

KAPANA IN PLOVDIV AS THE “FIRST CREATIVE INDUSTRIES DISTRICT”: REALITY OR ILLUSION*

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Abstract

This paper will focus on Plovdiv – the first Bulgarian city to become the European Capital of Culture for 2019. One of the leading projects in this campaign is the renovation of *Kapana* (“The Trap”) – a historical district in the urban centre. „*Kapana – a creative industries district*“ is a long-term public policy initiative that attracts audiences and representatives of creative industries from Plovdiv, the country and abroad, providing a favorable and stimulating environment. The main goal of this intervention is to preserve, restore and explore this district emblematic of the city’s history. The paper presents the various transformations of *Kapana* in relation to the creative industries approach, developed by policy-makers and taken on board by the European Commission. The “creative industries” discourse on *Kapana* is a political tool applied in the process of making it an affective space for leisure and tourism.

Keywords: *Plovdiv, Kapana, European Capital of Culture, creative industries, tourism*

Plovdiv is now the European Capital of Culture¹ for 2019 – a title it shares with Matera in Italy. The campaign launched in 2012 to promote the candidacy of Plovdiv has stimulated the residents of Plovdiv to articulate and accentuate their European affiliation, urban legacy, cultural heritage and historical development spanning over a period of 8, 000 years. Promoted as the oldest inhabited city of Europe, Plovdiv has archaeological structures *in situ*, artifacts and all other forms of artistic expression that are presently considered as valuable cultural resources with strate-

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¹ More about the European Capital of Culture initiative, see at: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/capitals-culture_en (23.06.2019)

gic significance for developing and showcasing the city as the Capital of Culture. The motto of the 2019 campaign is “Plovdiv Together”. The cultural strategy of the Municipal foundation “Plovdiv 2019” includes four priority areas called platforms: FUSE, TRANSFORM, REVIVE, RELAX.² According to the application form³ the basic activities include fusing the social groups in Plovdiv, and hence the ethnic diversity of the city is being perceived as a valuable cultural heritage, a multicultural legacy and human resource that need to be addressed and involved in the implementation of the program. Another major platform is focused on transforming the urban space by placing landscapes, architectural and archaeological monuments together with infrastructure in proper social and cultural setting. Plovdiv is one of the few European cities to have preserved Roman theatre, Roman forum, stadium and Odeon – all situated in the centre. The events in the program are also aimed at reviving the intangible and tangible heritage of the city by providing cultural education to the general public, involving groups of people in shared cultural activities, bringing culture to the streets, making it a daily shared experience, rather than an elitist activity. In this area the cultural strategy is oriented towards stimulating local creative industries by supporting artistic projects and initiatives, thus fostering local and regional cultural identity.

Daniel Habit (2014) reviews one particular case study – Sibiu – a Romanian town that was the European Capital of Culture for 2007. He makes interesting observations about the cultural policy of the EU with regard to promoting “European model of society”. The election of Sibiu and now of Plovdiv for the Capital of Culture corresponds to a long-term EU trend to endorse and showcase peripheral East European cities and regions:

“This geographical turn to Eastern Europe and, especially, to provincial cities rather than capitals, reveals the expansionist spatial strategies of the European Union and the **EU-ization of space through cultural labeling processes**. As a central dimension in the context of the manifestation of power, **urban space gains an essential role in the process of Europeanization**, as the Union can represent itself on a European stage through the city legitimated by the award. The local **symbolic reconfigurations focus mainly on public spaces, as they are more exposed than other places, with their distinctive physiognomy and historical memory**. In the cities that receive the awards, these concepts develop specific ways of **spatial symbolism** according to their sources of financial support, conceptual design, and local habits” (Habit 2014: 65–66, my emphasis).

The case of one prominent public space, *Kapana* – a residential district in the heart of Plovdiv is a fine example of how urban space is being remodeled by us-

² See the official program for Plovdiv 2019 – European Capital of Culture at: https://plovdiv2019.eu/data/fms/news/LAST%202018-08-29_Plovdiv2019_highlights_programme_book_160x235_KS_v1.pdf (10.06.2019)

³ See Plovdiv 2019 Application Form – Selection Phase at: <https://issuu.com/plovdiv2019/docs/plovdiv2019app/20> (10.06.2019)

ing discursive mechanisms drawn from the European cultural-economic theory and practice. The “symbolic reconfigurations” of *Kapana* or “spatial symbolism” in this case is related to the application of the “creative industries” discourse in directing and managing cultural processes and urban transformation. At the same time this type of local development could be seen in the model proposed by Andreas Reckwitz – he calls it “self-culturalisation of the city” implying the culture-oriented form of governance. He interprets the concept of “creative cities” in the following way:

So what are creative cities all about? In the following, I am assuming that the concept of creative cities and the phenomena which the term suggests point towards a very real transformation of Western and global city structures since the 1990s – and to a certain extent even since the 1970s. However, the concept is capable of grasping exactly what characterises this transformation in its heterogeneity only in outline. This fundamental change can rather be described as a self-culturalisation of the city. The cities – by which we mean their dominant inhabitant milieu, their political institutions, their economic organisations and their media scene-setters – increasingly see themselves in terms of „culture“, as a phenomenon of the cultural. „Culture“ is here not just an observer category of social and cultural studies analysis in the sense of the cultural turn, i.e. of external culturalisation – which it certainly also is – ,but a pattern which the social reality, in this case the reality of the city, in its different groups of protagonists, applies to itself. This self-culturalisation does not remain limited to a supposedly consequence-free (or even obscuring) discourse phenomenon, but massively structures those social practices and materialities – of urban development, architecture etc. –, which constitute the city. Paradoxically, the self-culturalisation itself has a material character; it relates to the changing materiality of the urban, its traffic routes, residential districts and consumer districts and industrial estates (Reckwitz 2010:2).

Therefore the project initiative of remodeling *Kapana* in Plovdiv has to be considered within the general framework of the Europeanization of urban space by promoting “cultural labeling processes” which is indeed a process of “self-culturalisation” of the city.

