



# Utopian Visions

## Governance failures in Kosovo's capital

Discussion paper  
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“When I think of it today, I realise how much harm these mad city planners have done to my city. They deprived the city of its natural mirror.”

Migjen Kelmendi, *The Riverless City*

Amidst the high political drama surrounding final status talks, it is easy to lose sight of the vast challenge facing Kosovo once status is resolved. In social and economic terms, Kosovo has been falling behind Europe for half a century. A decision on status alone will not break this trend. It will require major changes in the way Kosovo is governed.

As the capital city, Pristina should be leading this process of revitalisation, by setting the standard for effective and democratic governance. Pristina is Kosovo's wealthiest municipality, the seat of all of its governing institutions and home to a large number of international institutions. Yet Pristina is still far from setting a positive example.

Illegal construction is rampant. Buildings are constructed without regard to safety standards, and unplanned housing settlements and commercial developments place major strain on infrastructure. The city's historical centre has been filled with new, high-rise construction. Buildings listed as national historical heritage have been neglected, some even destroyed. Infrastructure is deteriorating: water cuts are frequent, the road network is barely maintained, and the sewage system is deteriorating. Public spaces, parks and markets are falling into disrepair. Municipal services are unreliable. In winter, ice accumulates in the streets, posing a threat to public safety, while in summer garbage builds up in public spaces. The town's economy depends to a dangerous degree on the presence of temporary international missions. There is unreliable data on what is being

produced in Pristina today, and no credible vision for its future economic development. What would it take for this to change?

### **Sources of growth**

Pristina's history is one of sharp discontinuities. In the Ottoman period, Pristina was a lively trading town, with 18,800 inhabitants by 1910. The old bazaar, artisan workshops and the cattle market dominated its economy.

In the Yugoslav era, the town grew from 20,000 inhabitants in 1948 to 108,000 by 1981. Communist urban planners and large socially owned enterprises built apartment blocks to accommodate a new class of officials. Building Pristina provided jobs in the largest employer in the town, the construction company Ramiz Sadiku. In this time of rapid growth, the slogan was 'Destroy the Old, build the New'. Youth action teams were sent out to destroy the bazaar and other Ottoman-era monuments, symbols of trade capitalism and a backward, oriental past. They were replaced by modern shopping malls, office buildings and monuments to Yugoslav Brotherhood and Unity.

As Kosovo's administrative centre, Pristina received the lion's share of new investments – up to 43 percent of Kosovo's capital expenditure up to 1981. Home to one third of all of Kosovo's public servants and workers in state-run enterprises, Pristina had close to full employment, and was the focus of housing construction and urban development. The city grew rapidly, but the pattern of development was top-down in nature, with expansion paid for largely by transfers from the Yugoslav development fund.

By the 1980s, this model of growth had ground to a halt. Even before the repression of the Milosevic era, large urban construction had ceased and employment levels had begun to decline. Stagnation was followed by a decade of repression, followed by open conflict in 1998 and 1999.

Post-war Pristina has become again a town of administrators, this time foreign as well as Kosovar. Major socialist-era buildings, including office blocks, banks and for a while even the National Museum, were turned into offices for international organisations. On the outskirts of the town, a new generation of entrepreneurs (mostly importing goods to sell in Kosovo) turned Pristina once again into a city of traders.

### **A murder with consequences**

In August 2000, the Association of Architects of Kosovo published a letter urging the UN administration to take action to protect the urban environment of Pristina.

“As a result of destruction as well as illegal construction, the historical heart of the city and objects of architectural and urban value, which reflect our entire cultural heritage, are being badly affected.”<sup>1</sup>

The illegal construction they were referring to took a number of different forms. Since 1999, informal housing settlements had sprung up on agricultural land on the city’s fringes, sometimes connecting illegally to water and electricity. Many citizens had built new houses or extended existing structures without building permits, creating unsafe and unsightly developments. New commercial buildings, in particular warehouses for the city’s retail sector, had sprung up in areas not zoned for commercial development. Most blatantly of all, shiny new multi-storey buildings had appeared in the historical centre – sometimes on sites of other buildings that had been illegally demolished. The 36 regulatory plans drawn up between 1967 and 1990 were still in force, but neither Kosovar nor international public officials paid much attention to them. In post-war Pristina, for all practical purposes there was a legal vacuum.

