

COMPETING URBAN VISIONS FOR THE CAPITAL OF ALBANIA:
INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS FOR TIRANA CITY CENTRE

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INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS FOR TIRANA CITY CENTRE**

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ABSTRACT

COMPETING URBAN VISIONS FOR THE CAPITAL OF ALBANIA: INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS FOR TIRANA CITY CENTRE

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This thesis concentrates on urban regeneration as a strategy of urban transformation in general and in the context of post-communist countries in particular. The spatial transformations in cities resulted by the urban renewal and regeneration processes are currently under discussion in Albania. The present research is based on three pillars: a review of the urban transformation, renewal and regeneration in the West and in post-socialist cities in particular; exploring the historical formation and transformation of the Tirana city centre; and finally the regeneration of the city centre through a series of international competitions as a completely new model introduced by the municipality.

The thesis focuses particularly on the international competition organized to

obtain the master plan for the regeneration of the Tirana city centre; it compares the main concepts, ideas and features of the three shortlisted entries: Those of Architecture Studio, Mecanoo Arkitekten and Boles and Wilson. The winning master plan is evaluated with regard to the objectives of the regeneration, its integration with the existing built environment and open spaces, as well as the process of implementation. Within this framework, the thesis aims to study and evaluate this process to direct the urban development through a master plan competition completed by a series of urban design and architectural competitions.

The process of regeneration of the centre of Tirana illustrates that despite the increased capacity of the citizens in Albania in participating in the decision making of the government, the public participation in the planning process was a difficult task despite the efforts of the Municipality. Yet, the enthusiasm that the new vision of Tirana brings is considerable.

Keywords: urban regeneration, urban project, post-communist city, Tirana competition, *Architecture Studio*, city spine.

ÖZ

ARNAVUTLUĞUN BAŞKENTİ İÇİN YARIŞAN KENT VİZYONLARI: TİRAN KENT MERKEZİ İÇİN ULUSLARARASI PROJELER

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Bu tez, genel anlamda bir kentsel dönüşüm stratejisi olarak kentsel yeniden canlandırma olgusuna özellikle post-sosyalist ülkelerdeki bağlamla ilişkilendirerek odaklanmaktadır. Kentsel yeniden canlandırma ve yenileşme süreçlerinin yarattığı mekânsal dönüşümler Arnavutluk'ta son dönemde tartışma konusudur. Yapılan araştırma temelde üç ana bölümden oluşmaktadır: Batı ülkelerinde ve post-sosyalist ülkelerdeki kentsel dönüşüm, kentsel yenileme ve

yenileşme; Tiran kent merkezinin tarihi olarak oluşumu ve dönüşümü ve son olarak kent merkezinin yeniden canlandırılması için açılan master plan yarışması ve açılması sürdürülen uluslararası kentsel tasarım yarışmaları. Bu çerçevede, bu tez çalışması kentteki değişimin niteliğini ve kentteki morfolojik değişikliklerin politik, sosyal ve ekonomik etkenlerle ilişkilerinin değerlendirilmesini hedeflemektedir.

Bu çalışma özellikle Tiran kent merkezinin yeniden canlandırılması için uygulanması düşünülen nazım planının elde edilmesi için düzenlenen uluslararası yarışmaya odaklanmakta; bu bölümde son elemeye kalan 3 kentsel projenin – Architecture Studio, Mekanoo Arkitekten ve Boles-Wilson tarafından önerilen projelerin- temel kavramlar, fikirler ve özellikler üzerinde karşılaştırmalı bir değerlendirmesini yapmaktadır. Kazanan proje uygulamanın yanında, kentsel yenileşme konusundaki hedefleri, yapıyı çevreye ve açık alanlara olan uyumu açısından değerlendirilmektedir. Bu çerçevede tez, yapılan nazım planı yarışması aracılığıyla kentsel gelişmeyi yönlendiren bu süreci incelemeyi ve değerlendirmeyi amaçlar. Daha sonra düzenlenen bir dizi kentsel ve mimari tasarım yarışması bu nazım planı tamamlanmaktadır.

Tiran kent merkezinin yenileşmesi süreci göstermektedir ki önceden sosyalist bir ülke olan Arnavutluk'ta kentlilerin yönetimin kararlarına katılma kapasiteleri artmakla birlikte, belediyenin tüm çabalarına karşın, planlama sürecine kamusal katılım konusu zor bir süreç olmuştur. Yine de, bu sürecin büyük bir heyecan kaynağı ve Tiran'ın gelecek vizyonunun oluşturulmasında faydalı olduğu söylenebilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: kentsel yenileşme, kentsel proje, post-sosyalist kent, Tiran Kentsel Tasarım Yarışması, *Architecture Studio*, kent omurgası

To my family...

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C HAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Definition of the Research Problem

The competition “Tirana- A New European Capital City” was organized by the Tirana Municipality with the aim to regenerate the Tirana city centre, an important step in the urban development. Architecture Studio, the architectural office winning the competition, proposes a solution for problems encountered by the city during the transition of the country from an isolated *étatist* economy to a free market economy.

The research will inquire the process of the project development for the centre of Albanian capital and whether the winning project brought efficient solutions to the problems envisaged by the municipality. If so, what novelty brings this project to the citizens of Tirana, what are its impacts on spatial transformation and regeneration and consequently the economical, political and cultural development of the city?

Further, the focus of this research will be mainly on the analysis of the factors that determine the feasibility of an urban restructuring project. Finally, the progress of the implementation of the project will be studied; the causes of the current delay will be searched for.

1.2 Scope and the Aim of the Study

The competition of Tirana city centre master plan is the first urban regeneration idea that emerged in Albania after the transition period. With this project Albanian government and the municipality of Tirana city aimed at achieving the desired image of a European city.

Tirana is the capital city of Albania, which is relatively a new city. After being chosen the capital city it has become the main cultural, social, economical and political centre of the country. For the time being the 1/3rd of the Albanian population has chosen to live in Tirana transforming into the only Albanian metropolis.

Urban transformation, renewal and regeneration with their definitions and applications are considered in this study as urban processes visible in Tirana city. Urban regeneration in the Western countries and urban regeneration in the ex-communist countries are analysed aiming a comparison with a special form on the urban transformation of post-communist cities.

The master plans for the urban development of Tirana in different periods related to different regimes will be analyzed, followed by the spatial transformation of the post communist regime. Political and economical changes are the main factors that shape the present situation. The current level of constructions and the chaotic traffic situation were issues that in a way forced the announcement of the competition for the urban regeneration of the city centre on May 26th 2003.

Within this framework, the study seek to analyse and discuss the three short listed competition projects, their visions and the impact of the wining project on the spatial transformation and regeneration of Tirana city centre. Therefore, the question this research rises is how far can be successful the Architecture Studio proposal can be successful in the regeneration of Tirana downtown.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 The Purpose

The spatial transformations that take place in the last two decades of Tirana are related to politics, social and economical and planning approaches they suggest, so relating and analysing these structures is a method to be used in this research.

Tirana is a European Capital city which is passing big architectural and urban transformations after falling of Communist regime. The transformation process of the city developed in two dimensions; the first one happened as a result of massive migration to Tirana, while the second one is related to the international competitions organized from Tirana Municipality to renovate and reconsider different spaces of the city. This competition brought to Albania worldly known architectural studios and architects and at the same time the organization of this competition brought a professional satisfaction to me, because there were not held before competitions of a quality in Albania in the fields of architecture and urban planning. The international competitions in one side, living in city periodically and seeing its natural transformation on the other side, were inspiration points for me to make this research.

This research aims to explain the concepts of renewal and regeneration concepts in the World and especially in the Post-Communist countries. The study is concentrated on the renewal and regenerations in Tirana and aims to reveal the architectural and urban values of these processes within their historical and political context.

1.3.2 The Collection and Analysis of Data

Different sources concerning to renewal and regeneration are used to structuralize the theoretical basis of these concepts. The study at first is kept at a big scale explaining renewal and renovation concepts by giving examples both western and

eastern countries. There are used different sources to illustrate these examples. Then the research narrows to Tirana case study.

The required data for Tirana at first is collected from the existing written sources. The book of Koco Miho *Shqiperia Veshtrim Urbanistik* (An Urban Prospective of Albania) and that of Besnik Aliaj, *Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development* were basic sources for the history of Tirana city urban development. The migration and the emigration concepts in Albania are explained. Statistical method was used to evaluate the data showing the migration rate in Tirana.

Taking the proper data for the recent architectural competitions organized by Municipality from its Digital Archive was another important source used in the study. There are secured original copies of the presentations made from the participants during the international competitions for the renewal or regeneration in Tirana.

The method of photographing was used to take the needed visual materials of the city spine. The city spine buildings are explained by referring the existing sources to reveal their historical and political contexts of the time they were built. To take out the architectural values of the buildings both sides of the city spine were photographed.

