

In 2021, it was decided that the Hivzi Sulejmani Library in Prishtina would be rehabilitated to become one of Manifesta 14's headquarters. We believe that the restoration process goes beyond the refurbishment of buildings, it brings up histories and draws attention to the relationship between space and memory.

What do we choose to keep, to restore, to rehabilitate and to remember, and what do we decide to eliminate? Fixing the material past of a building entails dealing with the immaterial past – society, culture, values and memories. It is an interpretative and participatory process of looking into the past in order to reveal narratives of belonging that do not embody any single history, memory or identity, but that are cumulative and negotiable.

Archival documentation on the history of the library was extremely limited, so we decided to approach the rehabilitation of the space by activating social processes such as engaging with its collective memory. Foundation Shtatëmbëdhjetë was invited to help us in (re) building this knowledge by exploring the different stories and recollections of people who worked in the institution throughout the years, members of the library, its visitors and the citizens of Prishtina.

This publication, which playfully references the Hivzi Sulejmani Library's old membership cards, is a result of the aforementioned research conducted in 2021. It has served as not only a departure point for future activities as part of Manifesta 14's Education and Community programme in the library's former reading room, but also to contextualize a permanent interdisciplinary space that will be called Centre for Narrative Practice.

For this collaboration, we would like to thank: Foundation Shtatëmbëdhjetë; the research team comprised of Bleona Kurteshi, Egzona Hajrullahu, Goneta Ademaj, Idila Ibrahim, Trina Hoti, Ridona Berisha and Lirika Demiri; the research mentors, Linda Gusia and Nita Luci; and the report's author, Sihana Klisurica.

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THE FUTURE

The building known as the former Hivzi Sulejmani Library – an institution in itself – has not only educational and cultural value but also cultural heritage value. As a library, it was a space that enabled many generations to access various kinds of literature on their journeys of personal development. In architectural terms it is notable for its style and age. It was built in the 1930s as a residential building with Austro-Hungarian architectural influences. Despite various periods of architectural development and devastation as a result of wars, the building survived.

Analysing its nearly century-old existence helps us to more clearly understand the role of political, social and cultural changes. This overview aims to highlight different perspectives, starting with a brief history of the building's functions, including the period of its establishment as a library, the institution's glory days, its challenges and activities.

A considerable part of the report is based on interviews that contribute to the collective memory of the library, and on archival material and documents collected during four months of research in 2021.

To help us to understand more complex aspects, social interactions and even cultural phenomena, this research explores how and why certain things have happened by interpreting activities and describing different endeavours.



In order to collect information on emotions, behaviours, understandings and individual experiences concerning the former Hivzi Sulejmani Library building, a qualitative research method was used. Interviews were conducted with individuals who worked at the library or frequented it during various stages of their lives. To establish a broader picture of the condition of the building and the common memories that build the general narrative of it, over 40 oral interviews were conducted, while state and personal archives were explored for supporting materials. Six research interns were involved in the research and were in charge of interviews with neighbourhood residents, people who were employed at the library and those who are still active there. The sample of over 40 interviews with people of different ages, ranging from 20 to 65+, provides a general impression of the function of the institution over the years and documents the collective memory surrounding it.

Books, reports, cards, magazines, photographs and other materials were discovered, which also served as grounds for this report.

Although there is no document proving the year the former Hivzi Sulejmani Library building was constructed, based on the inscription on the front façade, it is believed that it was built in 1930. According to a monograph by Sylejman Pireva, the director of the library between 1999 and 2008, “the building was the property of a Jewish merchant by the name of Jovo (Jovan Milić)”¹, and it was confiscated after World War II. In 1945, the building was allocated to the Regional Committee of the Communist Party, which remained there until 1947 when it was turned into a library. It remained as a library until 2016. The library was relocated to this building two years after its establishment, however there is no available information on its previous location.

Over the years, the library had different names, starting off as the Miladin Popović People’s Library – a name it kept until 1993² – before becoming the Biblioteka Grada (City Library).

It subsequently changed names frequently, becoming the Hivzi Sulejmani City Library, Hivzi Sulejmani Regional Library and Hivzi Sulejmani Inter-municipal Library³. The institution is now called the Hivzi Sulejmani Library.

Four historical periods define the work of the Hivzi Sulejmani Library. During the first period, between 1947 and 1977, the aim was to consolidate the library into an institution. Over the first decade, it had very few employees, all underqualified for their positions. In 1956, there were 12 employees: seven Serbs, one Albanian, one Turk, two Roma and one foreigner. While the library had 1,300 books when it was founded, by the mid 1960s, it housed nearly 60,000, with more than two-thirds of them in Serbo-Croatian. In 1971, it had around 5,000 members of different ethnicities, including Serbs, Albanians, Montenegrins and Turks.

