, transportation, information and communication technology and other public services.

Kosovo cities and towns are full of physical barriers that impede the free movement of disabled persons. In 2007 Administrative Instruction no. 33/2007 was adopted. It regulates technical aspects of access of disabled persons in the buildings, aiming at facilitating independent living and movement of disabled persons in the cities. Technical parameters in this administrative instruction determine the size and functional arrangements of apartments, entrances, internal stairs, administrative, cultural and sports facilities, as well as the parameters related to the slope of ramps, surfaces, roads, the traffic lights switch, etc. With this administrative instruction the content of technical documentation of all architectural, engineering, electrical projects is regulated as well, as a requirement for obtaining a construction permit from the municipal departments of urbanism etc. [19].

As stated above, the real situation is that administrative instruction remains on paper and municipalities do not follow the procedures for applying these technical

requirements in architectural and urban projects. Therefore, people with disabilities in Kosovo cities face barriers when wanting to access different facilities and streets. The few attempts to facilitate access are usually made hastily, as Jos Boys [16] suggests, often at the level of appearance, without taking into consideration all the regulations contained in the aforementioned administrative instruction. In cities these sloppy interventions are to be found everywhere, ramp slopes appear to be out of the standards; tactile strips are absent, as are contrasting color markings on the floors / street surfaces for persons with visual impairments, etc. Lack of public toilets for disabled people, or the ones that are intended to function as such, are unequipped and converted into storage room (and kept closed, so the needy community cannot access them). Municipal inspectors overlook the implementation of this particular administrative instruction when doing inspections of construction sites. Disabled people are not able to use the public transport in the throughout Kosovo, etc. [19]. And this is just a glance at the surface of the problem that is deep and complex.

## 3. Purpose of research

This research is part of a broader study on Public Space and accessibility for disabled and aged persons in Prishtina and Prizren which final objective is setting principles and guidelines for designing future inclusive public spaces that offer basic conditions for disabled and aged population in cities in Kosovo. In its essence, the research interlocks major activist intentions – by presenting the survey findings to a wider public and authorities, raising the awareness of the public on the physical barriers disabled people face on daily basis and advocating for more access for disabled and aged population in these cities. And by making visible the barriers in maps, instigating authorities to act – provide more access in the city, implement the technical regulations, reviewing projects, inspecting construction works and amending the existing faulty interventions.

As of last trimester of 2013, when this research was conducted, in Prishtina municipality lived 3250 disabled persons while in Prizren 1973 [21]. Most of them live on the brink of poverty, and are unable to move out independently of their houses, cannot reach most of facilities, services, etc. They are all dependant on their family members and other relatives. And some beg for their living.

The present article focuses more on a research which objective is to identify the major problems arising from bad planning, design and management of the city, that results in manifold barriers disabled people confront on daily basis when trying to access and navigate public spaces in Prishtina and Prizren. As part of the research,

two surveys were conducted aiming to identify these physical barriers that impede independent movement in public spaces of Prishtina and Prizren, as a condition for an independent life and full civic participation for persons with disabilities, which is guaranteed by the United Nations Convention and applicable laws of the Republic of Kosovo.

An aspired objective of surveys and of mapping is instigating a public debate on the problem of inaccessible public spaces that has been missing in Kosovo. Finally, the survey aims to promote planning and design mentality that solves accessibility problems as integral part of their designs rather than implements technical parameters as "separate issue" [16, loc. 763–777] in the location.

In the conclusion of this section, I would like to recall that persons with disabilities have the right to equal access to public spaces like everyone else. Discrimination against persons with disabilities occurs when people with disabilities are treated unequally in relation to other persons. Denial or restriction of access

to public spaces for people with disabilities represents limitation of basic human rights.

