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The yellow pavilion: An exploration of the benefits of temporary public spaces

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the role of “The Yellow Pavilion” intervention by Architecture for Humans in reclaiming Rexhep Luci Street as a public space and promoting urban interventions in Prishtina. The temporary structure was installed for a week to transform the street into a public space, and the paper presents the findings of its impact on the neighborhood and city. By examining the effectiveness of temporary interventions, the article highlights the benefits and limitations of tactical urbanism while also considering the potential for this kind of intervention to create social connections, promote community engagement, and revitalize urban areas. Ultimately, this research contributes to understanding the value of temporary public spaces in urban design and planning.

KEYWORDS

urban intervention, pavilion, tactical urbanism, public space

1. INTRODUCTION

Public spaces are essential to the urban environment, providing opportunities for social interaction, cultural exchange, and community engagement [1]. They are spaces where public life unfolds, individuals and communities come together, and urban identities are formed. However, many cities worldwide have seen a decline in public spaces due to urbanization, privatization, and commercialization, leading to the loss of important public spaces for citizens [2].

The creation of qualitative public spaces can be a difficult and costly endeavor for cities. Permanent interventions in public spaces require significant investments in design, construction, and maintenance and can often face challenges from competing interests and limited resources [3]. As a result, temporary interventions and tactical urbanism have emerged as effective and innovative approaches to address these challenges. These approaches can provide a platform for testing new ideas and public space interventions without committing large amounts of resources or making permanent changes [4].

Urban interventions, like tactical urbanism, have emerged as a practical approach to reclaiming public spaces and testing new public space interventions without substantial investment. These approaches involve the temporary or low-cost transformation of public spaces using creative, people-centered design solutions. Tactical urbanism and temporary interventions have been used successfully in many cities worldwide, enabling citizens to test new ideas and interventions in public spaces without spending enormous amounts or disrupting existing infrastructure [5]. The approach has been proven effective in increasing urban spaces' vibrancy, livability, and functionality and improving public life [6].

Cities like Prishtina have experienced significant changes in urban development over the past decades, resulting in the loss of many public spaces to cars and private sectors. This has led to a need for adequate public spaces for citizens, leading to the need to reclaim and repurpose underutilized spaces to create new ones. Rexhep Luci Street (Fig. 1) is a prime



Fig. 1. "Rexhep Luci" Street before the urban intervention (Source: Author)

example of a Prishtina street that can be transformed into a vibrant public space. Currently, the street is being used mainly as a parking lot, with little consideration for the needs and desires of citizens. However, with its central location and proximity to the main boulevard, the street has excellent potential as a public space that could serve as a hub for social and cultural activities. By reclaiming this street and transforming it into a public space, Prishtina could provide citizens with much-needed public space, improving the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

This paper explores the findings of the intervention "The Yellow Pavilion" by Architecture for Humans, its role in reclaiming Rexhep Luci Street as a public space, and its potential to promote urban interventions in cities like Prishtina. The Yellow Pavilion was designed to create a space for social interaction, community engagement, and cultural exchange, demonstrating the potential for temporary interventions to transform underutilized spaces into vibrant public spaces. This temporary structure was installed for a week and aimed to transform the street into a public space for a short time.

By examining The Yellow Pavilion intervention, this paper will explore the effectiveness of temporary interventions in promoting urban interventions and the impact of these kinds of interventions on citizens, urban planners, and policymakers. The paper will provide insight into the benefits and limitations of temporary and tactical urbanism, offering recommendations for future urban interventions in cities like Prishtina.

2. METHODS

The methods used in this study incorporated both qualitative and quantitative analyses of the site. The qualitative analysis primarily focused on the social aspects of the site, using Jan Gehl's [2] human-centered approach to urban design. This approach emphasizes the significance of public spaces for promoting social interaction, enhancing human well-being, and improving the quality of life in urban areas. To gather information, observers conducted behavioral and needs analyses of people in

public spaces. This information was used to create functional and enjoyable spaces for citizens.