In the Application form, detailing the key principles and elements of the Program in the selection phase of the Plovdiv 2019 candidacy, *Kapana*, together with the *Tobacco City*, was recognized and addressed as “problematic architectural heritage”.⁴ Therefore, in this paper I will also consider “*Kapana*” from the perspective of the critical heritage studies (Bendix 2007; Brumann 2012; Bendix & all 2012). Thus, I often refer to the official public policy discourse (the officially sanctioned heritage discourse) and the positions of the relevant actors (foundations, municipality), involved in the policy-making process. Against this background my ethnographic

⁴ <https://issuu.com/plovdiv2019/docs/plovdiv2019app> (pages 46–49).

research will disclose the current social and cultural practices, and the ways the architectural heritage of *Kapana* is being utilized and perceived on the local level. This approach has been applied to other case studies in Bulgaria; hence Ana Luleva makes a critical analysis of the UNESCO universal “heritage regime” and its local interpretations in regard to the ancient city of Nessebar (Luleva 2014).

The decision to include the transformation of *Kapana* in the official candidacy of Plovdiv 2019 was a municipal policy-making strategy aimed at utilizing the strategic potential of the district for developing tourism. In this way, the symbolic capital of the district, its architectural heritage, cultural infrastructure and artefacts (e.g. graffiti street art) is being transformed into economic capital. These are the motives inspiring the municipal initiatives in *Kapana* to this day. Just recently (in July, 2019) the Mayor of Plovdiv, Ivan Totev, opened a new Art Gallery “*Kapana*” with an exhibition entitled “Selected from the fund of the Plovdiv Municipality” which presented a collection of artworks compiled by the institution since 1980. The “*Kapana*” Gallery is situated on the main pedestrian street just opposite the entrance to *Kapana* district. The Mayor called it “a pearl we can be proud of” and it was described as the biggest art space in Plovdiv (1000 sq. m).⁵

“Kapana – the Creative District” (2012–2019): a review of the conceptual framework

As a “specific phenomenon in the urban fabric of the city”, *Kapana* developed over centuries as a trade and crafts center near the central pedestrian zone of the city. The narrow and meandering streets create a complex matrix in which a person can lose a sense of orientation – a specific feature that contributed to its name.⁶ The buildings in the district are mainly narrow two-storied houses with a double function – residential and commercial – a spatial arrangement from the time of the Ottoman urban craft centers. This duality and practicality has contributed to *Kapana*’s reputation as the district of artisans and craftsmen. After a period of decline during socialism, the district is now being reintegrated into the urban network and revalued as a space for modern recreation and leisure, attracting international tourists.

The process of renovating and rediscovering the city’s emblematic neighborhood *Kapana*⁷ goes back to 2012 when it was included in the cultural strategy of the municipal Foundation Plovdiv 2019. “*Kapana – the first creative district*” was a new conceptual framework and an eye-catching formula that drew attention to the

⁵ The information about the gallery was publicized through the local media outlets: <https://www.plovdiv24.bg/novini/plovdiv/Galeriya-Kapana-novata-perla-na-Plovdiv-882414>

⁶ The word “*kapan*”, commonly used in Bulgarian, is actually introduced from Turkish.

⁷ Presently, the status of the district in the registers of the Ministry of Culture is “A Group monument of Culture, *Kapana* District, Plovdiv” and has been announced with Protocol No. 13 of 11.12.1998 of the National Council for Conservation of Cultural Monuments.

urban dimensions of the European integration. It is one of the flagship initiatives of the platform called “Transformation”, part of the cluster “Urban Dreams” and its aim is to “develop the potential of this central urban zone as an area of discovery, innovation and experimentation in the sphere of culture, cultural management, and the creative industries.”⁸ Among the proclaimed goals are the following:

- Long-term and sustainable interventions in the urban landscape;
- Reinvention and revitalization of the desolated spaces and providing them with new cultural functions;
- Using integrative activities to develop the zone as the first district area in the creative industries in the country.⁹

“Creative industries” is one of the key concepts related to *Kapana* – named to be the first “creative industries district” on page 24 of the Application Form. More concepts – “creative entrepreneurs”, “creative inhabitants” appear on the same page. They are not explained in the document prepared by the managerial team of the Foundation. Therefore, one of the aims of this research is to clarify their meanings (by referring to the prominent discourse on “creative economy”) and point out how these ideas are translated into public policy practice and applied to the local context.

The potential in developing the cultural and creative industries has long been recognized by the policy makers of the European Union. In a document from 2010, we can find the following statement:

There is a lot of untapped potential in the cultural and creative industries to create growth and jobs. To do so, Europe must identify and invest in new sources of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth drivers to take up the baton. Much of our future prosperity will depend on how we use our resources, knowledge and creative talent to spur innovation. Building on our rich and diverse cultures, Europe must pioneer new ways of creating value-added, but also of living together, sharing resources and enjoying diversity¹⁰.

In a UN report on Creative Economy from 2008, the following explanation of the terms “creative industries” and “cultural industries” is provided:

The scope of the creative economy is determined by the extent of the creative industries. Defining “creative industries”, however, is a matter of considerable inconsistency and disagreement in the academic literature and in policy-making circles, especially in relation to the parallel concept of

⁸ <https://visitkapana.bg/en/about-the-project/> (19.05.2019)

⁹ https://visitkapana.bg/en/2017/08/01/3a_npoekra (18.05.2019)

¹⁰ Green Paper: Unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries (European Commission, Brussels, 27.4.2010 COM(2010) 183 final, available at: <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1cb6f484-074b-4913-87b3-344ccf020eef/language-en>, p. 2 (23.06.2019)

“cultural industries”. Sometimes a distinction is made between the creative and the cultural industries; sometimes the two terms are used interchangeably¹¹.

Exploring the relationship between creativity and economy, John Howkins coined the term “creative economy” in his book *The Creative Economy: How People Make Money from Ideas*, published in 2001. Since then the “creative economy” discourse has also been associated with a cluster of concepts such as “creative class”, “creative cities”, “creative clusters” and “creative districts”, in addition to the notions of “creativity”, “creative products” or “creative goods and services”.¹² There is not a widely shared consensus on the final definition of these concepts. In this paper I will try to clarify the meaning of “creative industries”, and based on my fieldwork in *Kapana*, provide a few examples (case studies) of what is now considered to be “a creative industry” in the context of the project.

