

# BUILDING A WHOLE NATION WITH HALF THE PEOPLE: ISSUES OF ILLEGAL CONSTRUCTION, INFORMAL NEIGHBORHOODS AND RIGHTS TO THE CITY IN POST-CONFLICT KOSOVA/O<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** This article aims to address the issues of informal and illegal building occurring in the urban environments of post-conflict Kosova. This article discusses why informal settlements and illegal construction occurs in post-conflict Kosova and addresses the major problems and consequences that result from their manifestation. These issues are important to address because they present various hindrances in creating the new democratic nation and state of Kosova, which declared independence from Serbia in February of 2008.

*Beirut, Kabul, Grozny, Prishtina, these and quite a few others are the cities that today are facing an enormous challenge: to reinvent themselves again after conflict. Very often the conflict still slumbers. Most of the time there is a complete lack of public bodies with the capacity and jurisdiction to enforce law. And always there is a profound crisis of confidence in the public dimension of urban life.<sup>2</sup>*  
~E. Gardener 2006

## **Introduction**

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<sup>1</sup> The name of Kosovo is a tricky subject due to both historic and more recent geopolitics in the Balkans. The word itself is highly political. The word 'Kosovo' is largely recognized as the English word for this area. However, it is also a word that resembles the Serbian pronunciation. Meanwhile, "Kosova" more accurately resembles the Albanian pronunciation of the word for this area. I will default to using the word "Kosova," since this is the word used by the ethnic Albanian majority of the region and the government currently seeking independence. I use the word "Kosovo" when it is used as an official title or when it makes sense to reflect the Serbian pronunciation of the word. As for other place names used in this article, I will present both Albanian and Serbian names the first time I use it, but I will default to the Albanian name for the remainder of the article unless it is necessary to use the Serbian name. I apologize if anyone is offended by the naming convention that I use.

<sup>2</sup> Edwin Gardner. Comment on "A.I. Prishtina -About." Comment Posted: Tuesday November 28th 2006, 9:56 pm. <http://www.archis.org/unbuilt/prishtina>

In September 2000, Rexhep Luci, the chief of the Directorate for Development and Urbanism for the Prishtina/Priština municipality in Kosova "was shot dead when walking home from a conference on urban planning in Prishtina. ”<sup>3</sup> The name of the conference was “Vision of Prishtina 2000-2005” held in the massive concrete Tito-era Grand Hotel Prishtina located in the heart of the city.<sup>4</sup> Luci started a local campaign to address illegal housing and construction building in the city by documenting cases of unpermitted building and calling for the destruction of illegal construction occurring in and around post-war Prishtina. However, Luci’s efforts were seen as interfering with the interests of other actors in the city. Luci’s murder has never been solved (Photo 2).

Luci’s death was not the marking point for the end of illegal building in Prishtina. Rather, this event marketed the end of any form of formal dialogue to stop or regulate illegal construction in the city. In fact, his death was the catalyst that allowed for even more rampant and widespread illegal construction to occur in the following months and years. The case of Luci’s death also illustrates the flesh and blood connection between urban spaces, post-conflict urban processes, and the struggles of everyday life in cities trying to re-establish themselves after war.

This article aims to address the issues of informal and illegal building occurring in the urban environments of post-conflict Kosova. This article discusses why informal settlements and illegal construction occurs in post-conflict Kosova and addresses the major problems and consequences that result from their manifestation. These problems operate at two scales. One is the everyday, where problems associated with these

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Martens. “Pristina, a Balkan suburb of Utopia. How administration in Kosovo works.” In *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. June 13<sup>th</sup> 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Kosova Stability Initiative/ European Stability Initiative (IKS/ESI). (2006). *Utopian Visions Governance failures in Kosovo’s capital -- Discussion paper*. June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2006. Accessed on July 30, 2008. [http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi\\_document\\_id\\_78.pdf](http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_document_id_78.pdf)

neighborhoods manifest themselves at the local level. The other problem exists when these local issues become an unseen problematic for democratic nation and state creation.