Another method used in the research was that of interviewing specialists on Architecture and Urban Planning fields. The interviews were made with members of the international competition jury like Elia Zengelis, who was one of the most important, its member. Again there were taken interviews to Martin Rein, MVRDV representative, Rodo Tisnado Studio Architecture, the winners of the international architectural competitions held in Tirana.

The method of analysis was used to evaluate the winning projects. The proper solutions brought from the projects at first were explained. Then comparison between them was made. This method could bring out the strong and weak points of each project. At last the implementation problems of the winning project were revealed.

1.4 Thesis Outline

In the 1970s in Europe started an economical reconstruction which has been an important issue that effects the transformations occurred in the cities. Spectacular changes developed in the cities where industrial employment in Europe declined and the private sector increased. In some cities of the West the population decreased because of the employment loss while in the Eastern European cities with the changes of the regime increased. Thus European cities are actively pursuing urban regeneration strategies in order to bring a solution to these urban problems. Cities of the Eastern Block where Tirana, Albanian capital city takes place, has been grown so rapidly by the movement of people from countryside to the cities that governments being that national and local, have been powerless to offer and supply the new coming population with housing, infrastructure, employment and consequently the urban life.

All these changes in social and economical aspect of the city are factors of urban transformation. To meet these transformations certain countries planned urban renewal and regeneration projects. Therefore at the beginning of this research we believe that it worth introducing these three concepts: urban transformation, urban renewal and urban regeneration. These notions are highly seen in the post-communist Tirana which is the case study this research is based on. Accordingly, former-communist cities of the Eastern block are investigated. The change of the centralist system and the establishment of the capitalist one which is passed on pluralist democracy and market economy with the aim to be part of the international political and economical system are going to be elucidated as key factors of the transformations in the post-socialist cities. Focusing in the spatial pattern of the socialist city and then of the post-socialist city, based on the cities of the Eastern block, will be another issue of this research. Urban regeneration as a concept that is recently seen in the East European countries is investigated in the case studies from the Western cities and from the Eastern cities to see the success of their implementation.

Tirana, as the capital city of Albania and as the case study of this research is going to be introduced in the geographical context and the historical formation of the city centre in terms of its spatial pattern and built environment. Its shift from a village to a capital city and its spatial evolution pre-communist, communist and post-communist are themes to be elaborated during this research thesis. The research will consider landownership as a factor that shapes the spatial development of the cities and especially in Tirana city. We will see here the impact it has in the spatial transformations of post-communist Tirana.

The present situation of the main axis of the Tirana city centre i.e. city spine will be brought in with the help of the photographs in order for the reader to have a better understanding and a clear vision of the present Tirana. From this study we will witness the significance the city spine and we will point out its role as the civic centre of Albanians' capital city.

After the presentation of the study area and familiarizing the reader with the present situation of Tirana city, additionally the thesis will focus on the initiative of Tirana Municipality Mayor Mr. Edi Rama to change the vision of the capital city. In 2003 the announcement of an international competition "Tirana-A New European Capital City" was an important step forward the development of the city. Morphological problems, like covering every empty piece of land and erecting buildings without construction permission, road infrastructure dereliction accompanied by a traffic mess and the increased population that the city lived during the transition period, were aimed to be solved by the end of this competition. It was also intended that the capital city be in the centre of interest of the foreign investors, international capitals and so Albania will have a modern capital city with a better traffic, with sufficient green areas and with an image compared to the capitals of Europe.

The competition was sponsored by the German Government and specifically from Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) (German Association for Technical Cooperation). The competition were organised into three phases each evaluated by international juries. Firstly, 400 international offices were sent a request for expression of interest. 48 offices from different countries entered the first phase and as it was stated in the competition regulation, at the end of this phase, three

entries were selected. They are the following: Boles and Wilson, Architecture Studio and Mecanoo Architecten, Germany, France and Netherlands respectively.

In the second phase the winning conceptual project of Tirana 2040s was selected. The work done by the individual offices were presented in front of an international jury with the attendance of the national television channels.

The Architecture Studio, winner of the second phase, elaborated the details of the conceptual design during the third phase, bringing the project into a more precise state for the implementation.

All the projects brought urban design approaches that are going to be studied at the end of which we will see how they solve the problems of the city centre considering the rich design character of their conceptual proposals. Mecanoo ranked as the third office, brought richness in the identity of the city centre and were mostly based on a good balance between public and private network bringing solution to one of the major problems Tirana has. Bolles and Wilson proposal on the other hand, gives importance to the conservation of the modern architectural heritage of the city centre. They give particular importance to the existing modern blocks and search the identity of Tirana in the modern heritage of the city. The winning project proposed by Architecture Studio was characterised by the emphasis they put on the axis *cardo-decumanus* (Boulevard and Lana River) as politico-administrative and business trade axis.

Comparison between of the projects, bringing forward the advantages and disadvantages of each of them is another point that the study explains.

Afterward the study gives details of the winning project based on the unpublished report Architecture Studio handed to Tirana Municipality. Third phase of this process is still going on with the arrangement of several other individual project competitions. In this study are presented briefly the ones organised until now. They also are international competitions and are evaluated by international juries.

Among the three visions the competing offices bring to Tirana it is mentioned very briefly the image the Berlage institute students proposed for Tirana city in a study

they had made as a term project of making detailed analysis of the condition of city centre urban area, further development by the elaboration of the projects and further international competitions.

Before making a project and process evaluation the study searched the problems of implementation found as lack of funds, landownership and the political landscape.

The study concludes by making an evaluation of the projects with regard to urban identity since Tirana city has been always in such a search. The winning project of the competition introduced some high-rise buildings which put a question mark into the identity of Tirana.

Variety, customer care, flexibility and accessibility are part of success of the Architecture Studio proposal.

To sum up this research contributes in the understanding of the objectives and potential implementations that the competition and the winning project bring to city centre directly, and to grasp the innovation that it brings to the urban design discourse and practice.

CHAPTER 2

URBAN TRANSFORMATION, URBAN RENEWAL AND URBAN REGENERATION

Various changes may be seen in all the cities, while particular transformations occurred in the cities of the Eastern Block after the collapse of the socialist regimes. Of course, there are different factors that entail these changes. The transformation in the economic system, politics and society brought new ideologies and consequently had particular impact on the urban structures of the cities.

Urban renewal and urban regeneration were planning processes that characterized the transition period of post-socialist cities. Defining these terms and analyzing them for developed countries and for the Eastern Block and considering Albania case study, would be a contribution to the few literature that exist for post-socialist spatial changes.

2.1.1 Urban Transformation

The city and its dynamic character is an important study topic for many researchers. Depending on this dynamism, defining and categorising the urban changes is always a necessity. Urban transformation, renewal and regeneration are three notions to be explained in this chapter.

“Urban transformation” is a broad term / issue and once this term is well defined the steps and the phases that a city passes will be better understood and consequently the

renovation, redefinition or regeneration terms will be part of this comprehension. In general sense transformation means a structural change, and they are classified into three as functional, social and spatial transformation of urban areas. Any urban transformation comprises a structural change that might have occurred as a result of a renovation, regeneration, rehabilitation, revitalization, redevelopment, re-definition, or gentrification.¹

To make a general definition, urban transformation is an urban phenomenon which is resulted from the changes in social, economical and physical properties of a city or a part of it. This multidimensional transformation may be the result of planned changes such as urban design projects, or it may be a spontaneous change which gradually accumulated all through the years left behind.

2.1.2 Urban Renewal

Cities are dynamic entities which are shaped with the impact of economic and social changes. The general process of transformation in the economy, politics and society creates a pressure in the increase of the demand for land, new buildings and new constructions. These changes increase the needs for public utilities and infrastructure for transformation.

Chris Couch, a specialist in the field of urban development, describes the term urban renewal as “the physical change, or the change in the use or intensity of use of land and buildings, that is the inevitable outcome of the action of economic and social forces upon urban areas.”² With the urban renewal the morphological aspect changes for the city. The changes in the physical fabric play a critical role since they affect the urban functions as well as making the city appearance better or worse.³ Actually this definition made by Couch is far away from what it aims and much more close in meaning to the urban regeneration definition which will be defined later. The renewal of the urban fabric is influenced by the public sector in most cases and the

² Chris Couch. (1990). *Urban Renewal Theory and Practice*, London: Macmillan Education Ltd, p.1.

³ Ibid., p.115.

renewal process is not a spontaneous procedure. These are two aspects around which revolve the definition of the urban renewal made by Roelf Verhage⁴.