What is the origin of the “creative industries” term? The cited UN report informs that it originated in Australia in 1994 when the report *Creative Nation* was produced. The development of the idea proceeded further in the policy-making sphere in the United Kingdom in 1997, “when the Government, through the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, set up the Creative Industries Task Force. It is noteworthy that the designation “creative industries” that has developed since then has broadened the scope of cultural industries beyond the arts and has marked a shift in approach to potential commercial activities that until recently were regarded purely or predominantly in non-economic terms.”¹³

The structural characteristics of the creative industries are conceptualized in different models, such as: UK DCMS model¹⁴, symbolic texts model, concentric circles model, WIPO copyright model.¹⁵ For example, the UK DCMS model (referred to in the previous paragraph) has the following structure: Advertising, Architecture, Art and antiques market, Crafts, Design, Fashion, Film and video, Music, Performing arts, Publishing, Software, Television and radio, Video and computer games.

In addition Andreas Reckwitz defines the term in relation to the concept of a creative city:

The culture-oriented city is the primary location of those expanding occupations and enterprises which essentially engage in symbol production,

¹¹ Creative Economy Report 2008: The challenge of assessing the creative economy towards informed policy-making, available at: <https://unctad.org/en/pages/PublicationArchive.aspx?publicationid=945>, p. 10 (23.06.2019)

¹² Ibid, p. 9–10

¹³ Ibid, p. 11

¹⁴ UK DCMS model refers to the policies developed by the UK Department of Culture, Media and Sport (see the paragraph above).

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 12–13

the creative industries. This field includes old and new media, finance, consultancy, advertising, research and development, tourism, design, fashion and the higher segments of gastronomy. The symbol-producing economy provides the economic basis of the culturalised city. In contrast to the model of the large corporation of the organized modern era, the symbol-producing economy also extends to more strongly nonhierarchical organisational forms, not least also (even if by no means exclusively) to project-oriented ways of working and new self-employed people. These are not artistic professions in the narrower sense, although at the margins – for example in design and events culture – the boundaries are fluid. The creative industries are the primary occupational field of the post-materialist middle classes, and the enticement of the creative industries into the city is – as Florida aptly describes it and engages in it – a central objective of municipal cultural governmentality. The British Labour government of 1997 to 2010 had a pioneering role here. The spatial anchoring of the creative industries within the city can present itself in very different ways: often, it is once again the restored districts close to the inner city in which the creative industries concentrate – together with the art scenes or in a contest of displacement (Reckwitz 2010: 17).

In the course of my fieldwork in *Kapana* carried out in 2018 and 2019 I have identified the following spheres of “creative industries” and their products: design & architecture, art and antiquities, visual identity and promotional products about *Kapana* and *Kapana fest* (branding), media and performing arts (films screenings, music concerts, exhibitions), artisan subcultures and their artifacts, including graffiti art, paintings, photos, cosmetics, handmade gifts and souvenirs, custom-made products. During my visits in *Kapana*, I made pictures, visited galleries and workshops, conducted interviews with the locally based and visiting artists and about their work in the district. In this text I will give specific examples of the “cultural entrepreneurs” I found in this district, relating my material to the conceptual framework provided by the official narrative of the project management team at the Foundation Plovdiv 2019.

The “spatial symbolism”: Kapana as a place of memory

As early as the 1980s, the leading intellectuals and architects in Plovdiv recognized the symbolic value, historical significance and great potential of *Kapana* for developing tourism and cultural infrastructure. On the official webpage, describing the project of redeveloping the district, there is a quote by the Architect Antoaneta Topalova who was a zealous advocate of the idea of rescuing *Kapana*, and a participant in two projects for its reconstruction and socialization (1985 & 1995 – the Bulgarian/French project). Her words about the district are presented under the title – “*Kapana is a specific phenomenon in the urban fabric of the city*“:

One territory becomes a "place" / topos / when there is a phenomenological factor- human experience and emotion. "Kapana" is exactly such a place – specific, unique, Plovdiv. From the beginning of its existence it has been the most inhabited part of the city- the Charshiya. Such kind of trade and craft areas during the Middle Ages existed in all larger settlements in Ottoman Bulgaria. Some of them still exist – the "Charshiya" in Haskovo; "Samovodska charshiya" in Veliko Tarnovo; "Varosha" in Lovech and Blagoevgrad... However, the Charshiya in Plovdiv is the largest and the most preserved up to date and this is "Kapana". A place where the labyrinth of narrow medieval streets, saturated with some of the most vibrant activities – trade and services – captivates the visitor and he unexpectedly and voluntarily is "trapped" in the Kapana. The human presence here is inevitable – from its very construction and development until now it is its main characteristic. There is no other place in the city, already existing for more than 7 centuries, with such a concentration of vital public activities, with such a tangible sense of urban environment and atmosphere¹⁶.

This public discourse on *Kapana* is presenting it as a place of memory – a piece of the living history of Plovdiv. The narrative that follows can be found on the official webpage of the project.¹⁷ There the short historical reference states that *Kapana* was established during the early Ottoman era when the district began its existence as a Čharšiya (marketplace), and "received its present name after the XV century when two narrow market streets, full of dense networks of small shops, called "*Un Kapan*" (Small Kapan) and "*Buyuk Kapan*" (Big Kapan), gave the name of the whole neighborhood."¹⁸ Situated in the heart of Plovdiv, the Čharšiya was the most famous marketplace – the home of trade guilds, artisans, and merchants – a space of intercultural contact and communication among Turks, Armenians, Greeks, Bulgarians, Jews and other people from far and away places (Velčev 2014: 173–187). The area was framed by distinctive Ottoman buildings – the Džumaya Mosque (The Friday Mosque, *Cumaya* in Turkish) – the first imperial mosque, supported personally by the Sultan; the Bezisten (a covered bazaar used for trade, built in XV c.), and the Kuršum Khan – the first imposing structure built by Šakhbeddin Paša in Plovdiv (Philibe) in 1370. It functioned as a *kervansaray* – a free hostel for travelers – the biggest one between Constantinople and Belgrade. The story of Kuršum Khan is the history of Philippopolis (the Roman name of Plovdiv) during the Ottoman era. From the exterior it was a stone fortress with an impressive silhouette, preserved today only in the old photographs. It was a kind of city in the city. Its domes were covered with sheets of lead (from the Turkish word, *kurşun*) (Velčev: 2014: 15–23).