In 1975, the library had 35 branches all over Kosovo. It also had a mobile book collection that would travel to different locations and institutions, including rural areas, schools, hospitals and factories with a large number of employees.

The second period, from 1977 to 1992, is considered to be the time when the library underwent its most rapid development. During those years, an increasing number of Albanians joined the library’s staff, and in 1977 the position of director was given to an Albanian, Zekie Kada, for the first time. She held the position until 1992. The first director was been Milka Stefanović, who was in post between 1953 and 1959, and she was followed by Radoslavka Gigić, who held the position from 1959 to 1977. Both were of Serb nationality.

With levels of education low in Kosovo after World War II, the area’s subsequent development was accompanied by a noticeable increase in population and an increase in literacy. This growth and development reached its peak in the 1970s.

¹ Sylejman Pireva, “The Hivzi Sulejmani Public Library (1945-2010)”, p.20.

² <https://www.biblioteka-pr.org/sq/Historiku>

³ *ibid.*

Meanwhile, “between the first post-WWII census, in 1948, and the last one conducted as the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in 1981, the number of inhabitants in Prishtina increased from 19,631 to 108,083”⁴. Such an increase necessitated more space for readers. The reading room, which was built later on the same site as the library, had an approximate capacity of 50 seats and was also where the library’s collection of scientific books was located. During this period, the library managed to increase its inventory with various titles, adding not just children’s books to its collection but also world literature, novels and scientific books in Albanian, Serbian and English.

The third period, between 1992 and 1999, was defined by broader political developments in Kosovo. After the abolition of Kosovo’s autonomy in 1989, Kosovo’s occupation by Serbian forces followed, accompanied by repressive measures towards Albanian citizens. The dismissal of Albanians from their jobs and the other ethnically-based measures of oppression that culminated in the 1998-99 war, also left their mark on the library. The number of books, especially those in Albanian, was reduced significantly, and relations between members of the library’s staff were tense. The library’s inventory suffered great losses during this period as a considerable number of books in Albanian were placed “in processing” and sent to the paper factory in Lipjan after a committee was formed to revise books that were considered contrary to Serbian policy, while the library’s 28 branches outside of Prishtina were closed.

⁴ Arbër Sadiki, “Architecture of Public Buildings in Prishtina 1945-1990: Social and Formative Factors”, p.22.

The fourth period spanned the years between 1999 and 2016. Immediately after the last war, the library resumed its activities by opening new branches, expanding its book collections and renovating its spaces. In 1999, the library was named “Hivzi Sulejmani” in honour of the well-known writer who had gifted his property in the Taslixhe neighbourhood to the Municipality of Prishtina in order to open a children’s library there. Sulejmani’s bust was erected in the library yard in Tophane in 2000. The previous year, Sylejman Pireva had been elected head of the library and during his eight years managing the institution he would create many programmes and cooperations with other libraries. In 2008, the position of director was taken up by Munish Hyseni, who still holds the position.

The Hivzi Sulejmani Library’s former building was included in the List of Cultural Heritage Under Temporary Protection in 2011, and it has been abandoned since 2016. On August 23, 2016, a new facility was inaugurated in the Dardania neighbourhood, where the institution still operates today. It left behind the 92-year-old facility with many promises and unfulfilled plans for repurposing.

A broad look at the library's names over the years allows us to understand which strata of society was favoured, depending on the social circumstances of the time. Upon opening, the library first assumed the name of Miladin Popović (1910-1945), a Yugoslav partisan. Popović was a political secretary in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia's Regional Committee for Kosovo and an organiser of the Communist Party of Albania. He was assassinated in his office in the building that would later become the library from 1947 to 2016. While it was named after Popović, books were predominantly in Serbian and there was a higher number of Serbian readers.

In 1999, after the war in Kosovo, when Albanians took over the management of institutions, the library was named after Hivzi Sulejmani (1910-1975). He was a renowned Albanian writer and was considered to be the author who laid the foundations of Albanian prose literature. Sulejmani aligned with the leftist literary and political movement. It is notable that the library's developments in the 2000s were similar to those of the 1990s. While in the 1990s books in Albanian were banned or burnt, during the 2000s the same thing happened to books in Serbian. Evidence of this comes in the form of the many publications in the Serbian language that were discarded or left behind during the process of relocating the library in 2016, when publications dating from the 1800s onwards were found in the building behind the main library. In the course of relocating the inventory, staff had left behind old and historical titles.