On the other hand, the quantitative analysis was mainly concerned with the site's physical features. It involved building mapping, road measurements, and examining the functions of the buildings in the surrounding area. This approach was used to understand the site's physical context better and identify any opportunities or limitations for the intervention. The combination of qualitative and quantitative analyses provided a comprehensive understanding of the site, which was instrumental in ensuring the success of the intervention.

2.1. Counting

Counting was a widely used tool in public life studies where pedestrians, cyclists, and cars were counted. Counting provided numbers for evaluating the state of the place and making comparisons over time. Observers counted moving as well as staying (standing or sitting) people. Gehl and Gemzøe [6] pointed out that public spaces played a crucial role in shaping people's daily lives. Therefore, it was essential to understand how different groups of people used public spaces. To achieve this, user demographics like age, gender, and disabilities were considered, as Gehl [2] recommended. The analysis aimed to identify whether the street was being used as a 'place' or simply a commuting way. In the process of counting, adjustments to the date and hour were made if weather conditions were not satisfactory, as suggested by Hester [7].

2.2. Behavioral mapping and tracking

Various research methods were employed to understand the urban environment being investigated comprehensively. One of the techniques used was behavioral mapping, which involved plotting and symbolizing activities, people, and places on a plan of the area to identify the type and number of activities occurring and their respective locations. This approach has been used in previous research, for example, the study by Madanipour [8], which utilized behavioral mapping to analyze public and private spaces in cities. Tracing and tracking methods were used to map people's movements within and across a limited space, providing valuable information about movement patterns and public spaces' use (Fig. 2). Lofland [9] used similar tracing methods in his seminal work "A world of strangers," where he followed people discreetly to understand how they interacted with urban public spaces.

Photography was another method to document human activity and analyzes the urban environment. This approach has been used extensively in previous research, for example, in the work of Whyte [10], who used photography to study the social life of small urban spaces. Time-lapse photography was also employed to gain insights into pedestrian velocity and movement patterns. Furthermore, the whole intervention process was documented in the documentary "Rexhep".

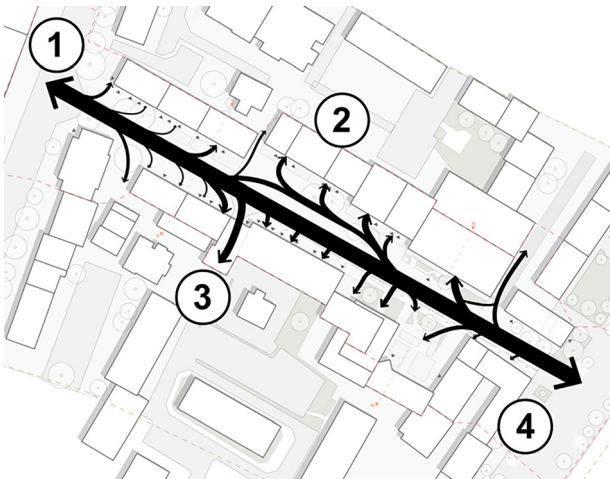


Fig. 2. Tracing of pedestrians' main pathways: 1: Transit to connect to main road; 2: and 3: Connection to inner neighborhoods; 4: Transit to main city boulevard (Source: Author)

Test walks and interviews were also conducted to supplement the quantitative data from other research methods. Test walks allowed observers to systematically notice problems and potentials for city life on a given route. At the same time, carefully crafted interviews provided valuable insights into people's perceptions of the area and the life developed there. Closed meetings with the neighbors' council were held to understand their concerns and expectations better.

2.3. The physical aspect

The study analyzed the site's physical dimensions through various methods. One of the methods used was counting car frequency, which provided information on the type and use of the street. Building characteristics were also examined, including the height, number of floors, width of facades, and overall state of the buildings. Additionally, the accessibility of the site for wheelchair users was evaluated, with building entrances being valued and mapped. Additionally, areas of greenery were identified and analyzed, including grass and tree types, sizes, and positions on the site. Potential proposals for new green spaces were also suggested based on the analysis. Various urban elements and furniture, for example, garbage bins, lighting pieces, benches, and seating, were identified, valued, and mapped. The environmental features of the site were also evaluated. Smells, wind, noise, and vistas were identified and placed on a map of the site to help gain a better understanding of the overall experience of the site. Sunshine/shade was also analyzed, particularly during the summer and winter solstice and the equinox. A safety perception analysis was also conducted.