#### 4. Methodology

Having taken into consideration the above-mentioned premises, the research foundation is set. In Prishtina, for identification of physical barriers in public spaces, a path with the length of 1.7 km was chosen, with departure point Bus Station of Prishtina and end point Building of Kosovo Assembly. The bus station as a starting point was selected to mark the possibility of access to capital for people from other districts and to identify the first barrier in this direction, which is the inability to use public transport as there are no busses of any kind in Kosovo that are suitable or flexible for use by persons with disability, Figure 1.

The methodology is based on the tracking of route of 7 different groups of disability communities in the predetermined path and identifying on the map the encountered barriers that prevent independent



Figure 1. The study path in Prishtina (diagram by Rozafa Basha)

THE PATH - PRIZREN

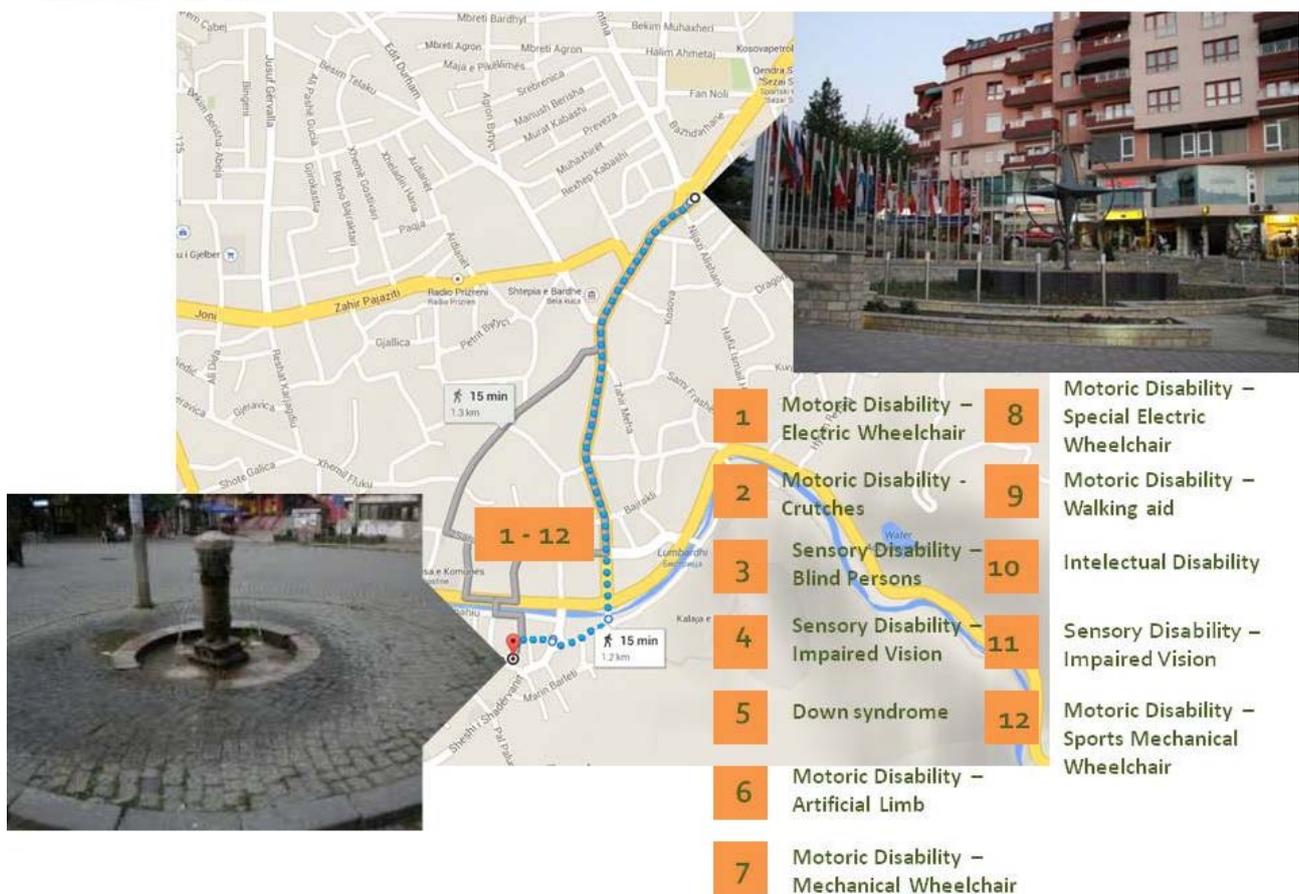


Figure 2. The study path in Prizren (diagram by Rozafa Basha)