In some sections of society, both the figure of Miladin Popović and that of Hivzi Sulejmani have given rise to debate, which continues to this day. Some consider Popović a hero and others consider him a traitor. Sulejmani is highly regarded for his contribution to literature, but not to politics, as in the 1940s he was appointed president of the district court in Prizren and he would later become a public prosecutor in Kosovo. In January 2021, the Municipality of Prishtina discussed an official request by an independent Assembly member, Rifat Deri, to change the name of the library.

In an interview given to the newspaper Koha Ditore, Deri, among other things, said that Hivzi Sulejmani did not deserve to have the library named after him on the grounds that “he was involved in processes that led to the killing of Albanians”. “At the time when the military occupation took place and at the time when the military curfew entered into force, he was named as a judge in the court in Prizren, where he sentenced many Albanians to be shot and severe imprisonments, just because they did not belong to the communist ideology of that time”,⁵ Deri’s request to rename the library was not approved.

18. 10. 2007

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KARTELË E LEXUESIT

EMRI Qendrim

EMRI I PRINDIT Fadil

MBIEMRI Durmishi

NR. I DOKUMENTIT TË IDEN. _____

ADRESA 17x. 4/11 + N. Golluri

Sheshi i Arbërit - p.o.

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DREJTORI _____

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⁵ <https://www.koha.net/kulture/253970/nisma-per-heqjen-e-emrit-te-hivzi-sulejmanit-nga-biblioteka-ndan-letraret/>

“Nostalgia” is the first word that almost all interviewees use to describe the former Hivzi Sulejmani Library building. “A comfortable job”, “satisfactory” and “fulfilling” are some of the other descriptions. Some of the strongest memories focus on the closeness between staff members, the books and the variety of titles, as well as the relationship with the readers. Yet there was also criticism. The aged facility and poor working conditions left many dreaming of a different environment for the institution. The 92-year-old building, together with its reading room that was built much later, did not provide adequate conditions to accommodate readers and activities, especially in the post-war period in Kosovo. The large, lush garden was an escape from the reading rooms, which were described as dark. Despite all this, the fact that staff voluntarily engaged in maintenance by bringing in and planting flowers shows the familiarity and comfort they enjoyed in their workplace.

In August 2016, the Hivzi Sulejmani Library was relocated to a new building, and Fatime Mehmetaj recounts that she and her colleagues often reminisce about the old days.

“Yes, very often with my colleagues, especially those who were there earlier. They mention it more often, but I do too. Not the fact that the working conditions were unsuitable, but that it was near the centre, had good access from all the surrounding schools, and it had a great garden where we used to have coffee together”, she said.⁶

⁶ Interview with Fatime Mehmetaj, library secretary.

The meetings in the garden were not just for drinking coffee. The institution’s workers considered it a second home. Each spring, they would bring different plants and flowers that they would plant in the garden. This collective activity strengthened their emotional bond with their workplace even more. Although each one of the workers sought a new building, they consider the old building to have had significant importance. When the librarians’ connections with readers are mentioned throughout the research, it is evident that they took on an almost teacher-like role, asking pupils if they had read the book they had received, what it was about or which part they had liked best. It was a kind of closeness that they say they no longer have with the readers.

“It was a modest building with somewhere between 42 and 44 seats, warm and quiet with greenery, average conditions much like the conditions in Kosovo generally. I always felt it to be my second home, as I called it and as I still remember it. I was very attached to that place. I miss it, and it seems to me that one of the most unfair things that has been done by the Municipality of Prishtina is the closure – either temporarily or permanently, I don’t know – of that space”, said librarian Bujar Verbovci.⁷

The building’s location, near the centre of Prishtina, provided better access for primary and high school pupils compared to the new building, which is visited more by students. For Vjollca Tuli, the previous building had great importance, amongst other reasons, because it was a “meeting point” for readers.

⁷ Interview with Bujar Verbovci, librarian.

“The frequency of readers was very high, which I cannot say for nowadays, since we are sort of isolated with only a few schools around here. Whereas in the old library we were in the centre of the city, which meant that all the neighbourhoods had access – [people] from Vranjevc, from Arbëria, from Mati 1, from Ulpiana, Dardania – so it was a much more convenient meeting point there. Now, from Vranjevc, a child must change two buses to reach us, therefore we don’t like the fact that we’re further away from the reader. But still, those who want to read, read and visit”, she said.⁸

The same nostalgia is noticed in those who read their first books or participated in their first extracurricular activity at the library, as well as in the students who spent hours there preparing for their exams. In order to clearly understand the impressions of all readers through different periods, people of other ethnicities should have been included, especially Serbs.