Finally, space syntax analysis was employed to understand the vistas and visibility of the main spots of the sites. Although these analyses are commonly used for indoor spaces [11], similar techniques have also been applied to outdoor spaces by other scholars as well. These scholars utilized these tools to investigate urban environments'

physical arrangement and spatial connections to understand better sightlines, path tendencies, and open spaces [12].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Yellow Pavilion project successfully transformed a street into a public space for a week, with a wide range of activities organized around the pavilion, including a public discussion with the mayor neighbors and pedestrians. The intervention demonstrated the benefits of public spaces for both inhabitants and visitors, including social interaction, community building, and economic development.

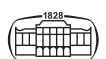
3.1. Data analysis

Rexhep Luci Street is highly populated with a lot of foot traffic. The study conducted there needed counting of multiple days and hours. To provide a solid picture of the daily rhythm, counting was carried out for 10 min once an hour over the course of a week, on Monday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, starting from 8:00, 12:00, 17:00, and 20:00. An additional 10 min were spent tracking people's movement and places of standing/sitting, as advised by Whyte [10].

The data was then collected and analyzed, after which it was concluded whether the street was being used as a 'place' or was just a transit way of commuting. The pedestrian counts (Figs 3 and 4) conducted during the study also revealed that the number of women and children on the street was lower than that of men. This finding highlights the need for urban intervention to be designed in a way that attracts more women and children. This is consistent with previous studies showing that the presence of women and children in urban environments is a sign of a healthy and livable community [13, 14]. Furthermore, studies have shown that women and children may have different needs and preferences when it comes to urban design, for example, the provision of seating, shade, and safe play areas [15].

The placement of urban interventions, in this case, a pavilion, can significantly impact the success of a project. To ensure the optimal placement of The Yellow Pavilion, analyses were conducted to understand the existing foot traffic patterns and areas of high visibility. This allowed for a strategic placement that would attract new pedestrian traffic to the area. In particular, the pedestrian traffic analysis revealed a need for more female and child pedestrians.

The analysis presented in Fig. 5a reveals that the prominently observable sections of the street are those illustrated in red. As a result, the optimal position for the pavilion was determined to be in this location, given its high foot traffic. The findings are further supported by the analysis presented in Fig. 5b, which indicates that the most advantageous vantage points to view the pavilion are concentrated in the same red regions. These observations suggest that the pavilion is likely to garner the attention of passersby on both the boulevard to the right and the adjacent main road to the left.



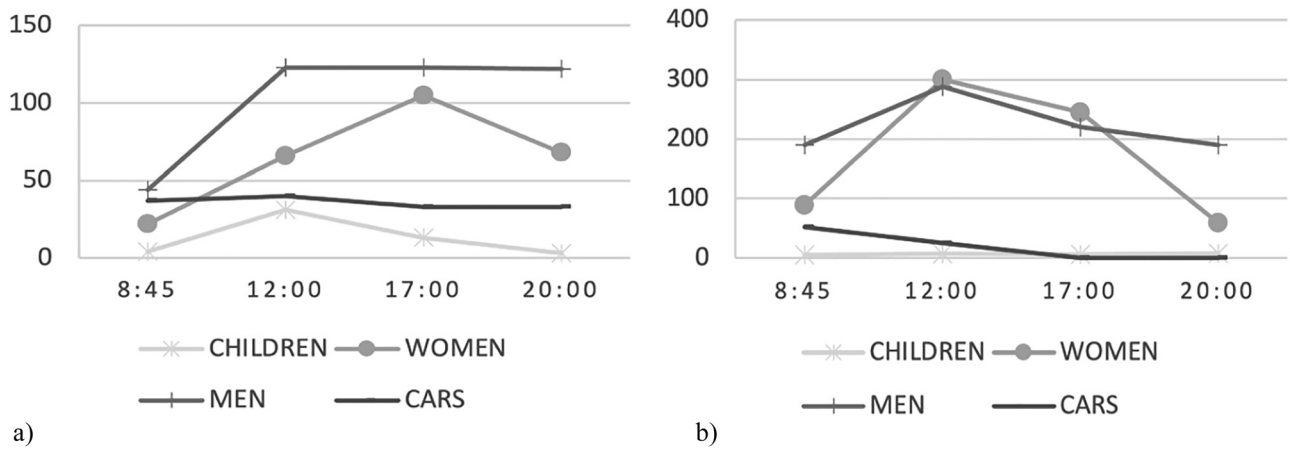


Fig. 3. a) Counting of pedestrians and cars – Monday, b) Counting of pedestrians and cars – Friday (Source: Author)