movement of these persons. The disability groups that have been included in this research are: persons with motor disabilities who use a mechanical wheelchair, electric wheelchair and crutches; people with sensorial disabilities, blind persons, persons with visual impairments and deaf persons; as well as persons with intellectual disabilities. Field research was conducted in two consecutive days in early November 2013, during which teams of students have walked together with persons with disabilities through the predetermined path. Later, these barriers have been graphically marked on the map of Prishtina that contains the above-mentioned path, and most critical situations encountered during the route have been illustrated, Figure 2.

Here, the methodology of research is based on the tracking of route of 12 different groups of disability communities in the predetermined path and identifying on the map the encountered barriers that prevent independent movement of these persons. The disability groups that have been included in this research are: persons with motor disabilities who use a mechanical wheelchair, electric wheelchair and crutches, artificial limbs; people with sensorial disabilities, blind persons,

persons with visual impairments and deaf persons; as well as persons with intellectual disabilities; Down Syndrome, etc. Field research was conducted in one day in mid-December 2013, during which teams of disability activists from NGO’s and students have walked together with persons with disabilities through the predetermined path. Later, these barriers have been graphically marked on the map of Prizren that contains the above-mentioned path, and most critical situations encountered during the route have been illustrated.

5. Mapping

Jos Boys suggests that “mapping spaces from the experiences of diverse disabled people brings to mind other ways of thinking and doing that remain considerably under-researched”. She continues “This is not just about asking people what they like, or don’t like; it is about starting from disability to offer alternative kinds of interpretations of material space beyond those within architectural discourse” [16, loc. 2834–2838]. The main purpose of mapping exercise is visualizing the frequency of barriers in a sample route walked by people with different types of disabilities.

In the map of Prishtina, each disability type included in the study has been assigned a particular colour. Routes have been marked with coloured strips. On the other hand, problematic spots of the public space have been marked by dots of a colour pertaining to particular disability group. In addition to this, with the aim of facilitating the understanding of maps, simplified illustrations linked to colours and spots in the city have been designed, Figure 3.

In the case of Prizren, as the study has been conducted in the historical part of the city with particularly narrow streets, the map contains one single line of movement, Figure 4. Spots where barriers occur have been marked by dots and have been illustrated similarly as in the case of Prishtina.

In addition to this, the objective to embracing this methodology is introducing a model for identifying barriers that impede free movement of people with disabilities. The last but not least, the maps have been used widely in a campaign for raising the awareness of the community regarding physical barriers in the city disabled people encounter on daily basis.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. The major issue: Cultural barriers

Main barriers that obstruct independent living of persons with disability are cultural and physical ones. Cultural barriers are very difficult to eradicate compared to physical ones. To acknowledge the other regardless of physical, gender or cultural differences an awareness raising platform needs to be developed which will offer children from an early stage of education necessary knowledge and consciousness through curricular content. Inclusive education and inclusive classrooms are already provided and regulated by laws on education in Kosovo. But they rarely function as such. Due to lack of necessary accessibility infrastructure in school buildings, many disabled children are not able to attend classes. And school managements and respective municipality directorates are reluctant to invest to provide the minimum required access for wheelchair users (ramps and accessible toilets) in schools.