⁸ Interview with Vjollca Tuli, librarian.

However, since it was not feasible to contact them due to their departure from Kosovo, the focus remains on Albanian employees and readers.

Based on the information uncovered and reports that were preserved, we understand that the library underwent its greatest development from the second half of the 1970s onwards, with a gap in the 1990s, only to boldly return in the 2000s. During the latter period, the library staff, back then managed by Sylejman Pireva, had to put a lot of dedicated effort into transforming the space into one that was suitable for readers, since it had suffered significant damage during the war. Firstly, there was a shortage of literature because a considerable number of books had been burnt or moved during the repressive measures imposed by the Serbian regime, and secondly, the age of the building meant it was in need of renovation.

“Yes, I always remember it as a rather small space, with that distinctive yellow on the surface. The stairs were old too; they would creak while going upstairs to the librarian. It was pretty old, yet it had this internal warmth, which I don’t think is the same in the new building in Dardania. Maybe I had just been used to it since childhood, and now it doesn’t feel the same; even though the architecture is much better and now anyone who visits is more comfortable. The chairs are much better for reading”, said student Elsa Hoti.⁹

⁹ Interview with Elsa Hoti, student.

¹⁰ Interview with Arta Sejdiu, sociologist.

However, the nostalgia for the old building has other reasons too. Even though the conditions might not have been as good as people wanted, the library often surprised the readers. Sociologist Arta Sejdiu, who often visited the library during her studies, thought she would end up only finding old publications.

“I was doing research on human rights, and I remember I found this handbook there on human rights that I couldn’t find anywhere else, and it ended up helping me a lot. I was quite surprised because the library usually only had old titles.”¹⁰

The road to the library did not only give Halili her much-wanted independence, but also the encouragement to write. In 1997, she would go on to publish her first poem in the daily Rilindja newspaper, a poem related to the protests of that same year that would later be published in other countries as well.

“Of course, my inspiration back then was the Hivzi Sulejmani Library, because for me it was the first institution related to books. And immediately after the war I published this book... not a book, but poetry. After I published it ... I started to write intensively, and of course, I still went to the library, to the children’s section for a while, and then I registered with the adults’ section. To register there, I published my first book in 2004. I was in high school and I had started to join a sort of circle of young writers”, she said.¹²

To join the library, every youngster first had to register as a member through a form, and then obtain a card for each book they borrowed. This registration method, according to Selvete Shala, had a modest fee.

“The fee was minimal, it didn’t even cover the cost of the paper form, let alone other things. It was 2 euros, the fee for children was 2 or 3 euros, and 5 for adults, paid annually. So, it was modest, very modest, just to be clear. And most readers had no fee, meaning those who were unable to pay or people in other categories, similarly to now, such as those receiving social assistance and others”, she said.¹³

BIBLIOTEKA NDËRKOMUNALE “HIVZI SULEJMANI” - PRISHTINË

LIBREZA E ANËTARËSISË

Nr. _____ Viti _____

Sektori-Dega _____

Mbiemri _____

Emri _____

Profesioni _____

Adresa (tel.) _____

Nr. idok. të identifikimit _____

Nga Rregullorja mbi shfrytëzimin e fondit bibliotekar:

- Libri jipet në shfrytëzim më së shumti për 15 ditë, por me të drejtë vazhdoni pas konsultimit
- Për librin e vonuar pas këtij afati bëhet kompenzimi
- Libri i dëmtuar apo i humbur kompenzohet me të njëjtën libër ose vlerë të trefishtë
- Informatat e tjera merren nga librat bibliotekarë.

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Tel: 038/232-980

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¹² Interview with Ervina Halili, poet.

¹³ Interview with Selvete Shala, library secretary.

SINIALE

Kthimi në biblioteka

Përpunimi i veprimtarisë bibliotekare është një nga kushtet e zhvillimit në shoqëri. Bibliotekat, të jenë, një nga vendtakimet e qytetarëve...