¹⁶ <https://visitkapana.bg/en/about-the-district/> (18.05.2019)

¹⁷ <https://visitkapana.bg/en/about-the-district/> (11.06.2019)

¹⁸ https://visitkapana.bg/en/2017/05/16/началото_на_капана (11.06.2019)

In 1652, according to Evliya Çelebi's chronicles, there were around 880 workshops. In the 18th and 19th centuries, Plovdiv was a major economic center in the Ottoman Empire, and in this period *Kapana* was the most prominent commercial and craftsmen's centre in the city (Assenova and Zapryanova 1988). According to the local historian and ethnographer Stoyuo Šiškov (2016: 168), until the Liberation (1877–1878) in Plovdiv there were more than 50 crafts with nearly 600 workshops and shops. Of these, 15–25 were Jewish, 25–35 Turkish, 15–20 Armenian, 15–20 Greek, about 100 Grecophile Bulgarians and more than 400 pure Bulgarian. Because the workshops of various trade and guild associations were situated in *Kapana*, the names of most of the streets were used to indicate the characteristics of specific crafts. Today these names are still preserved and can be read on the street plates – “Železarska” (Iron's), “Zlatarska” (Goldsmiths'), “Abadžiiska” (Dress-makers'), “Kožuarska” (Furriers'), etc.

After the Liberation, *Kapana* was neglected and relatively destroyed:

On the night of June 13th, 1906, a large fire broke out in the neighborhood, which entirely burnt a large part of the Charshiya. Nikola Alvadjev writes in Chronicles of Plovdiv, “Not only did the shops burn, but a past that will not be regained.” Among the irretrievably lost architectural values, were a large part of the Kurshum Khan and the Large Bazar. The intensive new restoration of Kapana took place after the WWI, more precisely, between 1920 and 1930¹⁹.

During socialism, there were a number of problems, including lack of investment and pragmatic interest, followed by decay and ruin of infrastructure. The only structure left of this impressive Ottoman legacy is the Džumaya Mosque, situated in marked contrast to the Roman stadium and the nearby *Kapana* district.

The “symbolic reconfigurations” of Kapana

The blending of history and modernity (“creative industries” and consumption practices) is a defining characteristic of *Kapana* today, it is a piece of the urban landscape revalued and infused with new functions and meanings. The creation of a hybrid urban culture with fusion between old and new ideas and practices is also noted in the “creative economy” discourse:

The urban landscape as a whole is a defining feature of every city and represents a value to be understood, preserved and enhanced through attentive policies and public participation. The historic fabric of a city and new development can interact and mutually reinforce their role and meaning.

¹⁹ <https://visitkapana.bg/en/2017/развитието-на-капана-1890-1995/> (11.06.2019)

*Conservation of the built environment therefore has a plurality of meanings: the preservation of memory; the conservation of artistic and architectural achievements; the valuing of places of significance and collective meaning*²⁰.

According to the official narrative “the first change in the new history of the district aiming to make a connection with European Capital of Culture started in 2012 when the Municipality of Plovdiv initiates the first steps for reorganization of the traffic in the district and the partial change to a pedestrian zones... The first streets dedicated sole to pedestrians are Hristo Dukmedzhiev, Bratya Pulievi, Magura, Evlogi Georgiev and part of Georgi Benkovski...”²¹

The emphasis on architecture and urban transformation was made explicit by the team of Plovdiv 2019. As early as 2014 the implementation of the strategy for transforming the district was initiated by a pilot project “Kapana Possible”²² – a field research, initiated by ONE Foundation and ONE ARCHITECTURE WEEK 2014. The aim of the project was to identify the potential hidden in a “historical environment (Kapana neighborhood in Plovdiv)” and “outline a realistic scenario for turning it into a creative district”. Intended as a public forum for exchanging opinions and expertise, “Kapana Possible” combined the efforts of students of architecture, urban planning, urban analysis and social anthropology in partnership with the Municipal Foundation “Plovdiv 2019”.

Kapana is still a residential quarter, a home for a handful of people who sometimes complain of the noise and havoc on the streets; it is also a modern spot for relaxation and enjoyment for visitors and residents of Plovdiv; consumption and leisure activities taking place in the local bars and taverns are the new practices introduced in the last few years. *Kapana* is also a hospitable environment for various creative projects – street art installations, concerts and theater performances, exhibitions and craftsmen’s bazaars. In the course of the a few years, some houses changed their owners, and many of them have now been refashioned to correspond to the new commercial and social settings. For example, a *Kapana*’s hostel called “Hipster” alludes to the generations of hipsters, for whom Caroline Bird wrote back in 1957:

Our search for the rebels of the generation led us to the hipster. The hipster is an enfant terrible turned inside out. In character with his time, he is trying to get back at the conformists by lying tow ... You can’t interview a hipster because his main goal is to keep out of a society which, he thinks, trying to make everyone over in its own image.

²⁰ Creative Economy Report 2013 Special Edition: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/pdf/creative-economy-report-2013.pdf>, p. 47 (23.06.2019).