In September 2000, Rexhep Luci, the city’s leading urban planner, launched an initiative called “Vision for Pristina, 2000 - 2005” at a workshop in Hotel Grand. His goal was to initiate the preparation of a new urban plan that would meet the development needs of the city for the next generation. In the run up to the workshop, he announced his intention to tackle the problem of illegal construction. Teams of municipal staff and students armed with cameras were dispatched across the city, returning with 2,000 documented cases. With the support of the UN Administration, he issued his first three decisions ordering the demolition of the most blatant of illegal structures, including a restaurant built in the middle of a public park.

On his way home from the cocktail party following the workshop Luci was shot dead. In the wake of the murder, UNMIK issues a new Regulation on Construction, named after Rexhep Luci, confirming the requirement for building permits from the competent municipal authority.<sup>2</sup> In 2004 a new Law on Construction was passed. In reality, however, little has been done to enforce the law.

The municipal Department of Inspectorate employs only three building inspectors, together with one driver, one official responsible for the execution of demolition orders and 13 administrative staff.<sup>3</sup> In most cases, the Municipality has to engage private companies to carry out the demolition work under police supervision, which turns out to be a very costly process. However, the 2005 municipal budget provided for only €30,000 to cover demolitions. The work of the municipal building inspectors is supervised by the Construction Inspectorate in the Kosovo Ministry for Environment and Spatial Planning. However, the Ministry itself has only one inspector.

The case of Luci’s murder has never been solved. It put an abrupt stop to talk of tackling the illegal construction problem. Other efforts to tackle illegal construction, including in

<sup>1</sup> Association of Architects of Kosovo, 2 August 2000, Prishtina.

<sup>2</sup> See UNMIK Regulation 2000/53 also known as Rexhep Luci Regulation on Construction.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Directorate of Inspectorate, Prishtina Municipality, October 2005.

the historic zone and in public parks, quickly petered out. The combination of strong rhetoric followed by a very public retreat also demonstrated the weakness of UNMIK, which was in charge of policing. Following Luci's murder KFOR also showed reluctance to get involved. Municipal authorities continued to speak of the urgent need for a new urban plan for Pristina, while allowing the existing legal framework to become a dead letter.

### **Planning Utopia**

In September 2003, the municipality put the preparation of its Strategy 2020 to international tender. In December 2003, the municipality signed a contract with an international consortium led by a Pristina-based company, Intech, together with four German institutes. The main outcome of their efforts was the 2020 Strategic Plan for the Urban Development of Pristina.

The Strategic Plan was prepared very rapidly. The consortium was given four months, until March 2004, to complete the task. Although there was little reliable data available to feed into the planning, the short process did not allow for much additional data collection. After a series of public presentations and expert meetings, the Strategic Plan was nonetheless adopted by the Municipal Assembly on 2 July 2004.

However, the Strategic Plan 2020 was from the outset based on a misleading vision of Pristina's reality. It uses wild assumptions in place of solid data, is unrealistic about resources, and fails to offer practical solutions to the real problems facing Pristina citizens. In short, the Strategy stands as another example of poor governance.

The most obvious problem with the Strategy 2020 is that it is based on incorrect assumptions about the size of Pristina and its growth. The Strategy refers to the absence of reliable data on population throughout Kosovo. It then proceeds on the basis of an urban population for Pristina of 350,000, in a municipality of 420,000.

There is a pattern among Kosovo and international institutions alike of overestimating the capital's population. The OSCE Municipal Profile of Pristina, published annually since 2000 and available on the internet, has regularly maintained that the population of Pristina is more than 500,000, based on an estimate first made under chaotic conditions in 2000. In February 2005, the OSCE profile read:

“Comprising a territory of 854 km<sup>2</sup>, Pristina is the most populous municipality in Kosovo, which doubled after the conflict. In 1991 the city was home to about 200,000 inhabitants, but presently, it is estimated that approximately 550,000, including 200,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) from other areas of Kosovo.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> OSCE Mission in Kosovo, *Municipal Profile Prishtine/Pristina*, February 2005, p. 1.