Ndonëse presioni i çdo ditëshëm, që ushtrohet në njëdësinë kosovare, ka cunqur zhvillimin normal e të përpunimit të librë, ka rrethuar sisteme vlerash nga më të ndryshmet, asesi një çekullibrim i këllitë nuk do të dëshje të përfundonte në gjendje amorfe. Përkundrazi, janë gjendjet e krijuara në shoqëri, ato të cilat vënë në lëvizje natyrën kërkimtare të njeriut. Aq më tepër, atëherë kur krizoa reflektion nga shtypjet politike. Si rrjedhim është i domosdoshëm angazhimi intelektual për avancimin e të gjitha segmenteve të jetës, pra edhe të kulturës.

Nuk mund të merret me mend një përpunim i individit kolektivitetit, pa pasur një rrjet të zhvilluar të veprimtarisë bibliotekare. Edhe pse biblioteka më me rëndësi në Kosovë, Biblioteka Popullore dhe Universitare në Prishtinë, nuk mund të ushtrojnë veprimtarinë e saj, për shkak të vënies nën masë të dhunashme nga viti 1990, pra e mbyllur për lexuesin dhe kolektivin shqiptar, megjithëkëtë është e domosdoshme që lexuesi të orientohet në shtyllëzimin e lokaleve të bibliotekave të tjera. Rrjeti i bibliotekave në Kosovë ka rreth 600 biblioteka, pra një kapacitet i cili duhet shfrytëzuar, edhe pse në shumë sosh është vepruar me metoda të njëjta, shoviniste. Janë demtuar fondet e librit dhe është ndërprerë puna në sistemin e librit në biblioteka. Porse, një nga veprimet, më të dëmshme është mbejta e fondit

veprimtaria bibliotekare, përkatësisht të shtohet fondi i tyre librar dhe të rritet numri i lexuesve. Shfrytëzimi në masë sa më të madhe i sallave të librit në ato biblioteka-njëdise, ku kjo gjë është e mundur, u krijon hapësirë të rinjve të jenë përvëmarrës në jetën aktive shoqërore.

Demistruancionalizimi kulturor, pra edhe ai i bibliotekave, kërkoi një angazhim të shuar për t'u vënë në rrjedhë sa më normale përpunimi, përkatësisht institucionalizimi i punës së bibliotekave në ato njëdise në të cilat është e mundur kjo. Bibliotekat, sikurse edhe asociacionet e tjera të kulturës e të shkencës gjënjë hapësirë dhe ndikim me vlerë, vetëm atëherë kur organizohen si veprimtari profesioniste. Edhe pse, kuadrot profesioniste nga bibliotekaria janë të pakëta, por shikaje objektive, megjithatë, bibliotekat mund të kryejnë optimist funksionin e tyre, me angazhimin e atyre që i drejtojnë dhe të qytetarëve. Një larguar nga puna nga Biblioteka Popullore në Prishtinë, përvoja dhe profesionalizimi i të cilëve do të ngrite nivelin e punës në biblioteka e tjera. Megjithëkëtë kushtet e vështira materiale sjellin vështirësi është imediatë sigurimi i sallave të leximit e shtimi i fondit librar, në bibliotekat në Kosovë.

Shpend HALILI

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COLLECTIVE MEMORY

A book could be kept for two weeks, and then it had to be returned to the library, always carefully guarded against damage. When children returned their books, the librarians would ask for a short summary of their impressions. This was perceived as a way to encourage the readers to read more and to enhance the children's understanding of what they had read. The librarians often proposed various titles that they deemed understanding of what they had read.

The Hivzi Sulejmani Library was not a meeting point and landmark only for the surrounding residents, but for all the pupils and students who used its reading rooms and literature, depending on the period and its political and social circumstances. The location of the building can also be seen as a good strategic point since it is in the middle of a number of Prishtina's neighbourhoods that have residents of different ethnicities. The library served all communities in the neighbourhood and its surroundings, so it had a multi-ethnic dimension. In addition to the literature in different languages, other activities also brought different ethnicities together.

At the beginning of the 2000s, the new leadership began to work on compiling new programmes that would complement the library's services for readers. During this period, the institution created a wide range of learning and recreational activities. They included organising writers' competitions, establishing the Youth Literary Club and publishing books written by its members, publishing the "Oaza" literary magazine, and cooperating with the Agim Deva Carnival of Children's Writers for International Children's Book Day. Notably, the library venue was also used for other cultural activities, such as dancing. Members of the Turkish community used it for exercise through the "Kërçeku" ensemble, mostly through traditional dance.

Former librarian Liljana Lokaj talks about how the library had multiple activities for certain events.