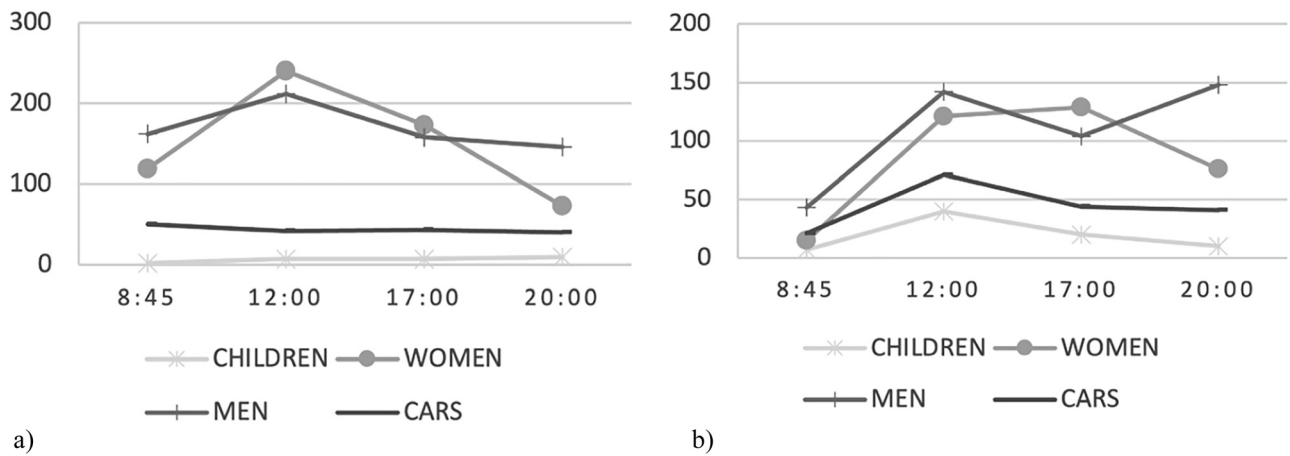


Fig. 4. a) Counting of pedestrians and cars – Saturday, b) Counting of pedestrians and cars – Sunday (Source: Author)