²¹ <https://visitkapana.bg/en/2017/05/16/20122013/>

²² <https://visitkapana.bg/en/2017/09/27/kapana-possible/>

Another spatial feature of *Kapana* is the graffiti made by Bulgarian street artists, Nasimo and Stern, exhibited in open spaces on the walls of buildings, dispersed around the district. Graffiti or street art was the special focus of the latest edition of *Kapana fest*²³ this year (May 31-June 2, 2019). In this period I joined an organized tour²⁴ in English for visitors who were introduced to the history of the place and walked around the most famous graffiti. During the fest Nasimo²⁵ had his six solo exhibition “*LIfe is a Study*” in the pop-up gallery *InDustReal* and presented his album “25 Years on Nasimo: Sketchbook” containing art projects from the last 25 years. His most prominent graffiti artwork in *Kapana* is featured on the backside of the Trade Mall (colloquially known as Halite). Titled MHP (peace), it is still in the process of making. On 31st of May I went to see his exhibition and introduced myself to Nasimo. The next day I arranged for a meeting with him through his manager. In the interview taken the same afternoon, he says: “*I cannot identify with anything, don’t like labels and categories; people who make this art are rebellious by nature, they rebel against something...this [art] was forbidden and there was adrenaline, a thrill.*” The following is an excerpt from our conversation:

“How did you first come to *Kapana*, tell me about your work here?”

Nasimo: Kapana (the trap) of the material world. I also ask myself the question “How did we all fall into this trap (kapana) of birth and death, because we are trapped in one body destined to be born and die, but we seek out freedom, the absolute freedom of soul which does not know birth and death. But why did we all fall into the trap of this conditionality?”

“You ask yourself these questions?”

Nasimo: I ask myself these questions, yes. We all fell into this trap (kapana), but all around us we can find freedom. And if we look for it, for freedom, for peace, I hope that one day, if we persist and keep knocking on the door louder, then we would be answered and we will understand what real freedom, love and peace are.

“Is that what you are trying to convey in your graffiti? What is your prevailing feeling while you paint? How do you paint?”

Nasimo: I paint mostly with emotion and, naturally, with some knowledge I have accumulated. But mostly I paint with the emotion I have at the moment. What moves me comes out of me. My work is an expansion of my essence.

²³ *Kapana fest* is a private initiative, not related to the Foundation Plovdiv 2019. So far there were 9 editions of the fest in the last 5 years. The latest 2019 edition was called “The legacy” and dedicated to the street art culture in *Kapana*. Source: <https://opoznai.bg/events/view/kapana-fest-plovdiv> (11.06.2019)

²⁴ I have joined the tour in the company of around 15 people, mostly Bulgarians, on June 1.

²⁵ His real name is Stanislav Trifonov, born in 1979 in Targovishte, Bulgaria. Nasimo has had academic training in the graphic arts.

“What is the emotion of *Kapana* you feel here?”

Nasimo: I feel the euphoria of people.

“How do you select the colors you work with? Does the place influence you in some way for the choice of colors?”

Nasimo: Naturally, I always consider the environment; the colors that are present there, the buildings, the forms; when you work outdoors you have to consider a lot of things, including the general mood.

The Advent of the Creative Industries in Kapana (2014–2019)

Nasimo is one representative of the “creative class”. But he is not a permanent resident of *Kapana*. The “residential program” for attracting artists started in 2014 when the Foundation released the first open call to invite artists and help them establish creative industries in *Kapana*. The selected ten start-up projects were supported by granting free accommodations for one year. The first ten selections were the following:

1. “Melformator”- audio- visual team/studio;
2. “Plovediv”- shop and gallery, graphic design;
3. “Kashe Atelier”- studio for architecture and design;
4. “House on the Plate”- a gallery and a shop for gramophone records;
5. “Hakafe”- a shared workplace;
6. Design space of Sariev Gallery;
7. Photographic gallery “Rubber Gallery”;
8. Gigi Sisters- workshop and shop for handmade accessories and paper souvenirs;
9. Gallery Point Blank;
10. “What a monster”- a t- shirt shop;

The statement of the call, published on the project’s official website, provides the following explanation:

The aim was to assist various cultural entrepreneurs to invest their energy in the place, feel it and make it as their own and thus help them begin and develop their creative activities precisely here, thus helping to transform the neighborhood into the first in Bulgaria the creative district – to support the development of the Bulgarian creative sector by helping to launch and further develop the creative environment; To help the economic and social development of Kapana and Plovdiv through the growth of local business and tourism; To contribute to Plovdiv’s candidacy for European Capital of Culture in 2019 and to the overall development of culture in the city²⁶.

²⁶ <https://visitkapana.bg/en/2017/05/16/20142015/> (12.06.2019)

The result was the relocation of various “cultural entrepreneurs” who established their creative projects in *Kapana*. In the months that followed “galleries, workshops, ateliers, bars and restaurants opened up next to the few existing. For the 12 months of the Phase I, the winners initiated dozens of exhibitions, attracted a variety of (new) audiences, the project became recognizable, and the actors themselves began to identify themselves as “ambassadors” of the idea of turning *Kapana* into a district of the creative industries.”²⁷ Of the initial ten project winners in 2014/2015 only about a half were still operational at the time of my fieldwork activities 2018/2019. I personally met with the artists behind two brands from the initial list – “*GG Sisters*” and “*pLOVEdiv*”.

GG Sisters

“*GG Sisters*” is a product brand developed by two sisters from Plovdiv. Their workshop for handmade accessories and paper souvenirs is located on Georgi Benkovski Str. No 25 alongside other creative spaces – “*Răkodelnicata na Jana*” (*Jana*’s atelier for handmade souvenirs), and the *Infinity Gallery* for ceramics art. Back in 2014 one of the sisters (*Gigi*) gave an interview to publicize their brand:

*Behind the name GG Sisters are me and my sister. Together we devote all our spare time to our craft – reusing excess paper and turning it into pieces of art. Modern urban population is buried under tons of excess paper: flyers, brochures, catalogs, all kinds of paper spam, old newspapers and magazines, used printing paper, old documents and so on... People throw these things out, but they are treasures for us – priceless materials for our creations! We are inspired by the idea of turning annoying SPAM into beautiful works of art with practical application. We are continuously rediscovering the potential of this material, and thus improving the creative impulse that drives us. There is no greater pleasure than making beauty “from scratch” with your own hands!*²⁸

In 2018 I visited the creative space “*GG Sisters*” and met with one of the founders, *Temenuška Džidžova* (*Gigi*), an artist who uses the art technique “knitting with paper” and a person who cares about the environment (her self-identification). She explained that supermarkets and offices produce piles of papers (brochures, documents) which were eventually thrown away. These archives were no longer necessary and the papers became useless; *Gigi* obtains the paper she works with from all over, and people leave piles on her threshold. She makes use of this discarded paper, recycles it and forms different objects – boxes, jewelry, lamps, etc. During our conversation *Gigi* described her artistic activities as art therapy. She had organized

²⁷ <https://visitkapana.bg/en/2017/05/16/20142015/> (12.06.2019)

²⁸ <https://ggsis.wordpress.com/2014/07/11/lost-in-kapana/> (12.06.2019)

group training for adults to promote her art. Nevertheless, pressured by economic necessities, in 2018 she planned to combine her artistic work with a second office job in order to support financially her workshop and keep her development as a free-lance artist.

