



# THE YOUNG KOSOVO

Photographs by Alessandro Gandolfi

parallelozero



Pristina (Kosovo), dancing and chatting at the Zone Club nightclub, one of the most popular in the city. Pristina has been known for being a cool, nightlife-loving city since the days of Yugoslavia.



Pristina (Kosovo), on the southwestern outskirts of the city stands Marigona Residence, a super-controlled, luxury residential complex for the upper and wealthy middle class, which includes houses, apartments as well as stores, restaurants, gyms, and other amenities.



Pristina (Kosovo), at work at the headquarters of StarLabs, Kosovo's largest technology company that focuses on software development, IT service and customer support, among other things. Founded in 2016 by Darsej Rizaj, now 38, the company has 165 employees and a school dedicated to teaching technology subjects.

## HOW YOUTH, TECHNOLOGY AND INVESTMENT ARE TRANSFORMING EUROPE'S YOUNGEST REPUBLIC INTO AN EXCELLENCE OF THE BALKANS

It is the youngest republic in Europe, in every sense. Kosovo was born only in 2008 and 60 per cent of its population is under 30 years old: **an educated and digitally native “generation Z”, which has not experienced war and is open to change** just like their favourite Dua Lipa (the pop star who grew up between London and Pristina).

Of course, with four thousand euros of GDP per capita, Kosovo is also the poorest country on the continent but things are changing fast: there are those who argue that **innovative start-ups, technology development, foreign investment and academic excellence** could turn the former Serbian province into the Singapore of the Balkans. Meanwhile from January 2024 its population will be able to travel to EU countries without a visa: ‘an historic decision,’ explains businessman Darsej Rizaj, ‘that will open us up to the European Union and take us out of the ghetto in which diplomacy and geopolitics – still complex in the Balkan region – have relegated us for 15 years.’

Kosovo has always aspired to join the EU and although it is not a member, it has adopted the Euro since 2002. ‘Ours, however, is still a weak brand,’ Rizaj points out, ‘and we pay for the prejudices of those who still consider us Third World.’ **Many people are ready to bet on Kosovo's future** and as music producer Rinor Ukimeri – inventor of We Sing, Kosovo's first music competition – says, ‘this country is full of talents: we just have to look for them!’



Pristina (Kosovo), young dancers practice at Behia's Dance school with teacher Behia Murtezi.



Pristina (Kosovo), journalist Djellza S. Asllanaj reads the 11am news on Kosovo's first television network, RTK1, founded in 1999.



Prizren (Kosovo), students on a school trip to a city fairground: Prizren is popular among Kosovars for its beauty and historical importance.





Pristina (Kosovo), two girls skate boards in a square with a monument bearing a quote from Mother Teresa. Behind, the distinctive Yugoslav architecture of the Youth and Sports Center.



Peja (Kosovo), young members of the Anibar association (from left, Jora Berisha, Arba Hatashi, Vita Kasapolli and Granit Karagjyzi) pose in the old Jusuf Gervalla cinema, built in the 1950s during the Yugoslav period. Founded by 18-year-olds, Anibar organises an annual festival of animated films in these halls.



Pristina (Kosovo), a dinosaur at the entrance to the cinema inside the Prishtina Mall, built south of the city in 2023 and considered (at 115,000 square meters) the largest mall in Southeastern Europe.



Peja (Kosovo), view of the Rugova canyon with the Lumbardhi i Pejës river, not far from the border with Macedonia and a paradise for hikers and climbers.



Prishtina (Kosovo), Berat "Strella" Gashi plays at his Tilt Radio & Vinyl Bar, which opened two years ago after he returned from London: it is an online radio station that is also a hangout for music and good drinking lovers.



Peja (Kosovo), children on bumper cars with Kosovar and Albanian flags.



Pristina (Kosovo), young Kosovar boxer Riad Hasanaj prepares to step into the ring during a series of international bouts at the Youth and Sports Center.