The same goes for many public buildings. If there are ramps before entrances, very often their slope is



Figure 3: Map of Physical Barriers – Prishtina

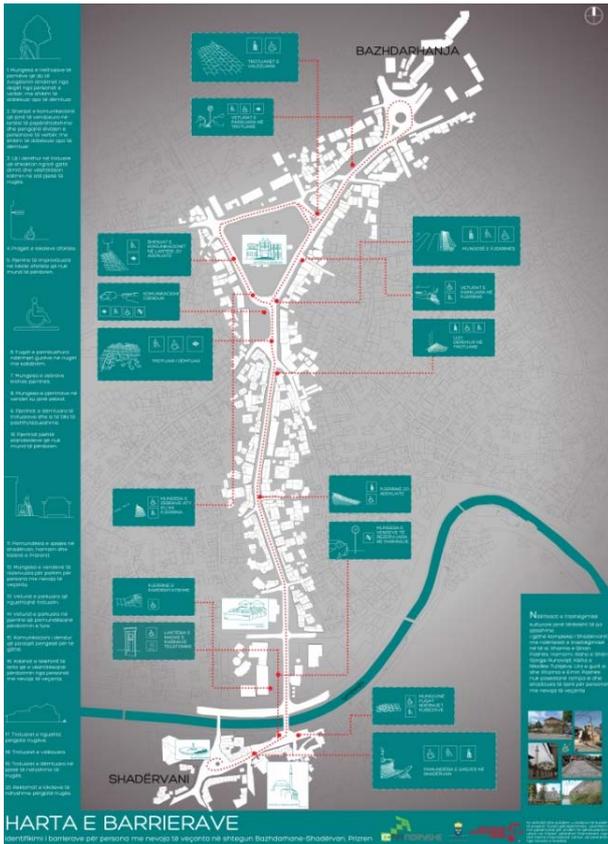


Figure 4: Map of physical barriers – Prizren



Figure 5: Inaccessible central part of Prishtina. Barrier encountered during mapping in Prishtina (photo: L. Pallaska, © R.Basha)

incorrectly designed/ calculated, and it does not meet the required technical parameters to be used by disabled people [19]. Without education the community of disabled persons in Kosovo is left outside of employment. The ones that have gained education are discriminated by the prevailing mentality of still seeing disability as medical problem and are left outside of jobs. As said above, cultural barriers maintain the physical barriers and preserve the discriminating mentality. For these reasons, disabled people of Kosovo remain among the poorest population in the country.

## 6.2. Mobility issues

In addition to accessing buildings, sidewalks are the most critical physical barriers. They are critical component of public space and they represent a common space where people interact. Many of these sidewalks are in really bad shape. This state of wreckage contributes heavily in the way they are (not) used by disabled persons. If the sidewalk surface is not damaged then it is either occupied by nearby shops with exhibited goods, poles, advertisements, or blocked by parked cars, etc. Public transport in the city is one of the key mobility elements for all citizens, including disabled persons. There are no public transportation vehicles adapted or flexible for the use by disabled persons in the whole Kosovo whatsoever. Administrative Instruction No.33/2007 of Kosovar Law on Construction addresses some of these obstacles and provides recommendations for the technical realization of public spaces in order for them not to pose a barrier to the movement of persons with disabilities, however the situation on the ground shows that many from those recommendations specified in this instruction are missing and when implemented they are implemented incorrectly, which makes their use impossible. Report on the survey, separated by cities where the survey is conducted, is as follows.

### (1) City of Prishtina

- Public buses of urban and regional transport are unsuitable for use by wheelchair and other assistive device users, including parents with children in strollers.
- Lack of public toilets for persons with disabilities at public transport terminals.
- All sidewalks in the city are unsuitable for use by persons who use electric wheelchairs. Figure 5.
- Urban traffic signs and electricity poles placed in the middle of narrow sidewalks impede the movement of persons with wheelchairs, crutches, sticks, etc.