"Book Day – especially April 2, International Children's Book Day, which started in 2002 – an activity for this day still goes on. This is International Children's Book Day, and the whole world celebrates it. So, there is a message from a specific country that you should read around the whole world on that day. Then, at the library, we organised other activities and announced essay competitions. We distributed the news about this competition around schools, and the three best pieces by those pupils were announced. Other festive days that we had, for example, were Teachers' Day – March 7, March 8 – November 28; we had these festive days. We worked with kids; we didn't just give books away, like in a shop, where you buy your stuff and leave, no. When I worked there, 23 years I worked at the library in Hivzi Sulejmani's house, I opened the library.

Two incredible halls. First, the Fairy Tales Library started its work with pre-schoolers, there weren't any [libraries] in schools. I will never forget that period. We had 70 kids, two full rooms, there were different activities each day", she said.¹⁵

There were also art exhibitions, rooms with computers and internet were created that were available to readers, and cooperations were established with libraries in Zarë (Croatia), Durrës (Albania) and Presheva (Serbia). One other important activity carried out by the library was awarding a prize for "Reader of the Year", which went to the most active reader. There were multiple meetings organised with new readers too, including links with primary and high schools. In order to increase the capacities of staff members, the library also organised professional training sessions.

"We had traditional and annual activities, for example announcing the 'Reader of the Year', which was annual. It was very beautiful, a very nice event where everyone was engaged. We invited all the media and other subordinate and relevant institutions and organisations – we invited all of them, and they all participated", Selvete Shala said.¹⁶

All these activities helped to shape many young pupils, especially in literature. Besides offering books, through its activities, the library became an essential part of those who wanted to create more. Undoubtedly, one of the most significant activities was publishing the "Oaza" literary magazine, which contributed to showcasing many new writers who continue their literary work today.

¹⁵ Interview with Liljana Lokaj, former librarian.

¹⁶ Interview with Selvete Shala, library secretary.



In post-war Kosovo, especially in the first few years of state-building and social, economic and political recovery, each process was hard. However, there was a desire to build stability, as though everything was starting from scratch. And in many instances, this was, in fact, the case. For years, repressive systems had dictated the methods and forms of thinking, as well as the approach towards various issues, while violating and endangering even the flow of writing and other forms of creation. If we take, for example, literature as a form of creation, then it is clear that even expressive forms belonged to the momentum of that period and the relevant issues of the time, and it can therefore be considered to be “committed literature”.

The “*Oaza*” (Oasis) literary magazine aimed to be a space that could make another form of expression possible, as a form of self-liberation.

At least, that was the call shared by the magazine’s editors. “*Now, the period of ‘normality’ should begin, where it needs to be understood that literature has done its job in creating national identity, national history and leading the liberation wars, and literature should be given back to the art of writing*”, read one of the magazine’s editorials in 2008.¹⁷

The magazine’s founding was preceded by an important activity for the library. In April 2003, a Youth Literary Club was founded which gathered approximately 40 members. After three months of meetings and work, the library managed to publish its first poetry collection, *To Hear Life*, which was also the first published work in the institution’s history. This publication was followed by eight further books of poetry, prose and journalism. However, one of the Youth Literary Club’s biggest achievements was the publication of its first literary magazine, “*Oaza*”, which was launched in 2004, a year after the club’s founding.



As was the custom, calls were published in the daily papers, initially for poetry, storytelling and essays/criticism, and later also for plays. To select the winners, the club organised a jury with famous writers, while applicants were required to deliver their entries with reference numbers instead of names.

The writer and scholar of literature Gëzim Aliu explains the application procedures back when he participated in 2005.

“As with the application announcement, the winners were also announced in the newspaper. I got the newspaper late, and I saw that the first prize had gone to the story ‘Kokrra e zezë’ [The Black Grain], reference number 77, and the author was asked to present themselves. And I was late in going there. The first time that I went to the city’s library was because I’d won the first prize, and that building seemed very interesting to me because it’s a little hidden between socialist buildings”, he said.¹⁸

Aliu’s “Kokrra e zezë” story was the beginning of his new novel, “Në klubin e të shëmtuarve” (In the Uglies Club), which was published in 2009, the same year he won the award for Kosovo’s ‘Novel of the Year’. He later became the literary magazine’s editor and became involved with the Youth Literary Club, which was later renamed “Klubi Letrar Prishtina” (“Literary Club Prishtina”). Despite its name, the club was not limited to Prishtina residents alone. It had members from different areas of Kosovo and students who had moved to Prishtina to study.