On the other hand the definition brought by Charles Fraser appears to be closer to how it appeared. He claims that the term urban renewal is an expression borrowed from the process of *slum clearance*.⁵ The term is more widely used in the United States and it is explained as clearing of considerable urban neighbourhoods in order to replace them by public housing projects. Lisa Davidson explains that “these projects reflected the modernist vision of social reform through environmental determinism”⁶

Peter Roberts states that slum clearance is said to have been introduced to Europe and firstly in England in the 1947. Comprehensive Development Areas of 1947 was a policy of pacification of low income groups that included “slum clearance” (now “urban renewal”) under the name of Town and Country Planning Act.⁷ Roberts states that the “urban renewal” is one of the major components of the urban transformation⁸ while Roger Kemp says that it is a movement the aim of which was to “modernize and reshape the physical character of the city”⁹

The aims of the urban renewal, in fact, change from one country to another, from one region to another; they depend on many factors such as political, economical, social, cultural conditions, physical structure and geographical position of the area which is planned to be subject to renewal.

Edward Hulsbergen and Paul Stouten state the re-formulation of the aims of the urban renewal by the government of Netherlands in the year 1997:

⁴ Verhage, Roelof. (2005). 'Towards a territorialized approach to urban renewal: A comparison of policies in France and the Netherlands', *International Planning Studies*, 10:2, 129 – 143

⁵ Chris Couch, Charles Fraser, Susan Percy (eds.). (2003). *Urban Regeneration in Europe*, London: Blackwell Publishing, p.22

⁶ R.Stephen Sennott (ed.). (2004). *Encyclopaedia of 20th Century Architecture* ,London: Fitzroy Dearborn, p.100

⁷ Roberts, P. (2000). The evolution, Definition and Purpose of Urban Regeneration. In P. Roberts, & H. Sykes, *Urban Regeneration: A Handbook* . London: Sage Publications. P.29

⁸ Ibid.p.16

⁹ Roger L.Kemp. (2001). *The inner city: A Handbook for Renewal*, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc.,Publisher, p.10

“Urban renewal is an intensified adjustment of the residential, working, production and living environment (in the built-up area before 1970) to the current demands and standards, in such a way that the existing deprivation is overcome stepwise, for the benefit of those who live in, work at and have their business in the deprived districts; maintenance and management are therefore excluded.”¹⁰

In a more broad term a more general definition related to the term “urbanization” is given by Adolf Ciborowski:

Urban renewal represents one aspect of a broad challenge faced by humanity, namely, worldwide urbanization. This means worldwide environmental changes, to the detriment of the natural environment, for the benefit of man-made environments.¹¹

2.1.3 Urban Regeneration

Definition of the term “regeneration” is a key theme not only for the developing countries but also for the developed ones. A quick search on the internet may inform everyone what the meaning of the word is and how it is used in different fields such as biology, physics, construction, urban planning etc. What we are concerned with is its definition in the field of urban planning and design.

By 1970s, cities changed in terms of their economy, which brought also other changes in the physical, morphological structure of the cities. We have already defined urban renewal as the “process of essential physical changes” in Couch’s words, a process that is mostly influenced by economic changes. A more contemporary process of wider influence, toward which the government looks for attracting investment, to bring a solution for a number of social problems, such as

¹⁰ Hulsbergen, Edward and Stouten, Paul. (2001). 'Urban renewal and regeneration in the Netherlands Integration lost or subordinate?', *City*, 5:3, 325 -337

¹¹ Ciborowski, A. (1970). Toward a more Humane Environment. *Theory into Practice* , pp. 168-174.

unemployment and increasing the quality of life within an urban area, is defined under the name urban regeneration.¹²

The response, in a particular time to the degradation, urban degeneration in a place, neighbourhood, is how the birth of the urban regeneration concept come out.¹³ This term is resulted from an evolution, as Peter Roberts studies this directly in relation to the progress of time. He says in 1950s the process was named as “Reconstruction”, in 1960s as “Revitalization”, in 1970s as “Renewal”, in 1980s as “Redevelopment” and in 1990s “Regeneration”.¹⁴ As time passed, the intentions and the aims of the processes evolved. Therefore it is not only the nomenclature that changes, but also the aim and the prospect to have a better environment. In other words “urban regeneration” is a process that combines the intentions of these aforementioned developing components. Mimi Li presents a similar approach in her thesis research. According to her the urban regeneration is associated with “urban revitalization”.

The terms “urban revitalization, urban renewal and urban renaissance” are used as synonymous. She describes them as “the field of public policy that addresses such urban issues as economic decline, environmental decay, community dereliction, growing unemployment and some social problems caused by the urban issues”¹⁵ In other words regeneration is not new, rather it has existed before but what makes it difficult is the “size and the complexity of the problems” and at the same time “the concomitant scale and sophistication of the policy,”¹⁶ as Couch, Fraser and Percy point out.

Appropriate use of words is very helpful in the elucidation of the term “urban regeneration”. The specialist whose research field is urban regeneration contributes

¹² Chris Couch, Charles Fraser, Susan Percy (eds.). (2003). *Urban Regeneration in Europe*, London: Blackwell Publishing, p.6

¹³ Peter Roberts in Peter Roberts and Hugh Sykes (eds). (2000). *Urban Regeneration: A Handbook*, London: Sage Publications, p.9.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.14

¹⁵ Li, M. (2003). *Urban Regeneration through Public Space: a Case Study in Squares in Dalian, China*, Master Thesis, Waterloo, Canada, p.5.

¹⁶ Chris Couch, Charles Fraser, Susan Percy (eds.). (2003). *Urban Regeneration in Europe*, London: Blackwell Publishing, p.2.

to it with their definitions. Coach argues that urban regeneration “attempt to return derelict and vacant land and buildings to beneficial use, create new forms of employment where jobs have been lost, improve the urban environment, and tackle an array of urban social problems.”¹⁷ Regeneration is concerned with the re-growth of economic activity where it has been lost; the restoration of social function where there has been dysfunction, or social inclusion where there has been exclusion; and the restoration of the environment quality or ecological balance where it has been lost. Thus urban regeneration is an aspect of the management and planning of existing urban areas rather than the planning and development of new urbanization.¹⁸ Roberts and define urban regeneration as a “comprehensive and integrated vision and action which leads to the resolution of urban problems and which seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area that has been subject to change”¹⁹ And, according to Patsy Healey, Simin Davoudi, Mo O’Toole, Solmaz Tavsanoglu and David Usher, urban regeneration is considered to be a kind of response to the economical, social and political changes, the consequences of which reflect on the spatial organization of urban environment.²⁰ This implies that urban regeneration is indirectly affecting the urban space.

The “response” here is an activity, a process and in order for a process to be successful a number of urban regeneration principles are to be followed. These principles are summarized in the Roberts’ work and they are valid in a broad-spectrum for the whole city. Here are going to be cited five of them seen proper to be discussed in the Tirana case.

According to Roberts urban regeneration should:

¹⁷ Chris Couch. (1990). *Urban Renewal Theory and Practice*, London: Macmillan Education Ltd, p.6.

¹⁸ Chris Couch, Charles Fraser, Susan Percy(eds.), *Urban Regeneration in Europe*, p.2

¹⁹ Peter Roberts in Peter Roberts and Hugh Sykes(eds.). (2000). *Urban Regeneration: A Handbook*, London: Sage Publications, p.17.

²⁰ Patsy Healey, Simin Davoudi, Mo O’Toole, Solmaz Tavsanoglu and David Usher (eds.). (1992). *Rebuilding the City: Prooperty-led Urban Regeneration*, London: E& FN SON, p.3

- be based upon a detailed analysis of the condition of an urban area;
- be aimed at the simultaneous adaptation of the physical fabric, social structures, economic base and environmental condition of an urban area;
- ensure that a strategy and the resulting programmes of implementation are developed in accord with the aims of sustainable development;
- accept the likelihood that initial programmes of implementation will need to be revised in-line with such changes as occur;
- recognize the reality that the various elements of a strategy are likely to make progress at different speeds; this may require the redirection of resources in order to maintain a broad balance between the aims encompassed in a scheme of urban regeneration and to allow for the achievement of all of the strategic objectives.²¹

If these conditions and standards are effectively realized and are reflected in the regeneration project, than the process will make a “positive contribution to the national economic performance and to the attainment of a range of other social and environmental goals”,²² emphasizes Roberts.