These issues are important to address because they present various hindrances in creating the new democratic nation and state of Kosova, which declared its independence from Serbia in February of 2008. Like most informal settlements throughout the world, the biggest concern stemming from the communities are the lack of secure land tenure by sitting homeowners. Lack of full ownerships to land inhibits citizens from having a full “‘right to the city’, that is, the right of all inhabitants to have access to collective infrastructures, services and facilities, and the obligation to contribute to the development process.”<sup>5</sup> When one does not have full land tenure or full ‘right to the city,’ they do not have full citizenship and cannot wholly participate or be represented in the democratic process .<sup>6,7</sup> In short, residents of informal neighborhoods are not able to fully participate in the newly established democratic system in Kosova. This is an especially important issue to address during the initial inception of an independent Kosova. Voices left out or not fully represented is a problem for establishing a fully democratic and multi-ethnic post-conflict society. This article concludes by reflecting one how these issues are being addressed Kosova. It does not suggest how to solve these problems, but does reflect on the need to protect human rights and what needs to be accomplished to help create a whole and democratic Kosova.

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<sup>5</sup> “For a Better Life in Our Municipality: Urban Upgrading and Regularization of Informal Settlements in Kosovo.” (2006). Informational Material of UN-HABIAT in Kosovo and OSCE.

<sup>6</sup> Henri Lefebvre. 1996. *Writings on Cities* (Blackwell: London)

<sup>7</sup> By ‘right to the city’ I do not necessarily mean ownership of land in the capitalist sense of the term. I reserve this debate for another place. In this article, I recognize that ownership or obtaining one’s ‘right to the city’ may exist in several forms, including the one the policy of state ownership that existed during the Yugoslav era. Therefore, I frame ‘right to the city’ as a process that aids in giving one a voice in a democratic process, not a process that gives private ownership to land.

Understanding post-conflict urbanization processes and the role of informal communities in post-conflict Kosova can aid in knowing how to best conduct post-conflict urban planning to help urban areas stabilize and progress from the ills of war when they do, unfortunately, occur (Photo 5).

### **Understanding Informal Settlements in Kosova**

While informal and illegal settlements manifest in cities throughout the world and are discussed throughout the literature, the case of Kosova provides a different context and different set of processes. First, the creation of these settlements can be framed under a dual process of post-socialist and post-conflict transition. While, largely due to issues of state ownership and policy, these settlements have long been a part of the Yugoslav urban landscape in one form or another.<sup>8,9</sup> The break of up the Former Yugoslavia in 1991 provided an unregulated path towards the free-market and post-conflict migration allowed for large amounts of rural to urban or lower-tiered to high-tiered urban migration. Exacerbating the problem, the post-conflict scenario in Kosova and decentralization associated with both frameworks has created an atmosphere of unregulation of urban policy.

In the post-war era (1999- to present), much of the construction and housing boom of Prishtinia and in other Kosovar cities has gone unregulated. The recent declaration of independence by Kosova from Serbia in February of 2008 means that government agencies are putting most of their efforts into addressing issues of nation and state building rather than regulating the everyday issues of construction and building in

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<sup>8</sup> Mina Petrovic, "Post-Socialist Housing Policy Transformation in Yugoslavia and Belgrade," *European Journal of Housing Policy*, 1(2) (2001): 211- 231.

<sup>9</sup> Z. Zegarac, "Illelgal Construction in Belgrade and the prospects of urban development planning," *Cities*, 16(5) (1999): 365-370.

urban environments of the country. While official regulations are in place, such as the UNMIK Regulation 2000/53<sup>10</sup> – also called the *Rexhep Luci Regulation on Construction*<sup>11</sup> – or the 2004 “Law on Construction,” local authorities or agencies are doing very little to enforce these regulations.

Decentralization of the government has led to a lack of cooperation among various actors involved with urban planning in Prishtina,<sup>12, 13, 14</sup> other municipalities, and lack of harmony between different levels of government, including the international community.<sup>15</sup> Overall, the lack of responsibility and not enforcing standards creates a problem of “urban chaos” in Kosova.<sup>16</sup> For example, illegal building near the Deçani/Dečani monastery, a cultural site and declared protected zone by The United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) – the governing body in Kosova since 1999 – began to occur several years ago. UNMIK noted the violation and local police were informed about the occurrence. However, local police and the local municipality did nothing to enforce the regulation because they felt it did not fall under their duties.