Prizren (Kosovo), tourists take photos in the square along the river and near the Sinan Pasha mosque. Prizren is popular with travelers for its beauty and historical importance.



# DIGITAL SCHOOL



Pristina (Kosovo), young students at the Digital School, a private institute where with just a few hours a week children and teenagers can learn about computer programming and technology topics. The Digital School has become a franchise present in 11 countries around the world and was founded by Darsej Rizaj in 2015, the same man who in 2016 created StarLabs, now the largest technology company in Kosovo.





Pristina (Kosovo), a zenith view of the National Library of Kosovo "Pjetër Bogdani," built in 1982 to a design by Yugoslav architect Andrija Mutnjaković: the building has 99 domes and is entirely covered with wire mesh.



Pristina (Kosovo), students attend a lecture in a classroom inside AAB College, Kosovo's first private university established soon after the end of the war in 1999.



Prizren (Kosovo), a guided tour of Kosovar tourists to the Sinan Pasha mosque, built in 1615 during the Ottoman occupation.



Pristina (Kosovo), view of the city from the southeast. The country's capital has more than 200,000 inhabitants and lies on a fertile alluvial plain surrounded by hills.



Pristina (Kosovo), boys play a VR war game in an amusement arcade inside the Prishtina Mall, built south of the city in 2023 and considered (at 115 thousand square meters) the largest shopping mall in southeastern Europe.



Pristina, Kosovo, at the headquarters of the Democratic League of Kosovo, founded in 1989 by Ibrahim Rugova, portraits of party members and former secretaries such as Fatmir Sejdiu (center), Isa Mustafa (right) and Xhemal Mustafa (left) hang on the wall.



Pristina (Kosovo), at the National Gallery, the president of the Kosovo republic, Vjosa Osmani (center, in purple dress), visits an exhibition by Montenegrin artist Gjelosh Gjokaj.



Pristina (Kosovo), two female students attend an art lecture by Professor Burim Myftiu in a classroom inside AAB College, Kosovo's first private university established soon after the end of the war in 1999.



Pristina (Kosovo), an electric go-kart track inside the Prishtina Mall, built in the south of the city in 2023 and considered (with its 115,000 square metres) the largest shopping centre in south-eastern Europe.