Many have used this figure as a reference. The UNMIK Municipal Report 2002, for example, refers to Pristina as “the biggest municipality with a population of over 500,000.”<sup>5</sup> A recent book on Kosovo municipalities by the director of the National Archive, Jusuf Osmani, states: “In this modern city live over 500,000 inhabitants of different ethnic background.”<sup>6</sup> A Geography Book widely used in secondary schools notes that “according to some measures Pristina has 600,000 inhabitants”.<sup>7</sup> A report on urban management and planning in Kosovo municipalities by the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning in 2002 commented that “large-scale population migration took place after the war, with the main stream of migration heading for Pristina, increasing the number from 210,040 inhabitants before the war to 545,477 after the war.”<sup>8</sup>

It is clear that the idea of Pristina as a large and rapidly growing city has widespread appeal, both for Kosovo institutions and the international mission.

It is wrong, however, to assert that a more accurate estimate of the current population cannot be established. In fact, the authors of the 2020 Strategy had access to more accurate numbers. They had met with the Directorate of Civil Protection and Emergency – the one municipal body to have engaged in a serious population estimate. Surprisingly, however, these figures do not appear in the Strategy.

In 2003, the Directorate of Civil Protection and Emergency conducted an assessment of the inhabitants of each of the 36 sub-municipal units of Pristina municipality.<sup>9</sup> Teams went from house to house completing ‘family cards’, recording basic information on each household member. A total of 28,275 households and 161,749 inhabitants were identified through that exercise. The Directorate believed it had covered some 70-80 percent of all households, yielding an estimated population of about 231,070 inhabitants.<sup>10</sup>

The figures given by the Directorate are not the only administrative data that can be used to estimate the urban population. In 2004, there were 34,634 households connected to the Pristina water supply.<sup>11</sup> Using the Directorate of Emergency’s figure of 5.7 members per average household, this suggests that 197,000 people are connected to water in the city. Allowing for a certain percentage of illegal connections, this would yield an urban population of somewhat above 200,000.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Prishtine/Pristina Municipality, Municipal Report January-December 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Jusuf Osmani, *Settlements of Kosova – Part I*, Pristina, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Riza Cavolli, 2004, p. 115.

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, Department of Spatial Planning, Report on present situation in urban management and planning in municipalities of Kosovo, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> The city of Pristina is divided into 20 sub-municipal units referred as Bashkesia Lokale (sub-municipal units). There are an additional 50 villages in the municipality making up another 16 sub-municipal units.

<sup>10</sup> Raport Per viziten dhe punen neper Bashkesi Lokale Prej 20 Janarit deri me 28 Shkurt 2003, p.5.

<sup>11</sup> Regional Water Supply Company Pristina, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> As the Strategic Plan noted: ‘Almost every household within the urban area of Prishtina is connected to the water supply system. However, the rural parts in the East of the municipality are not connected to public water supply’ (Strategic Plan).

The voter registry and school enrolments point to the same reality. In the 2004 election, there were 139,587 voters registered in Pristina municipality.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, there is the figure of 3,617 primary school students in each year level in Pristina municipality.<sup>14</sup> Multiplying this by 18 yields the number of 65,112 inhabitants under the age of 18. Combined with voters, this would be around 205,000 people in the municipality. To this, one would need to add those who are living in Pristina but not registered as voters, including university students, civil servants posted in the capital and foreigners.

A second central assumption of the 2020 Strategy, related to the first, is that net immigration is likely to average 6,400 persons per year in the coming decade. This, in addition to natural growth, would yield a likely population by 2020 of 650,000.