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<sup>10</sup> UNMIK Regulation 2000/53, “REGULATION NO. 2000/53 ON CONSTRUCTION IN KOSOVO,” 25 September 2000.

<sup>11</sup> UNMIK/PR/370, “SRSG Signs ‘Rexhep Luci Regulation on Construction,’” *UNMIK Press Release 370*, 26 September 2000

<sup>12</sup> Veton Ademi. “The implementation of the ‘strategic development plan of prishtina’ has started,” *Iliria Post*, June 10, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Martens, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Visar Krasniqi, “Prishtina, capital city only by name,” *Lajm*, June 10, 2006a.

<sup>15</sup> Binak Baqaj, 2007, *Urban Management (With focus on recent developments in Kosova)*. ( Prishtina, Kosovo: University of Business and Technology, 2007)

<sup>16</sup> Ferhat Betjullahu and Besa Jagxhiu, “Application of Design and Construction Standards – Chaos Prevention,” (presented at *International Scientific Conference in Architecture and Spatial Planning: International Experiences and Challenges in Kosova*, University of Business and Technology, Prishtina, Kosovo, June 26 2008).

Meanwhile, UNMIK did not take any measures to further regulate or follow up on this process.<sup>17</sup>

According to UNMIK Regulation 2000/53, municipalities have the right to destroy any illegal construction. However, after conversations with local planning authorities in multiple cities in Kosova, not a single one could yield any data or specific knowledge of the demolition of any illegal buildings in Kosova. This process of demolition can also be costly due to the procedure of contracting out a private demolition crew and police supervision of the process. The city of Prishtina allocated only €30,000 (\$47,200) in its 2005 budget for the demolition of illegal buildings.<sup>18</sup> This amount only realistically provides the funding for a few isolated demolitions and is far from enough to tackle the vast issue of illegal construction throughout the whole city. According to a study of six municipal planning offices in Kosova, each office indicated that finances were the number one problem inhibiting the proper management of municipal land.<sup>19</sup>

Legal planning documents and policy in post-conflict Kosova have ambiguous language that helps perpetuate the problem of un-cooperation and unclaimed responsibility by decentralized parties.<sup>20, 21</sup> Returning to the example of The UNMIK Regulation 2000/53, it states that building permit regulations must be carried out by a “competent municipal authority,” but does not state which authority should take on this role. According to the European Stability Initiative the municipality of Prishtina’s

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<sup>17</sup> Klm Info Service. (2006). “Illegal construction continues in Visoki Decani Monastery protected zone.” December 18th, 2006. Accessed on July 30, 2008.

[http://www.kosovo.net/news/archive/2006/December\\_18/1.html](http://www.kosovo.net/news/archive/2006/December_18/1.html)

<sup>18</sup> IKS/ESI, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Baqaj, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Florina Jerliu, “Treatment of Prishtina Urban Pathology,” (presented at the *International Scientific Conference in Architecture and Spatial Planning: International Experiences and Challenges in Kosova*, University of Business and Technology, Prishtina, Kosovo, June 26 2008).

Ministry of Environmental and Spatial Planning (MESP), perhaps a good candidate for “competent municipal authority,” has only three inspectors on staff<sup>22</sup> and its overseer, the Construction Inspectorate in the Kosovo MESP is only one person. Not to mention, cases show that some inspectors in Kosova are corrupt,<sup>23</sup> which can possibly hinder effective regulation of policy.

Second, the case of informal settlements in Kosova differs from other global cases in that most of the literature on informal settlements in cities from across the world usually discusses informal settlements in regards to squatter settlements comprised of low- income, highly marginalized and destitute social groups. Despite the fact Kosova also has its share of low-income and squatter settlements, many of the informal neighborhoods in Kosova are middle-class to high-income neighborhoods. I include all types of informal settlements found in Kosova in this article.

Third, the international community is not exempted from playing a role in changing the built environment of Kosova cities, especially Prishtina.<sup>24</sup> Many buildings in the center of city are occupied by agencies such as UNMIK, UNHCR, OSCE and various international civil society NGOs. Local apartments house international staff and local landlords charge higher rents to internationals.<sup>25</sup> Both office and residential spaces occupied by the international community push local residents to the urban fringe to less formal areas of the city or to illegally build onto existing structures.