Well-known contemporary writers and poets Ag Apolloni, Ervina Halili and Adil Olluri were all members of the club and also published their work in the magazine. The club encouraged many young writers to continue their work, poetry and criticism, if only for the fact that they were published in the magazine. For other reasons too, the club had significant importance for some. Since these were the first years of the post-war period, it was natural that the work environment was somewhat unusual.

For Olluri, the club and its magazine were a shelter.

“At that time, it was common to ask, ‘Are you displaced? Are you missing someone?’ The environment was like that, you know, still anxious about what was happening, and at that time to find a place like ‘Oaza’, it was also like an oasis of calmness. Like an oasis where you go, read and only think about literature, culture and such things. Because it had a very good psychological influence on young people.”¹⁹

Over the course of five years, “Oaza” published two magazines a year and announced winners during “Library Week”, organised by the Pjetër Bogdani Kosovo National Library. In 2008, it was proposed that in the upcoming years the winners would be announced on April 23, World Book Day. But it was to prove to be the magazine’s final year.

The library's change in leadership that year contributed to its dissolution, along with the economic situation and limited availability of support for the publication. In the opening sentence of the magazine's fifth issue, Pireva wrote:

Regardless of the reasons behind the end of the magazine, it remains a resource that documents a new form of literary expression, and a bridge for many writers and poets who are well-known names within Kosovo's literary scene.

There is no doubt, as journalist Imer Topanica puts it, that "the fact a whole generation of writers, poets and critics have been promoted through this magazine, explains its weight and importance."²¹

"We are sorry, but due to the library's lack of financial resources, and an absence of support from governmental institutions, we could not publish more than two issues a year and we could never pay the authors any honoraria, which would have helped motivate them to engage further towards a better quality of the magazine."²⁰

²⁰ Sylejman Pireva, "Oaza" literary magazine, April 2008, p.73.

²¹ Interview with Imer Topanica, journalist.

Following a project that started in 2011, and that was postponed and delayed many times – first during construction and then during the process of purchasing inventory – a new building with 30 acres of space now houses the Hivzi Sulejmani Library, the largest in Prishtina. On the 23rd of August, 2016, it was formally opened for new readers. This is also considered the first official day of work in the new building; months earlier the building that had previously been home to the library for 70 years had been emptied and abandoned.

The year 2016 marks the start of another new phase for the old building. On the 21st of April, 2017, the Municipality of Prishtina's Assembly approved a proposal to change the purpose of the former library, by turning it into a museum. It was to be named after Ibrahim Kodra, and to house more than 100 works by the master who is sometimes known as the last cubist. The museum was to function as a branch of the city museum, but to make that possible, the Municipality of Prishtina would first have to found Prishtina's museum. In 2018, the leader of the Ibrahim Kodra Foundation,

Foundation, Maria Pacolli, and the then mayor of Prishtina, Shpend Ahmeti, signed a memorandum of understanding for the project. The project concept for the building, a protected monument, was to prove the penultimate attempt to transform the building's purpose to date. According to the Kosovo Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments, the plan did not comply with the rules and laws on monuments and it was believed that it would damage the building's original look.

In the end, two years worth of work and preparation came to nothing, and hopes of repurposing the building were lost. This is when the most serious degradation of the building took place. The library's employees had taken the books and documents, leaving behind the inventory and anything else that was considered old.

The lush garden that had always been a had always been a highlight of the space was left unattended. For a short period, the space was used by an unknown group for unlawful purposes.

Another attempt to revive the building was made in 2020. The Municipality of Prishtina drafted a project assignment to preserve, restore and adapt the building, turning it into a city gallery. There was also an open call for architects to transform it into a Prishtina gallery and artists' residence, an "institution where local and international artists can show their creativity and display their work."

During the process of drafting the project assignment, the Municipality of Prishtina held multiple meetings with artists and art and culture organisations, and various discussions took place on bringing the building to life by turning it into a gallery. During these meetings, many ideas and proposals were put forward to contribute to a process that was ultimately never realised. Following an open call that was announced by the Municipality of Prishtina, three conceptual projects applied. Once again, the proposed ideas were not considered to be within the parameters of the rules and laws governing the protection of monuments, and the Institute for the Protection of

Cultural Monuments rejected all three projects. After the successive failures of these processes, the former director of the Municipality of Prishtina's Directorate of Culture, Adrian Berisha, says the appropriate solution for the building was considered to be giving it to Manifesta 14 to use.