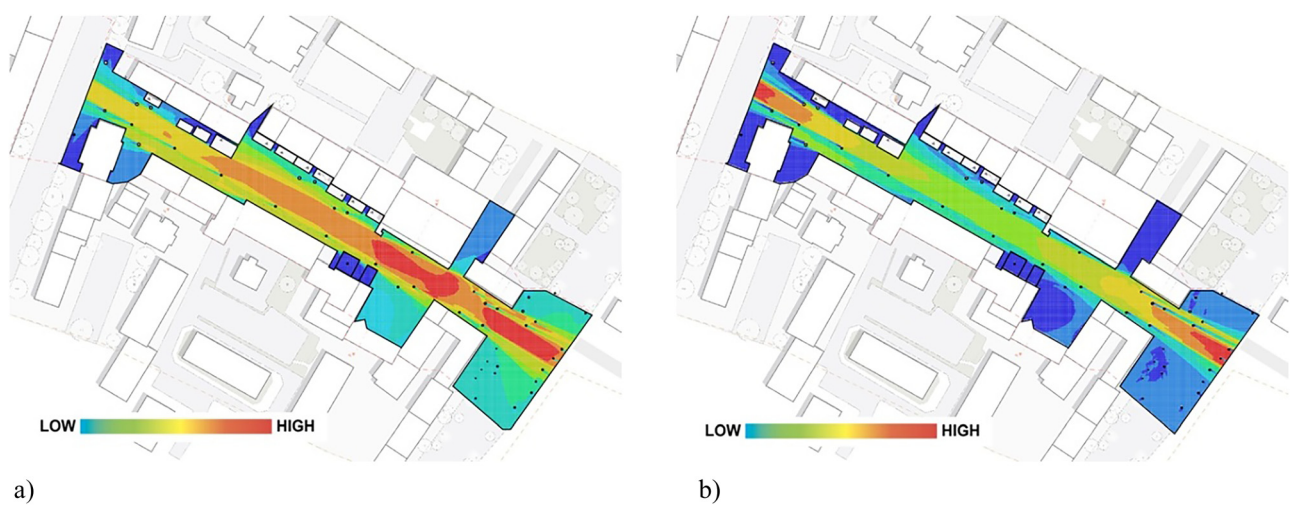


Fig. 5. a) Best visibility lines of the site/street, b) best points for better vistas toward the site/street (Source: Author)

3.2. Activities

The Yellow Pavilion aimed to create an intervention that would provide Rexhep Luci Street with a unique identity, engaging the public and lasting longer. The proposal sought to improve the quality of the public space, making it more human-scale and creating a chain reaction that would encourage citizens to engage with the space. Through site analysis, it was found that while the street was an active artery of the urban outline of the city, it was mostly used for transit, with few people taking the time to enjoy the space. The interventions were designed to enhance the features of the public space through activities and areas that could be used throughout the day, giving people the opportunity to sit, eat, and be a part of a living, inclusive, and vibrant city.

The street intervention was therefore divided into three interconnected spaces with slightly different activities and characters (Fig. 6), enabling people to have an undivided experience while passing through the street in any direction. The central part of each direction consisted of modular pods that served as a culmination of experience and activity. As a first step, cars were restricted from accessing parts of the street where the main activities occurred, making the public space belong to the pedestrians. This created enough activities to meet the needs of the people who live, work, or choose to spend their time there.

The proposed interventions included cutting vehicle access starting from the passage, in the direction of the boulevard, with supply and maintenance happening between set schedules that did not hinder pedestrian activity. At peak activity, up to 20 cars were parked in the official parking spots and on the street. Closing the street for cars turned that parking place into a public space, while the number of cars affected was low compared to the space provided for public use.

A large bright pavilion was built close to the cinema in the street to visually attract pedestrians and give the street a visually present and inviting characteristic for the users (Fig. 7). The pavilion aimed to connect the street with the boulevard in three essential dimensions: physically, visually, and socially. Pods were also dispersed along the street to



Fig. 7. The main structure of The Yellow Pavilion (Source: Author)

provide flexibility for various uses, creating a collective area of various activities.

The design proposal aimed to increase the presence of children and women in the space to provide a suitable environment for everyone. Coffee shops were one of the main reasons people visited the street. The pods provided a space for people to purchase drinks and food and enjoy them in a truly public space fused with pedestrians and other activities.

The proposal also included an exhibition and performance, curated to encourage reactions and activation of people, acting as a catalyst for future improvements. The exhibition consisted of lectures, children's activities (Fig. 8a), galleries, and other activities dealing with public space and spreading awareness about it and citizens' rights to access it (Fig. 8b). The intervention culminated with a musical performance, and printed panels showing the best-case scenario of the site were presented, allowing pedestrians to see how Rexhep Luci Street could look with proper investment and design.

The integration of The Yellow Pavilion as a piece of public art also significantly impacted the aesthetic aspect of the street. Its unique design and vibrant color scheme made it a focal point of the surrounding environment, contributing to the area's visual appeal. Enhancements of this sort made to the urban landscape have been noted by other scholars as well [16, 17]. In this study, the authors explore the use of installation art to enhance urban public spaces and promote urban renewal. The article's results align with our findings, demonstrating that integrating art in urban spaces can positively impact the area's visual appeal and revitalization.