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<sup>22</sup> IKS/ESI, 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Krasniqi, 2006a

<sup>24</sup> Jerliu, 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Besiana Xharra, “Rich Foreigners Keep Kosovo Rental Prices Soaring,” *BalkanInsight.com*, November 3, 2008. Accessed on November 7, 2008. [http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/life\\_and\\_style/14493/](http://balkaninsight.com/en/main/life_and_style/14493/)

## **The Cause of Illegal Neighborhoods**

The cause of widespread illegal construction in Prishtina and other Kosovar cities is due to large numbers of post-conflict migration in Kosova. Post-war Prishtina experienced a rapid increase in population from the in-migration of Kosovars from the countryside seeking a new life in the city and the return of Kosovar refugees who lived abroad during the conflict.<sup>26</sup> During the conflict in Kosova, many homes were destroyed by both ethnic Albanian and ethnic Serbian groups as well as the homes of other minority ethnic groups in Kosova, including Roma, Egyptian, Ashkali and Bosniak. Portions of the above populations escaped the war by going abroad, but upon returning to Kosova after the war they moved to cities or the capital city of Prishtina rather than returning to their old homes and communities. They did this because if they moved back to their home communities they would have to rebuild their homes. At the same time, many did not feel safe returning to their home communities due to ethnic tensions. Some found others living in their homes (Photo 6). Meanwhile, other portions of the population moved from villages, to towns, to larger towns and some continuing on to largest city of Prishtina. Overall, Kosova has become more urban in a post-conflict era.<sup>27</sup> Prishtina is the overwhelming urban growth pole in the country due to the prospect of various urban opportunities located in the capital city. Yet, other towns and smaller cities are experiencing the in-migration from lower-tiered cities or from rural areas of Kosova.

The construction boom in urban Kosova has manifested itself in two main forms A) the development of informal suburban districts (Photo 3) and B) "parasitic

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<sup>26</sup> Kai Vockler, "Building in the Wild –The New Prishtina," *The New Prishtina*, European Forum Alpbach. Archis Interventions, 2007: 2-6.

<sup>27</sup> Frank D'hondt, "Re-Creating Kosovo Cities," *Presentation publication from the 42nd ISoCaRP Congress* (2006), [www.isocarp.org](http://www.isocarp.org), Accessed on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008.



architecture" - the illegal construction of additional rooms or floors to an already present structure or infill building on open space.<sup>28</sup> Both forms increase the physical urban density of the built environment of cities. The latter form of building is particularly present in and around the Dardania neighborhood of Prishtina,<sup>29</sup> a characteristic socialist era bloc micro-district (Photo 4). Both forms jeopardize the functionality of the city by disregarding safety and fire codes and stress the city's utility infrastructure system, such as water, waste and electricity. These utilities must now service a city beyond the capacity of its infrastructure. According to a recent study on Prishtina, "75 percent of the city and its outskirts" has been changed by informal and illegal building.<sup>30</sup>

Most of the settlements addressed in this article can be labeled as informal rather than illegal. This is because most of the residents of these settlements are not squatting illegally on someone else's land but have properly paid for a parcel of land from a landowner who has informally divided up his plot of land. At times, these agreements and transactions may even be on file with the local municipality, despite the fact they are not fully sanctioned by the municipality. Further, many informal settlements in Kosova are suburban zones that fall out of the formal planning policy, but potentially fall into the natural urban growth of the city that otherwise (i.e. if there was no war) would be included in future urban planning policy of the cities. Therefore, it is not an issue of completely eliminating or destroying these settlements, rather, it is how can they be regulated, regularized, and upgraded to a formal or more formal status. This process, called "regularization," also aims to provide full 'right to the city' for residents.

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<sup>28</sup> Vockler, 2007.

<sup>29</sup> Jerliu, 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Visar Geci et al "Archis Interventions in Prishtina," *The New Prishtina*. European Forum Alpbach. Archis Interventions, (2007): 7 – 20.