To comprehend the urban regeneration process and to sum up what is discussed up to now a chart that includes the process and the principles of the urban regeneration and generally that of urban transformation is presented below. (Table2. 1)

On the other hand Richard Evans and Cy Paumier deal particularly with the city, town centre’s principles. City centre is thought to be the core of the city that characterizes the urban life. Efforts to regenerate it are made with the aim to regenerate economical and social life in the centres, to encourage people come together and interact with each other, so that the environment functions fully. There are a set of principles that Paumier considers in “*Creating a Vibrant City Center: Urban design and Regeneration Principles.*” Urban regeneration project should

²¹ Peter Roberts, The evolution, Definition and Purpose of Urban Regeneration, in Peter Roberts and Hugh Sykes. (2000). *Urban Regeneration: A Handbook*, London: Sage Publications, pp. 18-1 9

²² Ibid., p.19

“promote diversity of use, encourage compactness, foster intensity of development, ensure a balance of activities, create functional linkages and build a positive identity”.²³

A clear vision of these principles is studied in Evans’ work. He coordinates the elements that make possible the shaping of cities and morphological character of the town centres. His classification of the principles has many similarities with Paumier’s but the language he uses is different and the explanation he brings is much more detailed. Balance, Variety, Flexibility and Innovative Thinking, Customer Care, Accessibility, Employment Creation, Local Production and Local Accountability and Information²⁴ are eight principles that Evans argues in his book “Regenerating Town Centres”. To conclude, urban regeneration is an activity, a process and a response, that aims urban changes (cultural, political, social, economical and physical), contributing to a better urban life.

²³ Cy Paumier. (2004). *Creating a Vibrant City Center: Urban design and Regeneration Principles*, Washington D.C.: Urban Land Institute, p.17

²⁴ Richard Evans. (1997). *Regenerating Town Centres*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p.140

Process and principles of urban transformation (Roberts, P., & Sykes, H. (2000). *Urban Regeneration: A Handbook*. London: Sage Publications, p.14)

Period	-1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s-
Policy Type	Clearance Renewal Redevelopment	Reconstruction	Revitalization Rehabilitation Improvement	Renewal	Redevelopment	Regeneration
Major strategy and orientation	Slum clearance; removal of the detrimental effects of Industrial Revolution and early attempts at suburban growth through redevelopment interventions.	Reconstruction and extension of older areas of towns and cities often based on a 'masterplan'; repairment of II. World War damages, suburban growth.	Continuation of 1950s theme; suburban and peripheral growth; some early attempts at rehabilitation and improvement	Focus on in-situ renewal and recognition of the 'inner city'; still development at periphery.	Many major schemes of redevelopment; flagship projects.	Move towards a more comprehensive form of policy and practice; more emphasis on integrated approach.
Key actors and stakeholders	National and local government.	National government; local governments, private sector.	Move towards a greater balance between national government and local government.	Decentralization of national government authority; growing role of local governments and private sector; emergence of public-private partnerships and programme authorities.	Emphasis on private sector and special agencies; establishments of many partnerships between public and private sectors.	Partnership between the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. Urban Regeneration Agencies operating at the regional level
Economic focus	Public sector dominant.	Public sector investment with some private sector involvement.	Continuing from 1950s with growing influence of private investment.	Resource constraints in public sector and growth of private investment.	Private sector dominant with selective public funds.	Greater balance between public, private and voluntary funding.
Social content	Improvement of urban living conditions.	Improvement in quality of housing and living standards.	Housing improvement, social and welfare improvement especially to fulfill the requirements of the immigrants of ethnic minorities.	Community-based renewal; greater coordination between the previously separate economic, social and physical aspects of urban policy.	Community self-help with very selective state support.	Emphasis on the role of community.
Physical emphasis	Replacement of inner areas and peripheral development.	Replacement of inner areas and peripheral development.	Some continuation from 1950s with parallel rehabilitation of existing older residential areas.	More extensive renewal of older urban areas.	Major schemes of replacement and new development; 'flagship schemes'.	Area-based schemes with the emphasis on the urban sustainability, and cultural and historical heritage conservation
Environmental approach	No concerns on the environmental issues.	Landscaping and some greening.	Selective improvements.	Environmental improvement with some innovations.	Growth of concern for wider approach to environment.	Introduction of broader idea of environmental sustainability.

2.2 Post-socialist Transformation of Cities in the Countries of the Old Eastern Block

The fall of the Berlin Wall was the first step which initiated the beginning of substantial changes for all Eastern European countries. It happened on November 9, 1989 when thousands of protestors broke the most potential symbol of the cold war in Europe.²⁵

The fall of Berlin Wall became the root of a transformation process in political system, social structure and infrastructure in Europe. Practically, the socialist regime began to collapse one by one in all Eastern Europe and USSR countries. German Democratic Republic and Hungary were the first countries in which this system collapsed.²⁶

As the Socialist regime ended with a transformation process in political, economical and social sectors of life occurred in all Eastern Europe countries.

The political transformation consisted of the creation of basis for political pluralism, rule of law and reorientation of foreign policy. Transformation in the economic sector consisted of privatisation of the state companies and the reduction of state role as a producer. The formation of an economic system, industrial policy and creation of competition supervision was another aspect of economic transition. The social sector consisted of reform of social security systems and adjusting the educational system to the market economy.²⁷

The transition to market economy had a very big effect on the families of Eastern Europe countries. It caused an economic uncertainty to the individuals and their families. On the other hand the process of privatization brought unemployment, in contrast market economy made possible for people to open their own business.

²⁵ Jürgen Dorbritz, "Social, Political and Economic Transformation" in Dimiter Philipov, Jürgen Dorbritz, (2003), Demographic consequences of economic transition in countries of central and eastern Europe, Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, p. 22

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

Another social impact was the rising migration to western countries. The opening of the borders in central and Eastern Europe towards the west enabled migration between the former Socialist countries led initially to the presumption of a massive migration potential aimed towards Western Europe.

To understand the drastic changes that occurred during the transition period, from dictatorship of the proletariat to democracy, from one party ruling system to that of multiple party, from a regime in which the state totally controlled the urban and rural territories to a situation where the state and the government have lost the capability to control and direct any changes it is necessary to study and to be informed of the socialist city features.

Hartmut Hausermann outlines these characteristics of a ‘city in a socialist society’ into 5 main items:

- a dominant and ‘artistically’ designed urban centre, with a high concentration of publicly organized amenities based on an ultimate power of state over real estate;
- the city being a compact entity, with suburbanization only in the form of large buildings;
- visible deterioration of large areas of buildings constructed before World War II;
- absence of classical forms of segregation (that is, by income), but discrimination by politically distributed privileges and by age;
- fragmentation of local decision making between the party, the central state and industry; the non-existence of local self-government.²⁸

Considering these points it can be pointed out that urban renewal projects did already shape the centres of the cities of the Eastern Block. This phenomena strongly related to politics was also present in Albania city centre though different from the other Eastern Block cities where a large number of buildings constructed before the World War II were preserved.

²⁸ Häusseman, H. in Andrusz, G., Harloe, M., and Szelenyi, I. (eds.). (1996). *Cities After Socialism: Urban and Regional Change and Conflict in Post-Socialist Societies*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, p.222

The society and its structural changes have certainly their effects on the spatial dimensions of the city. After the fall of the socialist regime, cities that were under this type of government went into a process of radical development and spatial transformation. Today, post socialist cities are confronted with a boom in construction, such as hotels, offices, shopping malls, housing projects etc.

Transformation as a process is a development related with time. Growth of a city, its history and its changes through time define the transformation process in general, but political events play a very important role at certain moments of history and leave their prints on the physical structure of cities and the social structure of the nations.²⁹ Generally speaking these changes occur gradually in a long period, but in post socialist countries the changes are rapid and very different compared to the Western developed countries.

Central and Eastern European cities that were under the socialist rule, the *étatist* policies and practices of space production imposed by the regime are the cities that were mostly affected by socialist regimes. The transition from communism to democracy in some of them was lived normally but in some others, it happened in a very drastically. Even though there are some differences in the transition period from country to country, what can be said is that the “post socialist transition may have a significant number of unique characteristics” depending on the country and “undoubtedly no one can support the fact of being the only transition of the moment”³⁰ and the time being. Yet, this transition means nothing if not compared to others.³¹ For Enyedi “transition” means a “particular significant stage of social development in which and more external difficulties and/or internal difficulties hinder the reproduction of social and economic environment that forms the basis of the society.”³² These tremendous, spectacular and chaotic changes that the post-socialist transition period draw the interest of researchers, especially on the spatial change and urban reconstruction.