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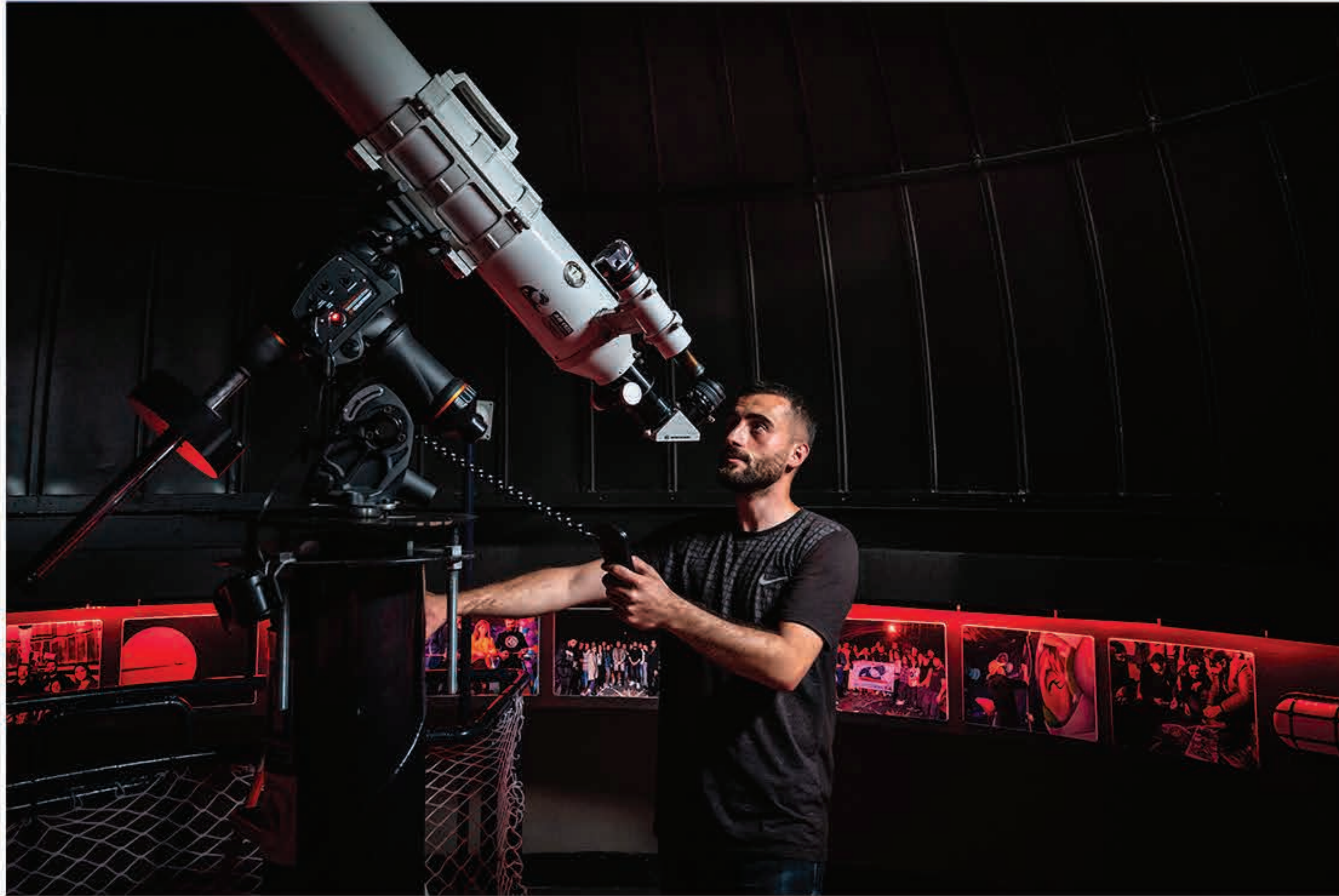
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Peja (Kosovo), tourist signs at an intersection near the Rugova canyon, in the direction of Shkrel.





Pristina (Kosovo), the studio audience of the program Libero during a break in the studios of the private television station ATV.



Pristina (Kosovo), Renor Ahmeti, 25, an astronomy enthusiast, prepares the telescope at the Pristina Observatory. Opened in 1977, closed after a few years and reopened only in 2022, it is now home to the Astronomy Club of Kosova.



Pristina (Kosovo), the interior of the Prishtina Mall, built in the south of the city in 2023 and considered (at 115,000 square meters) the largest mall in Southeastern Europe.



Prizren (Kosovo), Diona Mazrecky is photographed by her brother in the dress she will wear at her 18th birthday party on 11 August 2024. The photo is taken near the entrance to a historical site: the building that in 1878 saw the birth of The League of Prizren (officially the League for the Defence of the Rights of the Albanian Nation).



Pristina (Kosovo), lecture for an elementary school class in a room of the National Library of Kosovo "Pjetër Bogdani," built in 1982 and designed by Yugoslav architect Andrija Mutnjaković; the building has 99 domes and is entirely covered with wire mesh.



Prizren (Kosovo), Kevin Dula, 30, poses in front of an old Yugoslav film projector in a hall of the Lumbardhi cinema. Kevin is a member of the association that runs the cinema.



Pristina (Kosovo), famous Kosovar singer and guitarist Dren Abazi relaxes in his home. Dren, who also lives partly in Tirana, sings in the Albanian language and is known in Albanian communities around the world.



Pristina (Kosovo), at the end of the school year students gather in a small amphitheater not far from the boarding schools to listen to music and party.



Pristina (Kosovo), young Kosovar boxers prepare to step into the ring during a series of international bouts at the Youth and Sports Center.



Prizren (Kosovo), students on a school trip to a city fairground: Prizren is popular among Kosovars for its beauty and historical importance.



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