According to the UN-HABITAT in Kosovo, informal settlements are defined as an area that:

- is unplanned,
- has an informal or insecure property tenure,
- has an inadequate or non-participation in government, resulting in lack of basic services, registration and infrastructure,
- has a vulnerability of discrimination for the residents.<sup>31</sup>

Overall, these characteristics create populations that do not have adequate rights to the city, have a lower standard of living and fall short of being able to fully participate in a democratic system because they do not have adequate land rights or land tenure. This article, maintains a focus on the construction typology of informal suburban districts on the urban fringe of cities in Kosovo. However, illegal construction can make up the bulk of the building types within informal neighborhoods, thus the two types are not completely separate. The present discussions in Kosovo on urban planning policy overlap both typologies

### **Everyday Problems in the Informal Neighborhoods of Kosovo**

The main everyday problems of illegal building or informal settlements in Kosovo are primarily an issue of public safety, both in the short and long term. The integrity of building constructions in these settlements can be of poor quality since the plans are often un-approved, un-permitted or hastily built. This is a public safety issue because many

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<sup>31</sup> "Informal Settlements Leaflet," *MuSPP Information Unit. Informal Settlements Working Group composed by consultants and representatives of MESP, AMK, MuSPP/ UN-HABITAT and OSCE*. Date: December 2007.

buildings do not adhere to fire code or other safety policy, such as quality of life issues. For example, construction may block natural light or in-fill on urban green space which degrades the quality of urban life and could potentially obstruct evacuation paths in case of an emergency. More times than not, informal settlements also do not have adequate sewage and waste management, which can result in health and environmental concerns for all.

Further, Kosova is located in an earthquake danger zone. Therefore, a major earthquake in the area could have catastrophic results because the buildings are not built to withstand the force of an earthquake. This threat, in terms of both the actuality of an earthquake and inferior building quality, is not unrealistic when reminded of the devastation of the earthquake in the nearby city of Skopje, FYRO Macedonia in 1963,<sup>32</sup> <sup>33</sup> which is located 125 km from Prishtina and even closer to other major cities in Kosova, such as Prizren and Ferizaj/Urosevač (Photo 8).

Un-regulated and illegal constructions are destroying the historical fabric of the urban landscape. In-fill and illegal building within the city threatens historical and culturally important sites of the city (Photo 1). Building wherever and whatever on top of or next to these historical sites will have drastic ill effects both culturally and economically for the future vitality of these cities. Un-regulated building means that cities in Kosova may lose an important part of the historic identity of these cities (for more information on specific threaten sites see *A Future for Prishtina's Past*<sup>34</sup>).

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<sup>32</sup> J.C. Fischer, "The Reconstruction of Skopje," *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 30(01) (1964): 46-48.

<sup>33</sup> UNMIK/FR/019/01, "Illegal Construction -- Violators of Regulations are Violating the Rights of Their Neighbors," *UNMIK Feature Release 019/01*, Date: 2 March, 2001.

<sup>34</sup> "A Future for Prishtina's Past," *Kosova Stability Initiative/ European Stability Initiative*, (2006), [http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi\\_future\\_of\\_pristina%20booklet.pdf](http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_future_of_pristina%20booklet.pdf).

Many of the informal building in Kosova are being built on land that is environmentally sensitive, which is problematic. Building that occurs within a floodplain is one of the biggest concerns in regards to illegal building. Building here will most likely result in future complications for both the homeowners and for the greater population. Meanwhile, building in a floodplain also results in the loss the best agricultural land in Kosova. Informal building also often occurs on land that is on a steep slope and/or forested land, which leads to erosion and environmental degradation in the surrounding area. Again, many informal settlements do not adequately connect to municipal sewage and waste management (legally or illegally), which results in environmental degradation.

Poor or a complete lack of data is also highly problematic for urban planners of Kosovar cities in a newly independent Kosova. For example, the population of Prishtina is unknown. The last complete census in Kosova was taken in 1981. Another census was conducted in 1991, but was boycotted by most ethnic Albanians, the majority population in Kosova. Therefore, any results yielded by the 1991 census are not valid. Current population estimates span from 200,000 to 600,000. Recent planning documents have been critiqued as being “unrealistic,” invalid and worthless because they use the population 600,000 as the basis for their urban plan. However, planning a city of 200,000 with plans for 600,000 will result in a poorly planned city with wasted or ineffective design. Conversations with urban planners, urban designers and architects in Prishtina yield unofficial, but more realistic, estimate populations of 150, 000 to a maximum 250,000. A joint initiative was established to bring about a Strategic Plan 2020 for Prishtina, but was developed using wild figures of 600,000 that do not accurately

represent urban growth and population projections.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, while there are efforts to create a formal plan addressing the urban issues, it is not practical and is labeled as an "Utopian" plan because, arguably, it is not a practical plan for Prishtina due to its extreme population estimates. Poor or non-existent data is an issue for every municipality in Kosova. Further, how can democratic elections be judged fair and accurate when the population is not known?