²⁹ David C. Thorns. (2002). *The Urban Theory and Urban Life*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.2

³⁰ Gyorgy Enyedi. (1998). *Social Change Transformation of Cities and Urban Reconstructing in Central Europe*, Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, p.9

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

Ivan Szelenyi points that these spectacular changes of “urbanism” in post socialist cities furthermore are present in the social outline and urban forms of the city.³³ Michal Illner and Alois Andrlé state the same for the Czech Republic. According to them the regional transformation involve two types of processes: The first is strongly related to social changes and the physical structure of the city is “re-moulded” by those changes and the second one is claimed to be the regional structure itself for the fact that “it acts as a moderator of societal changes”.³⁴ In Prague, after 1990 three processes were correlated to these highly visible changes:

“(1) the commercialisation of the historical core; (2) the revitalisation in some inner city neighbourhoods, which has taken the form of commercialisation and gentrification; and (3) residential and commercial suburbanisation in the outer city.”³⁵

During the socialist period in Eastern European cities ‘urbanism’ such as urban culture for instance, vanished and according to Szelenyi it was lost since urban changes had no option, there were no motivation toward the development of public places.³⁶ When compared to the capitalist system, planners during the socialist period had something that they do not possess now; it is their freewill on construction. In other words, the land during the socialist regime was state property and with the state order they had the possibility to implement their projects without much interference, but in capitalist world it is the opposite. Since the land had no market value in the socialist system, urban planners had no land price constraints. For this reason they had a greater prospect in finding free places for their design to be implemented.³⁷

³³ Gregory Adrusz, Michael Harloe and Ivan Szelenyi(eds.). (1996). *Cities After Socialism Urban and Regional Change and Conflict in Post-Socialist Societies*, Oxford: Backwell Publishers, p. 310

³⁴Michal Illner and Alois Andrlé. (1994). “The Regional Aspect of Post-Communist Transformation in the Czech Republic” *Czech Sociological Review*, Vol. 2 (No. 1: 107-127)

³⁵ Luděk Šykora. (1999). “Changes in the internal spatial structure of post-communist Prague” *GeoJournal* **49**: 79–89.

³⁶ Gregory Adrusz, Michael Harloe and Ivan Szelenyi(eds.), “ Cities After Socialism Urban and Regional Change and Conflict in Post-Socialist Societies”, p. 315

³⁷ Ibid., p.301

During the transition years the changes in the urban context and planning were not very encouraging. The legal and economical transformations faded planning. Land was reattributed to the owners and the real estate market was “re-introduced”. Private sector gained maximal rights, which is one of the key reasons for the planners not to have the same ability to control the urban development emerging in the cities.³⁸

The properties play an important role in the morphology of a city. According to Aldo Rossi landownership is “one of the most important, perhaps fundamental problems of the city” adding that it also “constitutes a strong constraint on urban development”³⁹

Baykan Günay shares the same idea in his book on *Property Relation and Urban Space*. He states: “Ownership pattern of both urban land, and potential land open to urban growth, constitute one of the most critical challenges of urban form.”⁴⁰ Further, according to Günay the “rearrangement of property rights in land is a basic task of urban development and transformation”.⁴¹

The urban form which is characterized by the urban fabric and built environment, reflects the spatial segregation of the transition period. Enyedi holds the view that the built environment is subjected to three functional changes: “expansion of commercial areas, transformation of industrial zone and the altered character of housing”⁴². On the other hand Konstantin Axenov points out that what distinguishes the post-transformation city are “urban hybrid structures”. This feature of the city creates the organism of “post-transformation city space” by interconnecting its components cited as “socialist, transformation and international business forms”⁴³

³⁸ Sonia A. Hirt , 'Planning the post-communist city: Experiences from Sofia', *International Planning Studies*, 10:3, 219 - 240

³⁹ Rossi, Aldo. (1992). “The Architecture of the City”, *Opposition Books*, London: MIT Press, p.152

⁴⁰ Günay, Baykan. (1999). *Property Relations and Urban Space*, Ankara: METU Faculty of Architecture Press, p.3

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Gyorgy Enyedi, *Social Change Transformation of Cities and Urban Reconstructing in Central Europe*, p.29

⁴³ Konstantin Axenov, Isolde Brade and Evgenij Bondarchuk. (2006). *The Transformation Of Urban Space In Post-Soviet Russia*, London: Routledge, p.176

If we could see concretely what happened in post-socialist cities we would understand more clearly the changes that took place in that period. For example, post-socialist Prague for Ludek Syroka witnessed the “re-emergence of some pre-socialist pattern, transformation in some areas from socialist times and creation of new post-socialist landscapes.” Characteristic post-socialist development for this city are claimed to be “accelerated concentration of advanced functions through commercialisation and densification of city centre”⁴⁴ Advanced functions such as changing the function of the residences to offices, development of multipurpose business centres including also facilities that serve to the tourism like restaurants and hotels are subject characterizing the post-socialist cities. Residential spaces of post-socialist Sofia have been subject to some consequences of the transition period such as “the loss of compact urban form inherited from the socialism and the growth of a lower –density suburban periphery.”⁴⁵ Sofia was experiencing the suburbanisation process which was a process that emerged in other countries too. Budapest for example experienced the same transformations as a consequence of commercialisation.⁴⁶ The built environment of the newly formed capitalist cities (as in Sofia example) “organization of open spaces” is needed for the simple fact that the transformation period brought a “loss of public green spaces and their fragmentation into explicitly private enclosures”⁴⁷ Tirana city is another example of this phenomena. It is still suffering from the loss of public green areas. During the transition period, open spaces; boulevards, city parks, green spaces and public plazas were totally occupied by kiosks of all sorts, loosing their original character as a result of the lack of control and construction policy of the public sector. For example Aliaj, Lulo and Myftiu state generally the urban post-socialist Tirana transformations as follows:

⁴⁴ Luděk Sýkora, “Changes in the internal spatial structure of post-communist Prague” *GeoJournal* **49**: 79–89.

⁴⁵ Sonia Hirt and Atanass Kovachev in Sasha Tsenkova and Zorica Nedovic- Budic (eds.). (2006). *The Urban Mosaic of Post-Socialist Europe*, Germany: Physica- Verlag, p.113.

⁴⁶ Ivan Tosics in Sasha Tsenkova and Zorica Nedovic- Budic (eds.). (2006). *The Urban Mosaic of Post-Socialist Europe*, Germany: Physica- Verlag, p.139.

⁴⁷ Op.cit.

What characterizes Tirana in the post-socialist time is an extreme degradation in the quality of urban environments and the occupation of lands by illegal developments, a process that is accompanied by serious harms to environment.⁴⁸

To go over the main points of the transformation period, post socialist cities went through a considerable number of political, economical and social changes that were the main cause of the urban transformations in those cities. A large number of constructions brought the degradation of the urban environment, compounding the main problem to be solved during the process called “regeneration”.

2.3 Urban Regeneration Projects and Issues Related to Implementation

2.3.1 Financial Organization Aspects

Economy plays a vital role in the urban regeneration project and its implementation process, as providing funds for financing the project is as important as the project itself is. For this reason, the provision and insurance of the support is crucial but the choice of the financial model make as easy as difficult.

In many cases, local and national governments are the main financial suppliers, but there are also cases where the European Union Structural Funds aiming economic development are available.⁴⁹ The economical source for urban projects mainly coming from the public sector yet after 1980s it was to encourage the private sector to collaborate in the investment of the regeneration process.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ B. Aliaj, K. Lulo and G. Myftiu, 2003, *Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development*, Slovenia: Gorenjskitisk, p.67.

⁴⁹ Chris Coach in Chris Coach, Charles Fraser and Susan Percy (eds.) *Urban Regeneration in Europe*, p.170

⁵⁰ Davis Noon, James Smith-Canham and Martin Eagland in Peter Roberts and Hugh Sykes(eds.), *Urban Regeneration: A Handbook*, p.170

This chapter is focused on some of the strategic approaches of urban regeneration implementation issues on the measure of the influence of the terms like partnership, private sector, politics, culture and physical urban structure.

2.3.2 Partnership as an Approach for Successful Urban Regeneration

Partnership is a method widely used in urban regeneration projects and it is evident in the urban regeneration writings where partnership is being repeated continuously. These writings extend on the discourse of partnership concept emphasising that the urban regeneration implementation is effected by partnership directly since the process of urban regeneration is itself a programme that involves many actors.

Public, private, community and voluntary sectors are the actors of urban regeneration that coordinate to integrate on a partnership, this last so essential for successful implementations.⁵¹ Indeed there is a number of actors that become partners, so that to overcome the urban regeneration, meaning that the definition of the term partnership is as difficult as the definition of the urban regeneration because there is a variety of reasons that join and tie the actors of different spheres to enrol in the partnership. Perter Caroll and Peter Stean argue that these reasons can be distinguished as “external reasons” and “internal reasons”. The first one is when the “regulatory system or competitive forces” that have been in the responsibility of one actor working in the areas that cannot still continue under just one actor’s responsibility but are in need of working together of different actors. The second, internal forces, is as a stipulation of the formation of the partnership.⁵²

A number of studies of particular types of partnerships are available, but here it is going to be mentioned the Public Private Partnership (PPP), since it has been proven

⁵¹ Ivan Turak, 2004, Urban Regeneration, What can be done and what should be avoided, Istanbul 2004 Internacional Urban regeneration Symposium: Workshop of Kucukcekmece District, p.59

⁵² Peter Caroll and Peter Stean in Stephen P. Osborne (ed.), 2000, Public and Private partnerships: Theory and Practice in International Perspective, London: Routledge, p.36

to be a successful comprehensive urban regeneration strategy. This is the case when the public and private communities cooperate to work together on a same project which International Monetary Fund study (PPPs) “refer to arrangements where the private sector supplies infrastructure assets and services that traditionally have been provided by the government.”⁵³

Tsenkova in her study describes the benefits of this successful strategy as follow:

- Ensure more efficient mobilization of resources;
- Leverage additional support based on the strengths of different partners;
- Address the nexus of urban problems in a more comprehensive manner;
- Ensure more equitable representation of different interests and stakeholders;
- Achieve coordination of different fragmented programs/projects.⁵⁴

She continues, and claims that even though it is a successful process it has its own disadvantages that should be considered before entering in a partnership and before deciding to start the implementation.