This compares to annual average migration of between 2,200 and 2,400 in the 1970s and 1980s respectively.<sup>15</sup> During that period, however, thousands of new jobs were being created in the administration and in socialist industries, and new apartment blocks were being constructed in large numbers. The planners offer no rationale for why Pristina should continue to act as an economic magnet. They simply assume that the continued urban development would require an expansion of the city from 2,200 ha today to 10,000 ha, while commerce and industry would expand from 120-130 ha at present to around 600 ha.

The Plan proposes to destroy large numbers of existing buildings: new private housing in Kalabria to the south of the city, old settlement in Tophane, including a historical mosque, and the one dynamic commercial zone developed on private land in Hajvalia, to the south of the city, where there has been substantial private investment in building up infrastructure.

Given the record to date in tackling illegal construction, this is highly unrealistic.

The traffic plans drawn up on the basis of the Strategy 2020 go even further, referring to a city of ‘nearly a million’ in the medium term. In an interview, Lulzim Nixha told us that he believed there were some “150,000 cars” in Pristina municipality. The only hard figure in the 2020 Strategy, however, is that 12,015 cars enter Pristina on an average day.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Final results of Kosovo Assembly election 2004, ‘Focus Kosovo’, September – October 2004, pp. 12-13. This number includes people over 18 years of age.

<sup>14</sup> This figure is obtained by dividing the total number of primary school pupils, school year 2005-2006 (aged from six to 14 years of age) in the municipality, 32,556, with the number of school grades in primary education, nine. MEST, ‘Statistikat e Arsimit ne Kosove, 2005-06’, Prishtinë, janar 2006.

<sup>15</sup> PUP, 1987, p. 28 (migration saldo)

<sup>16</sup> ‘Projektim i qarkoreve & trenit urban’, GRI, Kompania per inxhinierin e trafikut, regjionalizim dhe planifikimin e infrastruktures. This was based on counting cars entering Pristina on a Tuesday, 25<sup>th</sup> January 2005. Between 8:30 and 9:30 570 cars and 4 trucks entered the city from the North.

Finally, the whole Strategy 2020 planning process is divorced from any credible budgetary process and based on wildly unrealistic resource assumptions. Its schemes of large-scale expansion are to be funded by external sources – either donors, or unnamed private investors. It plans for large new urban settlements and high-rise apartment buildings, without any apparent indication that private developers are interested in undertaking construction on any such scale, or that there would be a domestic market for such housing if it were constructed. Having anticipated major housing growth, the plan then assumes that donor funding will be found for the infrastructure that it would require. However, preparing the Strategy without linking it to a credible medium-term budgetary framework condemns it to being a mere wish list of projects, without any serious prioritisation. In that sense, it fails to be strategic at all.

### **Europe’s youngest capital: the way forward?**

What would be a better way to arrive at a credible urban development strategy? There are three core issues to consider:

#### 1. Realism

The analysis of the socio-economic situation needs to be grounded in real research. A city that today has perhaps 220,000 inhabitants, and might grow to 250,000 inhabitants by 2020, has very different infrastructure and investment needs from a city of 650,000. A city in which 12,000 cars enter on an average day does not need crossings that cater for 70,000 cars.

#### 2. Focus

A good plan needs to address the current problems of the citizens of the city, not those of an imaginary utopian city of the distant future. Most households who will live in Pristina in 2020 already live here today: good planning is about addressing their concerns. These concerns naturally vary, depending on where people live (Dragodan or Kodra e Trimave, Ulpiana or Kalabria). They also vary depending on whether they are traders who would like to move into production, people working in restaurants catering to international customers, university students, housewives who do not know where to take their children on a weekend, or pensioners living on the eighth floor of one of the socialist apartment buildings in Dardania. A good plan needs to consult much more widely than has happened until now on what people actually want from their city.

#### 3. Enforcement

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Between 12:00 and 13:00 411 cars and 22 trucks entered the city from the West. And between 10:30 and 11:30 625 cars and 24 trucks entered the city from the South.

Crucially, a good plan needs to be enforceable. This will also require a level of cooperation among municipal departments, municipal and Kosovo institutions, and the organizations still linked to the KTA (such a utility providers), which has been lacking to date. It will require credible budgets that focus on genuine priorities.

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