- Narrow and rough pavement surfaces (non-flat surface, steep and damaged) for normal use by persons with wheelchairs, crutches and walkers.
- Sidewalk ramps at pedestrian crossings in some places are too steep, or at the bottom they end in metallic grilles for removal of atmospheric water.
- The height of push-buttons on the traffic lights is unfit for use by persons with disabilities and children.
- Service premises inaccessible and without adequate toilets for people with disabilities.
- Pedestrian crossings contain poles on sidewalks ramps, thus hindering the passage with a wheelchair.
- The sidewalk curbs are high and at inappropriate angle to roll/climb them.
- Many ramps are narrow, with the damaged surfaces, with a slope that do not meet the standard (over 6 %). The length of the ramp is unfit for use and in some places they lack adequate fences and railings.
- Lack of public toilets for people with disabilities. A toilet identified at the underpass, is unfurnished and is used by the underpass premises as a warehouse.
- Ramps in public buildings with slopes that do not meet the standard. Many of these ramps are inaccessible for wheelchair users, but also for mothers with children in strollers.
- The width of the island between the traffic belts is small.
- The height of ATMs inappropriate for persons with disabilities.
- Lack of tactile surfaces (tactile indicating/warning strips) for movement in platforms in and outside the bus station.
- Lack of tactile strips/paving warning in front of pedestrian crossing.
- Lack of tactile strips/paving warning for public stairs.
- Lack of sound signals and buttons with Braille writing in public lifts.
- Lack of colour contrast enhancement on stairs and other road surfaces for visually impaired persons.
- Lack of colour contrast enhancement on poles and other vertical elements for visually impaired persons.
- The height of traffic signs on sidewalks prevents movement of blind persons.

## (2) City of Prizren

- Public buses of urban and regional transport are unsuitable for use by wheelchair and other assistive device users, including parents with children in strollers.
- Shops along the sidewalks have high thresholds
- Improvised ramps in front of public buildings and shops which are impractical to use.
- Wide and deep joints in the streets paved by kalldrëm – traditional paving stone (mainly in the historical part of the city) impractical for movement of people using wheelchairs and crutches, sticks, Sidewalk ramps at pedestrian crossings are missing.
- Many ramps are narrow, with the damaged surfaces, with a slope that do not meet the standard (over 6 %). The length of the ramp is unfit for use and in some places they lack adequate fences and railings.
- Cultural heritage buildings are inaccessible for a great number of disabled persons. All historical monuments that are found in the Shadërvan area (Sinan Pasha Mosque, Saint George Church, Nikola Tutic Church, Saint George Runovic Church, the Stone Bridge, Emin Pasha Mosque, etc.) are lacking access ramps, tactile leading surfaces, colour contrasting surfaces and other special signaling elements.
- Lack of public toilets for people with disabilities.
- Lack of parking places for disabled persons.
- Urban traffic signs and electricity poles placed in the middle of narrow sidewalks impede the movement of persons with wheelchairs, crutches, sticks, etc.
- Parked cars on the sidewalk narrow or completely hinder the movement of persons using wheelchair, sticks, crutches and other assistive devices. Figure 6.
- Very narrow sidewalks unsuitable to be used by people using assistive devices.
- Lacks of protective fencing around urban trees endanger blind people and the ones with impaired vision to get hurt from tree branches.
- The height of traffic signs on sidewalks prevents movement of blind persons.
- The spilled water from nearby gutters creates ice on the surface of sidewalks, making it difficult to move.



Figure 6. Barriers encountered in the sidewalks of Prizren (photo: R. Basha)

- Lack of colour contrast enhancement on poles and other vertical elements for visually impaired persons.
- Lack of colour contrast enhancement on poles and other vertical elements for visually impaired persons.
- Lack of tactile strips/paving warning in front of pedestrian crossing (We acknowledge that in Arasta Bridge there is a pair of tactile strips constructed by Turkish KFOR).

## 7. Further developments

In both cities the studies have drawn attention of the community and politicians. Findings of the research conducted in Prishtina were made public in a public presentation in the center of Prishtina. Figure 7.