"We had proposed that one floor be a gallery, and the second floor be for artists' residences. This was the proposal we had discussed; but then when Manifesta arrived and wanted to build an institution, there was a discussion between us and others about what to do next. It had been a design task that had been carried out in collaboration with recommendations we had received from the wider community and we had accepted three different projects to intervene there. All three projects were then rejected by the Kosovo Institute for the Protection of Monuments. So, when we then had discussions with Manifesta, we thought it would be good to create an institution where Manifesta proposed, taking into account Manifesta's expertise", he said.²²

²² Discussion with Adrian Berisha, former director of the Municipality of Prishtina's Department of Culture. Contacted by Sihana Klisurica, March 23, 2022, Prishtina.



The Hivzi Sulejmani Library today continues its work as a cultural, educational and informative institution in another building, but whenever the institution's name is mentioned, it is more likely to recall its former location in Tophane. Generations of children in Prishtina have their first book-related memories in this building. However, it's not only children who have fond memories of the library building. Despite all the challenges that the employees may have faced in the building, and despite the small reading spaces, it is still thought of as an oasis, hidden in an alley, that once welcomed all book lovers.

Since 2016, the fate of the building has been widely discussed, particularly in the media following the proposal to turn it in the Ibrahim Kodra Museum. Unfortunately, this is not the first monument, nor the first building that is protected by law, to have been overlooked, or to have had its condition deteriorate.

After the library's relocation, the building was left unsupervised. Although it was neglected by the people who were legally responsible for it, the building remains in the memory of everyone who has visited it.

Those who worked there, grew up nearby and its many readers, believe that the building should come back as a library. Approximately 80 percent of those interviewed for this research, ask that, in one way or another, the building be returned to its earlier function. Others are happy with whatever function it may have, as long as it does not remain abandoned.

The library's secretary, Fatime Mehmetaj, talks about how almost all staff have asked that the old building continue to function.

*“We asked the Directorate of Culture to leave the separate space, the hall that was built later, as our branch for children. In other words, to have children’s books, and access for children and the schools that are close by. That hall was built later, it has enough space, lights and 44 seats. I don’t know how useful it can be, and it’s not that convenient, but maybe if they invested in it that building could be of use, maybe as a cultural centre. Once, it was mentioned that it should be an exhibition space for Ibrahim Kodra. I don’t know what condition it’s in now”, she said.*²³

Seeing the lack of libraries in the city, and the need for more spaces for students, librarian Drita Toci also agrees that the building should be a library.

*“Of course, it’s essential not only for that part of the city but for many places; all of the city’s neighbourhoods should have mini-libraries at least, based on the fact that from the centre, let’s say from Skanderbeg to Vranjevc, that part of the city is so far away from Dardania. Nowadays, the library is mostly occupied by students, and I don’t believe this can be called the city’s library anymore – it has almost taken the role of a university library. This period is not that important for the interview, but that building should be functionalised again, renovated, fixed and receive investment from those who are responsible”, she said.*²⁴

Another very important aspect to consider, among others, is the fact that this facility has served as a shelter for all communities that have lived and continue to live in Prishtina.

²³ Interview with Fatime Mehmetaj, library secretary.

²⁴ Interview with Drita Toci, librarian.

As communities of different ethnicities coexist in Kosovo, including Albanians, Serbs, Bosniaks, Turks, Gorani and Roma (who are often grouped with Ashkali and Egyptians), such diversity has been observed to some extent in the library, especially in the first decades of its work. The experience of Gulsen Bolukbasi, a neighbourhood resident, is one example.

*“From all the memories I have in the library, I hope in the future I’ll see the part that promotes coexistence between all communities living in Kosovo again. We grew up learning each other’s languages from an early age. I didn’t ever go to school in Albanian, I went in Turkish. I learned Albanian myself, initially in that yard that we had there in the library, together with my friends, Albanians, Bosniaks, etc.”, she said.*²⁵

²⁵ Interview with Gulsen Bolukbasi, neighbourhood resident.

²⁶ Interview with Flora Brovina, writer and activist.

Others who want to see the building in use think that it is enough if there is any activity there. Many still think its purpose should have something to do with books. Writer, politician and activist Flora Brovina, who spent her childhood in the library, has a lot of memories there and believes that they should be preserved, because: *“the library is not the walls of the building, and the history of the library is not the library itself, but it is the books that should be there, and they should take care of them for posterity”, she said.*²⁶

Our projections and desires for the building are for it to be a social and cultural space, a book museum or a multifunctional space to serve young people. A space for extracurricular activities; one that contributes to personal development and growth.

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