- The diversity of partnerships makes them difficult to manage and coordinate;
- The power and the capacity of different partners can be uneven;
- The legitimacy of partnerships is often challenged by lack of adequate representation of community groups;
- The multiplicity of interests can lead to divergent objectives and priorities for action.⁵⁵

However, despite the weaknesses, the role of PPPs is still crucial as an integrated program that corporate public and private partner. The adjustment of the

⁵³ International Monetary Fund (approved by Teresa Ter-Minassian), 2004, Public-Private Partnership (online), <http://www.imf.org/external/np/fad/2004/pifp/eng/031204.pdf>, (Accessed on 18/04/08).

⁵⁴ Tsenkova, S. (2001) Chapter 7 Partnerships in urban regeneration: from ‘top down’ to ‘bottom up’ approach (on-line), http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/faculties/EV/designresearch/projects/2001/Urban_Regeneration/partnerships.pdf (Accessed on 18/04/08).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

organisations, procedures and finance by each partner is a step forward in the success of urban regeneration.

Apart from these public private investments and executions two important characteristics of PPPs ‘an emphasis on service provision, as well as investment, by the private sector; and significant risk is transferred from the government to the private sector’⁵⁶ Although the private sector has a major role and responsibility, their building activity is maintained under municipality’s supervision.

Yet, PPPs in all their forms are on a permanent development. There is always a need for investments and for them to be adjusted in longer time periods.⁵⁷

2.3.3 Cultural-led Regeneration as an Action of Success

Recently, a discourse on art and culture as part of the urban regeneration strategy has become a trend in Europe and Barcelona in this field. The focus of this discourse is around “whether the arts and culture more generally, can positively impact on a city ravaged by urban decay, de-industrialization, poverty and crime so as to allow it to “reinvent” itself”⁵⁸ Charles Landry Lisa M Hanly and Meg Ruthenburg identify these discourses in their study by basing their ideas on Barcelona example.

Incorporating culture and identity into urban development, as demonstrated through the Barcelona case, as well as being mindful of the important relationship

⁵⁶ International Monetary Fund (approved by Teresa Ter-Minassian), 2004, Public-Private Partnership (online), <http://www.imf.org/external/np/fad/2004/pifp/eng/031204.pdf> (Accessed 18/04/08).

⁵⁷ Ray Mills and Mike Atherton in Paul Hackett (ed.), 2006, “Financing Urban Regeneration- the Case for public-Private partnership” *Financing the Future*, London: Smith institute, p.56

⁵⁸ IFACCA, 2006, ‘Arts and Culture in Regeneration’, *D’Art Topics in Arts Policy*, No. 25, International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies, Sydney (online), http://www.ifacca.org/ifacca2/en/organisation/page09_BrowseDart.asp, (accessed on 08/05/08)

between development and governance has proved to be invaluable components of successful and sustainable projects.⁵⁹

Heritage, the cultural industries and cultural activities have crucial characteristics that explain their importance to the development and maintenance of cities. Taking a broad view of culture it becomes clear that culture and the arts are more than purely an aesthetic experience and their possible contribution to urban regeneration becomes more evident. It involves recognising their multi-faceted nature and wide-ranging impacts.

The culture led-regeneration was a strategic approach not only for Barcelona, but also for other European cities in Europe like Glasgow, Paris etc. Garcia shares the opinion that Paris specifically in France was regenerating urbanely under the effect of the culture-led regeneration and “the programme ‘Grand Project Cultures’ involving the refurbishment and development of infrastructures, such as the Louvre pyramid, the Centre Pompidou and the Opera at la Bastille”⁶⁰

2.3.4 Urban Regeneration Examples and Recent Implementation in Europe

Having defined the urban regeneration as a process that aims the improvement of the socio-cultural, politico-economical and living conditions we will see some early examples from European cities.

⁵⁹ Fernando Carrion M. and Lisa M. Hanley(eds.), 2007, *Urban Regeneration and Revitalization*

in the Americas: Toward a Stable State, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, p. 194

⁶⁰ Garzia, Beatriz, 2004, *Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration in Western European Cities: Lessons from Experience, Prospect for the Future*”, *Local Economy*, 19:4, 312-326

Regeneration is not new; rather it existed before, meaning that it is not a new and unknown experience. What makes it difficult and very discussable is the “size and complexity of the problems” and at the same time “the concomitant scale and sophistication of policy”⁶¹ as Coach and Fraser point out.

In Europe, the restructuring of economy is a continuing issue, and the process of physical regeneration is a kind of representation of this economical restructuring. Major cities in Europe have been in the centre of interest of this motive.

It started in 1960 when many European cities were faced to many undesirable changes which were outcomes of a population loss, employment loss and activity loss.⁶² Their impact brought economical, structural, physical and social deprivation of the “inner cities” which formed “urban deprivation” considered as urban problems.⁶³ Thilo Lung in his working paper for *Institut für Regionalentwicklung und Strukturplanung* “Insights in the British Debate about the Urban Decline and Urban Regeneration” defines demographic and economic processes as reasons for urban problems. These two factors are the main themes for the urban decline of Albanian cities too. He states that:

Decline at the urban level can be best described in terms of continuous reduction of employment as well as an enduring loss of population; both processes are interrelating and are accompanied by rising social and physical problems. Often these processes are reflected on a regional level indicating a regional dimension of causes and impacts.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Chris Coach and Charles Fraser in Chris Coach, Charles Fraser and Susan Percy (eds.), *Urban Regeneration in Europe*, p.2

⁶² Lang, Thilo. Insights in the British Debate about the Urban Decline and Urban Regeneration, Working Paper, Erkner, Leibniz Institute for Regional Development and Structural Planning, 2005, (Available online: http://www.irs-net.de/download/wp_insights.pdf)

⁶³ Frank Eckardt and Peter Kreisl (eds.), (2004), *City Images and Urban Regeneration*, Frankfurt amMain:PeterLong, p.38

⁶⁴ Ibid.

In Tirana city, the factors that caused decline were the same but the process was different. The increase of population in the city increased the employment demand. The government was unprepared to face this situation.

While this situation were being more problematic, Coach claims that in order to handle with these problems counted as “urban dereliction, outworn infrastructure and underinvestment inner city housing led to the notion of urban regeneration as an important aim of urban planning”⁶⁵

The author selected four regeneration projects in four different countries. In England is the Liverpool Vision for the Liverpool city, in Netherlands is Kop Van Zuid project in Rotterdam city, Barcelona city regeneration and Sofia case in Bulgaria. In fact each case is multifunctional and consists of housings, offices, cultural facilities and all give the same importance to public spaces and public transport. It is the differences between the projects that made author chose among the many examples in European countries. British cities Urban Development Corporations are public and private sector oriented while the Netherlands cities are under the leading role of the urban planners and the PPP are very few in number.⁶⁶ At the same time their urban regeneration processes are old and they have got much more experience in this field. Case of Barcelona city, on the other hand, is chosen as a good example of culture-led regeneration, while Sofia case is a post-socialist city located in Balkan Peninsula, an example to be nearer to Tirana city regeneration initiative.

Thus, in 1980s’ Regeneration Policy in Britannic cities were very interested in the economic development. There has past about forty years since the first designation of the urban areas in order to deal wit the economical and physical decline.⁶⁷ To cope

⁶⁵ Chris Coach and Charles Fraser, Introduction: The Urban Context and Theoretical Framework in Chris Coach, Charles Fraser and Susan Percy (eds.), *Urban Regeneration in Europe*, pp. 1-2

⁶⁶ Dick Schuiling, (1996) “Key Projects for Urban Regeneration:the Dutch experience”, *Planning Practice and Research*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 279± 290

⁶⁷ Michael Carley, (2000) 'Urban Partnerships, Governance and the Regeneration of Britain's Cities', *International Planning Studies*, 5:3, 273 - 297

with these difficulties local economy of Britannic cities made use of land and buildings in the inner urban areas.⁶⁸ At the same time; “under the right economic conditions” the inner areas of the cities are point of interest for private house builders.⁶⁹ According to Roberts “the improving of the “physical” condition of housing itself” is a mean of successful physical regeneration since this is an approach to incorporate the community in the developing process.⁷⁰ Successful examples are Liverpool and Manchester. Liverpool city is said to be one of the European cities where urban regeneration is apparent in a high level. This city has been a kind of “laboratory for almost every experiment and innovation in modern urban policy and planning”⁷¹ as Roberts and Sykes point out.