That day among the wider audience, the newly elected mayor of Prishtina was attending as well. He was given the map of barriers for disabled people and he assured the audience that he will engage in making Prishtina public spaces inclusive and accessible for everyone. In August 2015, a regeneration and redesign of public surfaces along a central route of Prishtina (Garibaldi street) was made public in the media. The regeneration works imply widening the sidewalks, adding ramps from sidewalks to crossings, adding tactile strips for the visually impaired, removing the various obstacles from the shops aligning the sidewalks, flattening the surface of sidewalks, etc. [22]. The works are expected to be finished by the end of November 2015.

On the other hand, in December 2013 the findings and the map of barriers for the city of Prizren were handed over to the Directorate of Public Infrastructure and Services at the Municipality of Prizren. In the coming months, the Municipality allocated a municipal

budgetary line for amending some of the ramps and sidewalk problems that were identified during the investigation and improving accessibility in general.

## 8. Conclusion

The survey findings in the cases of Prishtina and Prizren exemplify the wide array of accessibility problems communities throughout Kosovo confront today. Until recently, the accessibility problem was discussed merely at the level of improving public facilities' entrances, toilets and providing a number of parking lots for the disabled within the range of these public facilities. In this spirit the provisions in the Administrative Instruction concern more on the matters of building access. Although, technical aspects of making public spaces more accessible are included in the document as well, discussion around accessing and navigating public spaces by disabled persons was absent. And most of the public spaces are lacking access.

And again, the main accessibility problem in buildings and public spaces, though equipped with ready-made solutions stemming from a legal framework, is adaptations and improvements and how they are conducted. Adaptations tend to complicate, extend and reroute to backdoors, storage entrances and service lifts the paths of disabled people, thus contributing to their invisibility in the public realm. What's more, adaptations, technology wise, resemble a badly improvised architecture. The survey tried to highlight exactly these failures that result in continuing marginalization of disabled people within architecture and urban design, which according to Jos Boys is perpetuated because disability/accessibility has become stuck in older, modernist understandings of architecture, which reinforces its 'unattractiveness' to, and lacks resonance with contemporary design ideas and practices; and this prevailing attitude towards disability, as Jos Boys states, makes architects put it (disability and accessibility) always in an 'uncomfortable' position that then becomes the very justification for avoidance and exclusion [16, loc. 763–777].

Disabled people are not visible in the streets of Prishtina and Prizren, because they are missing ramps, and wide clear pathways in the sidewalks, bars and restaurants where they can go, accessible public services and facilities, accessible toilets, suitable public transport, etc.; they are also invisible because they don't have a reason to go out, they can't get employment, they are lacking training and education, they cannot afford going out for fun.

To wrap up what has been said above, I would like to point out that the main issue producing current problems, identified by the survey are due to lack of planning for accessibility. Robin Paul Malloy maintains



Figure 7. Presentation of map of barriers in public space by NGO Handikos, in the center of Prishtina, on International Disability Day, 3 December 2013 (left photo: © Arben Llapashtica; right: © Handikos)

that the key to making communities safer and more inclusive is in recognizing that mobility issues relate only to the functional ability of individuals but also to the design of the natural and built environments in which they live [17, p.5]. In handbook "The Inclusive City", Goltsman and Iacofano present the inclusive city planning as a solution "based on sensitive economic, social, environmental and cultural policies allowing everyone to progress economically along with the improvement of their living space" [23].

They point out that cities need a planning approach that recognizes the right of each person's involvement in the development processes: "Through participation, people can shape their environment to meet their needs." More vulnerable groups usually are rarely included in the planning processes since they lack skills, knowledge and information. This then generates the risk of non-inclusion of their needs in urban design, which is further reflected in the relapse of their living environment. In order to address these issues, the aforementioned authors suggest an inclusive design process based on three categories: functionality (designing which incorporates all types of individuals), contextual sensibility (harmony with the surrounding environment) and the impact of fairness to "reduce social and human impact on the most vulnerable members of the society" [23].