On the evening of July 24th, 2019 I went to Gigi's Good-bye Party. She had previously posted the event on Facebook inviting friends to celebrate her fifth anniversary of creative work in *Kapana*. Since she had planned to move out and give up her residence in the district very soon, she also used the occasion to say "good-bye" to her fellows. From our conversation I understood that she intended to continue her art therapy as a hobby at home, and made no future plans to relocate her artistic activities to another area for the time being. Gigi told me, she had a regular job now. At the same time her next door neighbor, the ceramics artist Iva, also held a celebration on the pavement in front of her "Infinity Gallery". Iva had a birthday party this evening and I went to congratulate her and exchange a few words. We had met one year ago (in September 2018) when I interviewed her and took pictures inside her gallery. Back then she told me she had organized classes to teach people how to work with clay. This time Iva had also decided to move out of *Kapana* and relocate her gallery and classes to another place in Plovdiv.

pLOVEDiv brand

Initially "pLOVEDiv is a project launched by Milen Gelishev and Simeon Todorov in 2011. It starts with the light inscription they put on one of the hills in the city with the help of the Open Arts Foundation. This luminous inscription naturally became a recognizable symbol of the city, and people loved it. It can be seen on Stanislav Dospevski Street."²⁹ In September 2018 I came in contact with Milen Gelishev – a visual artist, graphic designer, and brand developer. He relocated from Sofia (the capital city) after earning an academic degree in visual arts. Milen created the only independent city brand³⁰, inspired by similar city branding in Berlin, Madrid, London, and Amsterdam, Berlin. *pLOVEDiv* is his designer concept – a result of a private initiative created before Plovdiv was awarded the title. He shared his reflections on the development of *Kapana*:

It was a huge parking area before, not a nice place; people did not take notice of its charm and potential until it was made a pedestrian zone, and until it was slowly inhabited, and the first "fresh blood" [influx of] people who came to reside was due to the initiative of the Foundation 2019. Initially there were only a few places that could be rented [by artists].

²⁹ <https://hicomm.bg/intervu/p-lov-ediv-pyrvijat-po-roda-si-gradski-brand-v-bylgarija.html> (12.06.2019)

³⁰ See the online store of the brand at: [https://plovediv.net/en/\(12.06.2019\)](https://plovediv.net/en/(12.06.2019))

At present Milen occupies Studio 24 in *Kapana*, a space he shares with another female colleague who sells the merchandise – t-shirts, bags, badges, magnets, cards, cups, notebooks, key holders, etc. The logo **All We Need Is pLOVEDiv** is printed on the souvenirs, “*which are not the standard souvenirs, but convey the emotion of the place, Kapana*”, Milen says. He has initiated a promotional campaign – people (both Bulgarians and foreigners) who had bought a t-shirt with the printed logo, took pictures and uploaded them in the social media. In this way there is now a virtual community of followers and supporters of the brand – a sort of a subculture:

Everyone who purchases a souvenir – a T-shirt, a bag, a cup, a keychain ... – and takes pictures with it (or photographs only it) and uploads the photo to Facebook or Instagram with #AllWeNeedIsPlovediv (or @AllWeNeedIsPlovediv) immediately becomes part of a community of pLOVEDiv. Very often these photos are shared on official Facebook and Instagram pages which make people feel even more connected to this project³¹.

Media use (including posting one’s photos online) and visual identity products (brands) are an extremely important creative and emotional practice. However, these media products are appealing to only a relative circle of young people and artists, thus creating subcultures of taste and enjoyment (Scheer 2012: 210). While interviewing artists, I heard that they address their audiences as fans, not as clients or customers. This address indicates the presence of subcultures that share aesthetic admiration and emotion related to creatively made products or works of art.

Project Phase II (2015–2016) and the Subsequent Open Calls

After Phase I of the project, the Foundation initiated the next Phase II in 2015–2016. During this period, a second open call was announced to attract artists and audiences to *Kapana*:

This time there were two concepts: the first was continuing the line of settlement of industries in Kapana “Establishment in Kapana”: providing the rent for a period of one year of creative ateliers. And the other was “Projects and events in Kapana”- supporting events implemented in the neighbourhood or devoted to its development: concerts, exhibitions, workshops, performances aiming to attract the local citizens and the tourists from the country and abroad to the district³².

³¹ <https://hicomm.bg/intervu/p-lov-ediv-pyrvijat-po-roda-si-gradski-brand-v-bylgarija.html> (12.06.2019)

³² <https://visitkapana.bg/en/2017/05/16/20152016/> (12.06.2019)

As a result of this phase, six more industries received a rent subsidy for one year. Additionally thirteen projects and events were supported, including the following:

– Festival of the Bulgarian handmade beer (September, October 2015) “Pod Tepeto” Ltd.;

– “Cheese in the trap”- theatrical performances in *Kapana* (June, July 2015), Key Turn Foundation (Hand Theatre);

– “Heard and Seen in *Kapana*” – Project for photography, calligraphy, printing and distribution of cards with quotes, inquired after a consultation with the residents form *Kapana* (May- June 2016), “Lastici” Ltd.