One of the principal activities involved a public forum comprising residents, a professional panel, and the city's mayor. During the forum, the significance of public spaces for the neighborhood's welfare was underscored several times. The project successfully influenced policy change, with the municipality of Prishtina using the project as a testing ground to permanently convert the street into a public space. Furthermore, after the initial intervention, the structures of the pavilion were relocated to different neighborhoods of the city by the Municipality. The main structure was relocated within the University Campus.

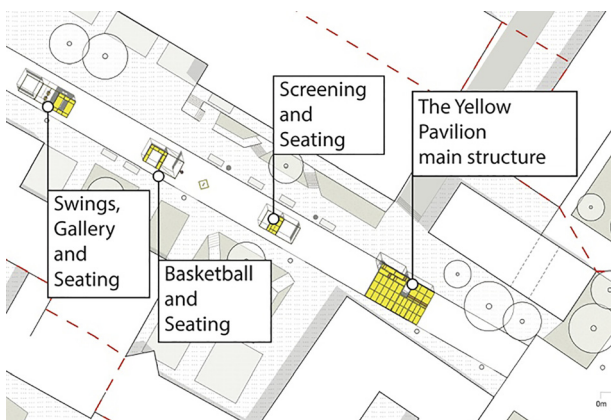


Fig. 6. The Yellow Pavilion masterplan (Source: Author)



Fig. 8. a) An example of the smaller interventions with different activities, in this case, street basketball (left) and leisure (right), b) public discussion with the Mayor of Prishtina, citizens, and professional panel (Source: Author)

While the current study has contributed to understanding the impact of urban interventions on foot traffic and public engagement, several limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, the study was conducted in a specific location and time, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other urban areas or periods. Secondly, the study only focused on the immediate impact of The Yellow Pavilion on foot traffic and did not explore any long-term effects of the intervention.

Overall, while the current study provides valuable insights into the impact of The Yellow Pavilion on foot traffic, several avenues for future research could build upon or improve upon the findings of this study. Furthermore, several areas for future research could expand upon the current study. For instance, it would be interesting to investigate the impact of The Yellow Pavilion on other aspects of the urban environment, for example, the surrounding businesses or the overall aesthetic of the street. Another potential avenue for research would be to explore the impact of different urban interventions on foot traffic and public engagement. Additionally, future studies could examine the long-term effects of urban interventions on the urban environment and the communities that inhabit it [18, 19].

4. CONCLUSION

The Yellow Pavilion project was a successful temporary urban intervention that demonstrated the benefits of public spaces and influenced policy change. The project provides valuable insights for urban planners and policymakers on the importance of public spaces in creating vibrant, livable, and inclusive cities. Through temporary interventions like The Yellow Pavilion, planners can explore the potential of underutilized spaces and understand how they can be transformed into vibrant public spaces.

Overall, The Yellow Pavilion urban intervention successfully achieved its stated objectives. The following are the key results:

- *Increased foot traffic:* After the installation of the Yellow Pavilion, there was a noticeable increase in foot traffic in the surrounding area. This was evident from the foot traffic data collected before and after the installation of the pavilion, which showed a significant increase in the number of pedestrians passing through the area;
- *Improved community engagement:* The Yellow Pavilion served as a gathering place for the local community. People were seen sitting, talking, and engaging with each other around the pavilion. The community members also participated in events and activities organized around the pavilion, which helped foster a sense of community;
- *Enhanced aesthetic appeal:* The Yellow Pavilion contributed to the area's visual appeal, creating an eye-catching and attractive landmark. The bright yellow color of the pavilion contrasted nicely with the surrounding environment and made it easy to spot from a distance;
- *Increased economic activity:* Local businesses reported increased sales after installing the Yellow Pavilion. The increased foot traffic in the area brought more customers to the local shops, cafes, and restaurants;
- *Positive community feedback:* The Yellow Pavilion received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the local community. Surveys conducted before and after the installation showed that most respondents found the pavilion to be a positive addition to the area. Many also expressed their desire to see similar interventions in the future.

Furthermore, the Municipality of Prishtina used the intervention as a case study to analyze whether closing the street would benefit the neighborhood. The intervention was used as an argument for the closing of the street, and the municipality of Prishtina now has concrete plans to close the

street, turning it into a public space and connecting it with the existing “Mother Theresa” Boulevard.

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