The key to a more inclusive society is in finding ways to overcome resistance to social inclusion [25, p.123]. Every battle of disabled persons is related to gain some kind of access (physical structures, public spaces, education, services, etc.) [25, p.123]. Accessibility for all is a fundamental principle of an inclusive city [23]. Being accepted as an integral part of the society is what disabled people aspire to gain in the end.

## 9. Recommendations

### 9.1. Strategic: Education and participative planning process

According to Goltsman and Iacofano [23], "cities need planning that recognizes full participation of every individual in the built environment", and that through participation: "they can shape their own environment to meet their own needs". These authors emphasize the fact that disabled persons are the ones that suffer the most from the planning process and their absence in the process is due to their lack of information, knowledge and skills. From what has been said so far, the main concern that needs an urgent solution is education, training and instructing members of this community. Inclusion of disabled persons is obligatory according to Kosovar laws. Control mechanisms should be put in place by municipal directorates and other state institutions to ensure implementations of these laws and the quality of provide education in general.

According to Goltsman and Iacofano [23], the outcome of disabled people being absent in the planning process is deterioration of their living environment. To accomplish an inclusive planning process, municipalities should campaign to inform and raise the awareness of population regarding the importance of participation in planning process for the development of the city. Along with such a campaign, working groups assigned with developing plans and strategies for the city, as well as in elaborating designs of squares streets and parks, etc., shall include disabled people and all the population that is directly affected by that planning process.

## 9.2. Municipal management

Municipality has a full responsibility over infrastructure – they design, plan, maintain and manage infrastructural elements. Making space for the disabled persons on sidewalks is their duty. They need to be alert and enforce laws by inspecting and placing fines for the illegally parked cars on sidewalks, shops that block the movement in the street with exhibited goods and ads. They should inspect façades, roofs for faults in outlets, uneven or defective surfaces of infrastructure should be repaired. Physical barriers that have been inherited from an earlier planning and designing process should be identified and eliminated. To identify the real situation, municipalities should map all the physical barriers in the public spaces of the city, and a strategy for their elimination should be put in place.

## 9.3. Implementation of technical parameters

The majority of problems identified through the study concern the physical impediments found in the sidewalks and other public surfaces of the city. When it comes to implementing technical parameters, meeting the required standards with the aim of eliminating physical and architectural barriers that impede the freedom of movement is regulated by the administrative direction Nr. 33/2007 of Kosovar Construction Law.

Despite the existing legislation disabled people still have difficulties moving around the city. Setting up technical and quality control mechanisms are required for implementing the technical parameters from an early stage of design. City planning offices should require meeting these parameters so they could produce building permits when applied for one and use permits at the end of the construction process as well. These parameters cover the whole range of technical requirements (sidewalk ramps, tactile strips, contrasting colours in public stairs, toilets for the disabled, parking places for the disabled, etc.).

When it comes to public transportation, since the end of the war in Kosovo, the greatest numbers of busses operating the public lines are old busses donated by other countries. Private operators have no access to donations and funds, so they operate with out-of-the-date busses as well, lacking elementary accessing devices for wheelchairs and strollers among other things. There is a wide selection of accessible busses in the world today. And providing such busses for public lines must be on top of agenda of municipal budget plan.

## 9.4. Focus on planning for accessibility

Implementing technical parameters for building construction are not sufficient to ensure an inclusive

community. This approach will not solve the manifold problems of communities. Poor planning makes communities inaccessible [17, p.5]. Planning for the needs of a community to achieve desired outcomes [17, p.15] will have to complement the activist engagements which promote inclusive design and the right access as a matter of civil rights and protection of disabled people from discrimination.

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<sup>i</sup> In 2015, this research is extended and complemented by a survey of disabled and aged population on quality and accessibility of public spaces in both these cities, which aims at setting design guidelines for more inclusive public spaces in Kosovo. The survey results are not presented in this paper.