The next open call for financial support was titled “*Kapana: Events and Interventions in Public Spaces – Focus: French Culture*”. This initiative was a joint venture between the Foundation Plovdiv 2019 and Institut français de Bulgarie. Among the many supported projects, there was one about the development and promotion of a boutique perfume called *EAU DE KAPANA*, distributed in the drugs & cosmetics store “Baraka Naturals”. The local printed media announced the news: “The perfume was especially designed as an “artistic”, i.e. dedicated to people, emotions, experiences, and cities. It was officially presented in May 2018.”³³ More details about the perfume and its creators we can find on the official project webpage:

“**Boutique perfume** developed by the owner of the leading boutique French company Grasse Au Parfum will be the latest addition to Kapana brand. Melanie Allais works for Pacco Raban in the cosmetic group BPI (perfume brand of Issey Mikake) before setting up her own company in 2011 in the capital of French perfumes Grass. The ambition of Baraka initiators is Melanie to transfer her experience and knowledge in developing a boutique aroma with a sense of Kapana district. With a series of demonstrations and French know-how, the Plovdiv creative quarter will have its unique boutique perfume. To realize the idea, Baraka team receives a subsidy of 2600 BGN”³⁴.

EAU DE KAPANA was produced in a limited edition of one hundred bottles, and sold at a price of fifty EUR for a bottle of 100 ml. It was just another promotional brand associated with *Kapana*, along with many others, developed by business oriented “cultural entrepreneurs”. A visitor can find and consume them in galleries, workshops, studios, cozy restaurants and shops, as well as other art spaces, including a vinyl shop. The names of these trendy places are meant to sound catchy and appealing to the imagination:

Vinyl's home place Soul Searchin' – Point-Blank Gallery – Darvodielie Atelier (carpenters') – What-A-monster – Kotka and Mishka (Cat and Mouse) Bar – Rubber Gallery – Our House – Hipster Hostel – Chill Out zone – Atelier 42 – Răkodelnicata na Jana – GG Sisters – Art Place Kapana – Atelier Muza – Sound Trap – The Craft Station – Trap Gallery – MBG Fashion Stu-

³³ <https://www.marica.bg/eau-de-kapana-trygna-s-cena-100-leva-Article-131927.html> (14.06.2019)

³⁴ <https://visitkapana.bg/en/2017/08/18/20172018/>(14.06.2019)

dio – Kanape Studio – Art Aslon [Incubator] – Basquiat Wine and Art – Rock Bar Download – Petnoto na Rorshah (the blot of Rorshah) – Skaptobara (an American-styled burger restaurant, that originated in Sofia and later opened a branch in Kapana) – “Terzo Mundo” Bar&Restaurant.

Kapana, in this sense, is a medium for experiencing emotions associated with relaxation and enjoyment, taste and subculture, creative inspiration and experimentation with colors, ideas, alternative lifestyles. It is the creative agency of artists and their audiences that reconnects *Kapana* to the living city and produces the “cultural ballast that in turn sustains global flows by attracting capital investment and drawing tourists and skilled migrants (the ‘creative class’) through contributing to an urban image befitting a global city, and supporting a culturally enriched lifestyle” (Kong 2010: 167).

The latest innovative focus in *Kapana* is related to promoting youth cultures and subcultures: the last open call for 2019 is announced as “*Kapana Creative District. Focus: Youths Core.*”³⁵ The proposed creative ideas have to be centered on and around the Core (‘*Yadroto*’) – a stage constructed in the heart of the district, surrounded by bars, small cafes, workshops, etc. According to this cultural initiative, the “artistic interventions in public spaces” should be developed by youth organizations and would feature campaigns and performative acts, streets art, contemporary circus; and other creative forms: dance, theatre, music literature, and cinema. The stage Core (*Yadroto*) is flagged on both sides with high walls featuring impressive graffiti artworks. On the spot, I have usually seen groups of young people who clustered together while talking and listening to music.

Effects of Gentrification

Gentrification is explained in relation to the “aestheticised districts of the city” in the conceptual model of Andreas Reckwitz:

The Renaissance of the inner cities of the creative cities covers not only the creative industries that settle there, the locations of the old and new cultural provision as well as the art scenes, but also and specifically the districts that are close to the inner city, as aesthetically developed residential districts for the post-materialist middle classes. Already in the mid-1960s, this process could be observed in parts of London and New York, and early on it was summed up by the suggestive term gentrification. This describes a multi-stage transformation, the first step of which is a partial settlement of hitherto dilapidated districts close to the inner city – frequently with a high proportion of old buildings – by „alternative” inhabitants – artists, students, members of

³⁵ [https://visitkapana.bg/en/2019/03/27/open-call-kapana-focus-youths-core/\(14.06.2019\)](https://visitkapana.bg/en/2019/03/27/open-call-kapana-focus-youths-core/(14.06.2019))

the subculture, young academics – who at the same time renovate the building stock. At the end of gentrification stands a complete exchange of population, so that well-to-do middle classes inhabit the districts and often buy residential property there. (.....) Of central importance for the aestheticised inner-city districts is thus precisely that they do not form purely residential districts, but at the same time are districts with expanding leisure and shopping opportunities, and in part also with work locations of the art scenes and of the creative industries. To this extent, in the sense of a de-differentiation of living, working and leisure, they stand in clear contradiction to the separation of living and working in the functional city (2010: 20–21).

During my fieldwork in *Kapana*, I have observed the reverse effects of gentrification – some of the “alternative inhabitants” have abandoned the district or are in the process of doing so because of the high investment interest in the property there. In the course of my visits and conversations with people in *Kapana*, I have come to realize that the prices and rents of the real estate in the district have dramatically risen. In this situation many artists found it impossible to continue their creative activities in *Kapana*, especially after their rent was no longer subsidized by the Foundation. Eventually, some of them were pushed into the margins of the district, away from the central streets, or had left *Kapana* altogether as the two cases of Gigi and Iva described above indicate. Their vacant places were quickly occupied by trendy bars, guest houses and other profit-making businesses. These reverse effects of gentrification were notable as early as 2016/2017 and marked by the official project discourse:

“The results of the analysis of the previous phases of the project proved, on the one hand, the effectiveness of the support of events in the district and, on the other hand, the first symptoms of gentrification – with the increase of rents. Therefore, the Plovdiv 2019 Foundation decided with the present edition of the competition to stimulate creative and artistic interventions and activities and not to maintain a rental space without necessarily encouraging artists to seek adequate market mechanisms to promote their activities”³⁶.