Through the creation of urban environment including their own identity and character urban regeneration project in Liverpool aimed a “healthy, safe, well maintained and concerning the best features of the past”⁷² The achievement of urban regeneration projects mentioned by Coach are the introduction of new function to the heritage building not used for a considerable period of time. Furthermore, as achievement is mentioned the investment growth ensuring re-urbanisation and the increased population in city centres.⁷³

Actually, there are a considerable number of urban regeneration programs for Liverpool city. Liverpool Vision is mentioned in the literature as one of the recent projects. Liverpool Vision was a company that had to propose an implementing regeneration project for Liverpool city centre and the main roads that go through it.⁷⁴

The aim of Liverpool Vision was the improvement of city centre spatial quality and to achieve this they aimed the attracting of the investments in this area. In the project

⁶⁸ Chris Coach in Chris Coach, Charles Fraser and Susan Percy (eds.), *Urban Regeneration in Europe*, p.35

⁶⁹ Chris Couch, 2003, *City of Change and Challenge: Urban Planning and Regeneration in Liverpool*, Liverpool: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., p.137

⁷⁰ Peter Roberts and Hugh Sykes, 2000, *Urban Regeneration: A Handbook*, London: Sage Publications, p.94

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.3

⁷² Chris Couch, 2003, *City of Change and Challenge: Urban Planning and Regeneration in Liverpool*, Liverpool: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., p.137

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.152

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.183

they propose “the connection of the city centre to the adjacent communities, streetscape improvements, redesign and creation of new squares etc” giving a particular importance to “the protection and restoration of city centres impressive heritage environments and buildings”⁷⁵ This proposal is designed to be implemented in the following decade with the funds of many partnerships as main regeneration toll of this Project.

Meanwhile Liverpool is seen to be as the earliest to have gone under the urban regeneration, for the North-West European cities, Dutch cities had a regeneration programme to a more broad perspective.⁷⁶ In 1970 Dutch cities had experienced many changes which are visible in its “economic structure with the process of de-centralisation” influencing and having a negative effect on urban areas.⁷⁷

As in British cities Dutch cities were experiencing de-industrialisation accompanied by a significant loss in population.

Rotterdam, the largest port in Europe was part of the urban decline. To handle the aforementioned situation impact in city structural changes the launch of a regeneration project was necessary. Actually, a number of cities were identified by government to be regenerated and Rotterdam was among them. According to John McCarthy the city’s key project was that of Kop Van Zuid which once was an important dock in 1960-1970 were converted to a waterfront area because the relocation of the port.⁷⁸

In 1978, plans were for social housing but the demand for commercialisation in the after coming years converted it in 1991 into a mixture zone.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.184

⁷⁶ Chris Coach in Chris Coach, Charles Fraser and Susan Percy (eds.), *Urban Regeneration in Europe*, p.29.

⁷⁷ Frank Eckardt and Peter Kreisl (eds.), (2004), *City Images and Urban Regeneration*, Frankfurt amMain:PeterLong, p.50

⁷⁸ Mccarthy, John (1999) 'The redevelopment of Rotterdam since 1945', *Planning Perspectives*, 14:3, 291 - 309

⁷⁹ Chris Coach, “Rotterdam: Structural Change and the Port” in Chris Coach, Charles Fraser and Susan Percy (eds.), *Urban Regeneration in Europe*, p.119

“Expansion of city centre uses to the Kop van Zuid area” makes it a key project after the need of opening out due to the run out of the vacant spaces in the Rotterdam city centre.⁸⁰

“Pragmatism, partnership, a pro-active approach on the part of the municipality and the integration of social objectives with those for physical planning” are some characteristic that should be taken in consideration during the Rotterdam case study experience.⁸¹ The investigation of the developed country regeneration projects contribute in the well development of the plans and projects of the cities that are still under the regenerating process. Good results of the project bring a new image for the city and consequently an increase in the economic level.

Despite the positive sides of the regeneration for the city, the projects have their influence on the country which may be directly or indirectly. The government uses the urban regeneration as a tool to change the urban image and environment to redevelop the cities and Barcelona city proves good integration of the projects and the government as well.

Tim Marshal states what makes Barcelona a successful case. In his words:

Part of the planning success doubtless lay in the ability to combine urban development with policies on the culture, economic development, transport (through control of the metropolitan transport body which run metro and buses), to name the most important⁸²

In the end on 1970s Barcelona was characterized by two “pathologies” which Spanish researcher Juli Esteban defines as: “on the one hand, the situation of degradation, in the sense of loss of the quality that the fabric of the city has suffered

⁸⁰ Opcit.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Tim Marshall, 2004, *Transforming Barcelona*, London: Routledge, p.16

in certain central areas, and on the other hand the situation of the periphery which, due to many deficiencies has not managed to become fully part of the city.”⁸³

Aims and the objectives of the city change within these two major problem solutions for the Barcelona city regeneration, and Esteban suggests that what best describes the activity is to “bring value to, or monumentalize, periphery and recover the centre.”⁸⁴

After 1980 a new aim was introduced to the city, that of the Olympic project but it was realized with a strategic plan in the beginning of 1988 while Barcelona was officially proposed to be the city that would welcome the Summer Olympic Games of 1992. Esteban claims that 1992 Olympics was a major catalyst for the urban transformation in Barcelona and summarizes the project aims as follow:

- Open the city to the sea
- Distribute spatially the improvements and re-equip the city’s sporting facilities
- Promote communication infrastructures, especially the road network.”
Olympic village, artificial beaches, rail lines are some of the successful realizations of these aspires that the urban regeneration project intended.⁸⁵

The intentions were well managed by Oriol Bohigas, the Spanish architect- planner who played a key role in the regeneration of the city, due to the usage he made to the Olympic Games as a tool for the construction of plazas, parks, and many other public facilities.⁸⁶

The work for improvement had the approval and the support of the community since the government presented an intelligent planning strategy make Barcelona a model of innovative planning. Bohigas further supports what happened in Barcelona and

⁸³ Juli Esteban in Tim Marshall(ed.), 2004, Transforming Barcelona, London: Routledge, p.113

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp.125-127

⁸⁶ Nuria Benach in Tim Marshall(ed.), 2004, Transforming Barcelona, London: Routledge, p.152-157

suggests other alternatives by claiming that planning is not limited to “normative and quantitative general plans”, but it is necessary “to design the public space- that is the city-point to point, area by area, in architectural plan”.⁸⁷

Innovative design, planning and projects point to a powerful economic development and the Barcelona example illustrates in the best the regeneration of a city as a whole.

The investigation of the developed country regeneration projects contribute in the well development of the plans and projects of the cities that are still under the regenerating process. Good results of the project bring a new image for the city and consequently an increase in the economic level.

Bulgaria is an example from the former communist countries that were in need of the regeneration after the transition regimes to capitalist market economy. Bulgaria went out of the communism regime in 1989, and was exactly that time when the preparing of new plan for Sofia city just initiated. Sofia lastly had had a plan or a “Genplan” in the 1961. With the end of Socialism Sofia Municipality organized a national competition with the participation of 25 teams. But, Sofia as all other post-communist cities faced political and economical problems that affected the process and consequently terminated it.⁸⁸

For about one decade the process was the same, Sofia was in a search for economical and political stability. And, when in a way that was achieved the process was initiated again.⁸⁹

The master plan under the motto “*Sofia 2020*” lasted from 1998 to 2003, which approval was under discussions up to 2006. This project as that of 1989 went through

⁸⁷ Oriol Bohigas in Tim Marshall(ed.), 2004, *Transforming Barcelona*, London: Routledge, p.94

⁸⁸ Hirt, Sonia A. (2005) “Planning the post-communist city: Experience from Sofia” *International Planning Studies*, 10:3, 219-240

⁸⁹ Hirt, Sonia A. (2007) “The Compact versus the Dispersed City: History of Planning Ideas on Sofia's Urban Form” *Journal of Planning History* 2007; 6; 138

a competition which was valued according to their scenarios that were divided into two.