Informal building also creates other social problems, not just a threat to economic vitality via the destruction of agricultural, cultural, and environmental sensitive areas. These other social problems consist of a threat to freedom of movement by certain groups of people and the creation of ethnic enclaves or ethnic ghettos that work against the current goals of an united and multi-ethnic nation of Kosova. The international community, including the UN-HABITAT program, will interject to avoid ghettoization or ethnic enclaves for formal resettlement plans when possible. But the informal neighborhoods operate underneath this radar. All the while, ghettoization is a realistic result of (re)settlement in post-conflict Kosova visible everyday at the edges of Serbian communities where KFOR (Kosovo Force – The NATO security troops) have checkpoints present.

## **Conclusion**

This article discusses the causes and major problems of informal settlements in post-conflict Kosova. The issues of informal neighborhoods in Kosova are largely based around human rights issues that strive for one's basic 'right to the city' and full representation in their government. At the present time, urban planning policy

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<sup>35</sup> Visar Krasniqi, "Utopia or Reality?" *Lajm*, June 26, 2006b.

approaches to the regularization of these neighborhoods does so by asking what is best for the overall community both inside and outside of the informal settlement. In turn, dividing human rights between collective human rights and individual human rights. Is this the best approach for urban planning and informal neighborhood regularization in Kosova? Or how can urban planning in Kosova incorporate both community and individual rights?

According to present policy, if a particular settlement is seen as un-sustainable or too harmful in terms of public safety or its degree of degradation to the surrounding environment, it should be destroyed and the local population should be re-located. This communal approach to urban planning can cause much friction at the fault line between collective human rights and individual human rights. The presence of the OSCE in Kosova allows for this agency to step in and monitor the process of the breakup of a community when necessary. The OSCE aids to ensure that when a population is expelled from a settlement, albeit only a few cases have occurred thus far, that basic individual human rights are maintained. This included ensuring an adequate effort is made to spatially, in the form of new land or housing, and/or financially compensate these individuals. This process should also grant full 'right to the city' to displaced people, but there is no evidence if this is a result of this process. In addition, the OSCE will not be in Kosova forever. For the time being, the OSCE must ensure the protection of human rights for expelled and displaced groups, while advocating for the protection of human rights in formal urban planning policy, not just the monitoring of the process. They must also ensure the full 'right to the city' is granted for the resettled.

Second, a strategy needs to be developed to more realistically understand the demographics of all cities, neighborhoods and settlements in Kosova. For example, an ‘utopian’ urban plan for Prishtina based on a population of 600,000 people when other data suggests that the realistic population is closer to 200,000 is not appropriate for pragmatic urban planning or nation and state building. It also not fair to the people of Kosova. The case of Zatra, an informal neighborhood in the city of Peja/Peč, via the efforts of NGO ‘Eye of Vision’ provides one successful example of how data was created from the grass-roots level to better understand the demographics and status of land security on the ground for one informal neighborhood in Kosova (Photo 7). The overall goal of this project was to help residents of the neighborhood achieve their ‘full right to the city.’

At this time, this example provides the best and only model in Kosova. While it is the best example thus, this case does not necessary mean it is the best model for all places in Kosova nor is it appropriate for understanding the urban situation on a regional/national scale in the context of nation building. The method in Zatra provided quality data and results, but if it were to be applied in every community in Kosova it would take several years to be in a position to understanding the urban processes in Kosova and accurately access the whole population of a newly independent Kosova and all ethnic groups that reside in the state.