In July 2019 *Kapana* won the prize “Guardian of the Bulgarian Architectural Heritage” presented by the Chamber of the Bulgarian Architects. And despite the high recognition, there are still great concerns about the present effects of gentrification in the district. On July 24th, 2019, the local newspaper *Marica* published the opinion of Architect Antoaneta Topalova under the title “*Kapana mutates under the pressure of market interest. Subjective taste and scale are increasingly taking over the new investment intentions and realizations.*” In the short piece she made the following statement:

“Much of the problem lies in the increased investment interest in the district. Some of *Kapana*’s previous fascination has given way to market mechanisms lead-

³⁶ [https://visitkapana.bg/2017/04/18/20162017/\(14.06.2019\)](https://visitkapana.bg/2017/04/18/20162017/(14.06.2019))

ing to a distinct identity loss. Subjective taste and scale are increasingly taking over the new investment intentions and realizations. Market interest, undisturbed by specific rules and restrictions, leads to a mutation of the building substance, which causes the loss of the authentic street silhouette, scale and character. Another major problem is the high rise construction in the art district in recent years. Attics, dormers, bay windows and balconies, alien to the delicate heritage structure, sprout in Kapana. Details and shape-formation alien to the environment and aesthetic criteria are realized. The use of river pebbles for plinths, granite tiles and glass for facades, balustrades, etc. makes an impression. This gradually results in functional congestion of the territory. Functions are gradually being introduced for which no suitable conditions are secured – hotels, offices and residential buildings are being built, a profane trade is being developed, etc., without providing parking space and access to the respective sites³⁷.

The general dissatisfaction and resentment with the current state of affairs in *Kapana* have led to public appeals to change the overall labeling and public presentation of the district. This view was expressed by Stanimir Kronev whose article “*Let’s remove the “arts and crafts” from the name of Kapana. Since 2017, over 25 new establishments, restaurants and cafeterias have opened there*”³⁸ appeared in *Marica* one day before the statement of Topalova. The author has voiced the opinion of the silent minority in Plovdiv who is not satisfied with the final outcomes of the “*Kapana project*”, including the loss of local identity, the exodus of artists, and the uncontrollable infiltration of *Kapana* by new business ventures.

It appears that the official public policy discourse on *Kapana* as the first creative district is subverted by the social reality – market interest, investors, tourism pressure. This ideological displacement takes place since the symbolic capital and values associated with the “symbol-producing economy” have given way to the tangible economic benefits and making profits in the tourist business. In this way the declared “heritage regime” in the district has been undermined by the advent of new investors, introducing new tastes and business ideas.

The opportunities for doing good business in *Kapana* were recognized as early as 2013. In 2019 I interviewed the owner of *Terzo Mondo*, Nikitas Chouchoutas – a businessman from Greece who had bought property in *Kapana* back in 2013 and redeveloped it into a trendy restaurant. He had decided to relocate his business to Plovdiv, expecting the high rise of tourism in 2019. The interior decoration of his establishment, *Terzo Mondo*, is inspired by the Third World countries which he had visited many times as a tourist agency operator. Having this expanded worldview, Nikitas said: “*Plovdiv is the most interesting, the most multicultural, the most erotic and historical city ever, incomparable to any other city in the world, not even in*

³⁷ <https://www.marica.bg/kapana-mutira-pod-natiska-na-pazarniq-interes-Article-222894.html> (28.07.2019)

³⁸ <https://www.marica.bg/da-mahnem-izkustvata-i-zanaqtite-ot-imeto-na-kapana-Article-222667.html>

Greece (and you hear this from a Greek!)”. Nikitas appreciates that the people of Plovdiv know the history of the city and their place in it. They do not “steal history” as the Macedonians did, but can differentiate among various cultures and historical periods – Thracian, Roman, Greek, Macedonian, Slavic, and Ottoman. As a Greek businessman Nikitas enjoys the ethnic diversity of Plovdiv, including the Armenians, Turks, Roma, Bulgarians, Jews, and says that this is our common future – to live **together**, repeating the motto of Plovdiv 2019: “*No matter the ethnic, religious and other differences, it is important to live and work together – this is the future of the Balkan peoples*”.

Conclusion

In this paper I have addressed the ideological and bureaucratic aspects of the project focused on transforming *Kapana* into a creative district within the general framework of the Europeanization of urban space. In my analysis *Kapana* appears as a place of memory, a space of transformation, a creative project in the making, but also as a battleground of conflicting discourses and practices. *Kapana* is still a point of contestation where many experimental ideas have found their realization. So far, this district has been the only visual and material evidence of the urban transformation and remodeling of space, associated with Plovdiv 2019 “capital of culture” campaigning – a result of a public policy intervention based on the concept of “creative industries”. Unlike other urban centered projects (the *Tobacco City*, for example) that produced high expectations in the public, but have failed for one reason or another, *Kapana* is one relatively successful case of redeveloping a central residential space and designing trendy creative background by attracting artists and audiences.

I have presented the official project discourse on *Kapana*, featured in the description of the open calls and their results, to review the multiple creative projects and ideas, associated with the content of the creative industries: architecture (spatial transformation), visual identity products (brands), social media and promotion, sub-cultures and youth cultures, various artifacts – a perfume, handmade gifts, graffiti art.

At the same time, there are still many more local businessmen, practitioners and cultural operators in the field – artists, brand developers and craftsmen whose agency is affecting the environment of *Kapana*, making it more open and hospitable to the growing number of visitors. Not all of them have received “official” endorsement by becoming beneficiaries of the “establishment program”, initiated by the Foundation. Some artists came to reside on their own initiative attracted by the growing popularity of the area. Others are only visiting artists like Nasimo who came for an event, creating a work in progress. The reverse effects of gentrification have caused the “emigration” of artists from the district and their relocation to other parts of the city. In addition I met product designers whose businesses (work

facilities and offices) are situated elsewhere in Plovdiv, but who have a show room in *Kapana* to promote their products and spread contact information. Regardless of their status, visiting or permanently residing in *Kapana*, artists are the new “cultural entrepreneurs” who make a great difference by transforming urban landscapes and lifestyles in the new “creative economy”.

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