In the meantime, a more realistic and rudimentary approach needs developed. This might mean sacrificing some of the quality of data available through grass-roots data creation, but basic demographic and population data needs to be created and fully supported and agreed upon by the international community, national agencies, local

municipalities and all local actors. Either a sanctioned census or pragmatic demographic methodologies need to be developed in the near future to gain a realistic and basic understanding of the urban situation in cities and communities across Kosova, in turn building a full notion of the nation. This may mean a more centralized or top-down approach, but it should just act as a realistic placeholder until more qualitative and rich data can be created from the ground up. And, just because the approach may be more centralized or top-down does not mean it can ignore local actors regardless of land tenure or ethnicity. A method for creating a more realistic data set might use select data sets created in the style of Zatra to balance or quality control more general data sets.

Kosova is still dealing with many issues, such as nation and state building, which take priority over urban planning and regularization of informal settlements. Also, the ambiguity in the status of Kosova by the international community and parallel structures coming from Serbia both present major hurdles for everyday life in Kosova.

The post-conflict situation in Kosova is an unfortunate one, but it is also a reality that plays out on the ground everyday one construction project at a time in this new country. The construction of illegal buildings and informal settlements provides one way of understanding life in a post-conflict environment, but it is also a process that forms the everyday places and spaces that make up the new country of Kosova. In some instances, urban planning in Kosova provides the unique opportunity of developing urban planning strategies completely from scratch. Yet, as this article shows, this is also a difficult path (at times a matter of life and death) where what happens on the ground moves at a pace much faster than what can be accomplished in focus groups, community centers and urban planning offices or state offices. Though a better understanding of urban planning



approaches, urban plans, and needs of local actors, we can help to close the gap that exists between formal urban planning, informal urban development and urbanization processes lived out everyday in post-conflict areas. In turn, closing the gap will result in better urban planning policy that better incorporates the voices and needs of local actors in a timely matter. From this, urban planners will be in a better position to go about doing good urban planning in post-conflict environments when war unfortunately does occur. Knowing how to do post-conflict urban planning correctly will aid in the creation of able government bodies, allow all citizens to fully participate in democratic processes vital to building a whole nation, stabilizing post-conflict environments, and restoring the positive aspects of urban life that bring people together.

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### **List of Acronyms**

FYRO – Former Yugoslave Republic of

KFOR – Kosovo Force (NATO Security Force)

MESP- Ministry of Environmental and Spatial Planning

NGO – Non-Government Organization

OSCE - The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

UNCHR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UN-HABITAT - The United Nations Human Settlements Programme

UNMIK – United Nations Mission In Kosovo

**Author Bio:**

Grant Garstka is an urban geographer with an interest in post-socialist transition in Eastern Europe. He recently graduated from The Miami University in Oxford, OH USA with a M.A. in Geography, where he researched the urban morphology and socio-spatial changes of everyday geographies in Bulgarian cities.

**Photos**



*Photo 1*

*Caption: Prishtina, Kosova – The center of Prishtina is a mosaic of both Modern and historic architecture and urban forms. Garstka 2008.*



*Photo 2*  
*Caption: Prishtina, Kosova – The Youth Hall, UNMIK HQ, and Grand Hotel Prishtina. Garstka 2008*



*Photo 3*  
*Caption: Informal Construction at the edge of Prishtina. Garstka 2008*



*Photo 4*

*Caption: "Parasitic Architecture" - the illegal construction of additional rooms or floors to an already present structure in the Dardania neighborhood of Prishtina. Garstka 2008*



*Photo 5*

*Caption: Post-conflict Urban Space – A Serbian Orthodox Church is abandoned but protected by KFOR in Prizren. Garstka 2008*



*Photo 6*

*Caption: Prizren, Kosova – Several damaged and abandoned homes, most likely from ethnic Serbian family who were driven out of town by the ethnic Albanian majority of the area during the 2004 riots that plagued all of Kosova. The families are now unable to return home for fear of their safety. Garstka 2008.*



*Photo 7*

*Caption: Zatra – An informal neighborhood in Peja that is on its way of becoming formal thanks to grass-roots planning activities. At present, residents of this neighborhood do not have full ‘rights to the city.’ Garstka 2008.*



*Photo 8*

*Caption: Prizren, Kosova – The dense urban fabric of Kosovar cities. Garstka 2008.*