The two alternatives shared the goal of transferring functions from the central city to the periphery (i.e., by relocating certain major administrative buildings) and thus creating a polycentric metropolis. They disagreed, however, on the extent to which this should occur.”⁹⁰

Visions that were suggested had their similarities and dissimilarities. One is for “a compact city that was dismissed” and the other one is for “a dispersed city that was endorsed” while “both visions aimed to position themselves within the framework of popular current international ideological tenets, in this case regionalism and sustainability”⁹¹. The city of Sofia is mentioned for its high influence of Western ideas and “both visions seek legitimacy using Western rhetoric” while one being inspired and emphasizing the “compact form”, representing the contemporary Western ideas, the other one does just the opposite, highlighting the historical issue.⁹²

It is clearly seen that Sofia has gone under strivings that intent modernization but they are not always successful concepts. On this aspect Hirt claims and concludes that:

Post-communist planners have the unique opportunity of observing the results of planning policies that encourage urban decentralization—consequences that are painfully visible in many sprawling Western metropolises, especially in the United States. While there may be some benefits in encouraging the transfer of some functions from the city center to the periphery, post-communist planning should not repeat Western mistakes of the past.⁹³

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

THE MAKING OF THE CENTER OF TIRANA

3.1. Albania in Brief



Figure 1: Map of Albania. (<http://www.italb.com>, <http://www.italb.com/images/mappa.albania.jpg>, accessed on May 27, 2008)

Albania is one of the countries that are part of the Balkan Peninsula: starting from its neighbours, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, Greece and the others, Slovenia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Bulgaria, European Turkey, and South East Romania. It has natural boundaries with Ionian and Adriatic Seas. It has an area of 28.748 sq km and a population of about 3.5 million. Albanians' capital city is Tirana and the government regime in the country is parliamentary democracy.

3.2. Post-Socialist Albania: the Transition Period

The last century was the century of drastic changes for Albania as it had undergone several regimes in this time span. First the Ottoman rule, then the Italian occupation followed by the 45 year long socialist regime governed by Enver Hoxha. After 1991, the transition from dictatorship to democracy, from the centralized planned economy to a free-market based economy brought in itself radical changes. The new government came after an uprising of the students of that time, who were not satisfied with the way of life and the restrictions of the regime. Their revolt was followed by a destruction of the factories and other industrial units. Therefore a considerable number of people went out of their jobs which forced them to emigrate to other countries to earn their life. Thus in this way the "emigration", that was forbidden during the socialist regime period has become a necessity to many Albanians. According to the Albanian Statistical Institution (INSTAT), from the end of 1990 to the mid-1991, about twenty thousand Albanians, who had been constrained to low economical conditions, left Albania towards Italy, Germany and France.⁹⁶ Beside emigration to other countries, migration within the country was also an important element of the transformation, during the transition period. "The free movement of citizens, in particular from the countryside to towns, were prohibited in 1961"⁹⁷, within the country it was only possible with the permission of the authorities.⁹⁸ 30 years later, the lack of official policies to direct the people's mobility, resulted in a chaotic and massive development in the urban areas.⁹⁹ For

⁹⁶ INSTAT (2002). The population of Albania in 2001, Tirana: INSTAT.

⁹⁷ B. Aliaj, K. Lulo and G. Myftiu. Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development, Slovenia: Gorenjskitisk, p.52.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ INSTAT. The population of Albania in 2001, Tirana: INSTAT.

better life conditions and for job opportunities, people's flow from villages toward the cities has been continuing since then.

Understandably enough, this rise in the urban population brought a boom in the construction in cities. About 24.5 % of the Albanian buildings are constructed in the ten years period during 1990-2001.¹⁰⁰ Since then the constructions have been continuing and it may be said with a higher rate. Now they are mostly concentrated on the seaside and the capital city of Albania, Tirana.

Studies conducted in the framework of the Tirana Land Management Program, show an urban reality characterized by an urban sprawl due to an unplanned urban development process on the fringes of Tirana. The analysis conducted on the 1994 aerial photographs reveal approximately 4,500 new houses built in informal settlements situated on the fringes of the city representing nearly 800 ha occupied only in 4 years.¹⁰¹ The case of Albania is one the unique cases where such a radical urban transformation was experienced in a very short period of time. The massive and uncontrolled flow of the population to the cities resulted in illegal settlements sprawling out around the urban areas. (Figure 2)

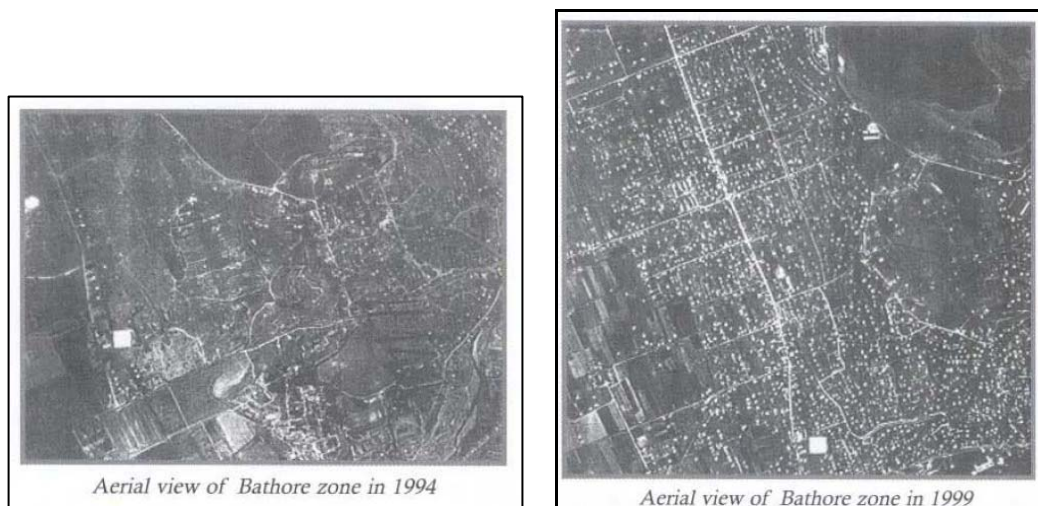


Figure 2: Aerial views of Kamza, region of Tirana, in 1994 and 1999. (Aliaj, B., Lulo, K., and Myftiu G.,2003, Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development, Slovenia: Gorenjskitisk)

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Possibilities to Start a City Wide Project in Albania: A report for the Netherlands Habitat Platform. (2000), p.6.

Most of the population that rushed to Tirana after 1990 was from villages and mostly from the north of Albania. Incomers were villagers that first occupied a plot of land in the city. After occupying it some of them illegally began to sell parts of it to other newcomers. They started to build their homes, first in the form of wooden structures, just to appropriate the land. After having the needed amount of money, which frequently is reached by the immigration to other countries. In this way they can afford the construction of houses, which will end up with illegal three-storey villas with no roads and no sewage or illegal connection to electricity. (Figure 3)



Figure 3: Steps in constructing of an illegal house in Kamza Municipality. (Aliaj, B., Lulo, K., and Myftiu G., Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development)

This situation is seen in the suburban areas of the big cities, but the chaotic influence of the transition period during 1993-1999 is also evident in the core of cities. After the restitution of properties, most of the buildings were given back to their former

owners; as a result many apartments on the ground floors have been transformed into private shops, banks, restaurants and cafes. Reconstruction of the backyards, as extensions of the apartment blocks is widely seen in the city (Figure 4); this is the expression of space insufficiency felt by the dwellers.



Figure 4: Extension of the ground floors around the existing building blocks in a residential neighborhood of Tirana after 1991 (Source: Author, Odeta Durmishi)

Additional floor extensions have damaged the facades of the majority of buildings; especially those erected along the main streets have created a negative image,¹⁰² as in majority of the cases they are raised on the pavements making impossible the people's movement or in places where roads were located now they are converted into *culde sacs*.

Although the immigration of people from rural areas to cities was a priority of neither the central government nor the local government, the mass of population

¹⁰² B. Aliaj, K. Lulo and G. Myftiu, Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development, p.52.

which flew to the capital city caused an uncontrolled urban development in the city as well as in its fringes. The municipality of Tirana was unable to adapt to the rapid changes that it faced with, in the first place.

3.2.1 The Land-Property and the Ownership Pattern

Land ownership was a priority for Albanians before 1945¹⁰³. After 1945, with the foundation of the socialist regime, private properties were subject to first a gradual and eventually a total elimination through forced and unrecompensed expropriations. Collectivization, meaning collecting the private property under the state ownership, became the basic principle of the regime. In 1976, the Socialist Constitution declared all property under state ownership, thereby eliminating even the small amount of land under private ownership.¹⁰⁴ In this way all the land belonging to the private owners was taken forcefully by the state. So citizens could keep under their property only their houses and the garden around it, but not any other land or property. All of the factories and other type of industrial facilities were taken by the state. Further more the state took all the animals like sheep, cows, goats, horses, chickens that were under the property of the private owners. As the state took all of these properties, practically there existed only the public sector. Putting an end to the private ownership it became the only producer of every product. The state was also selling agricultural products, as well as industrial ones.

Of course that had a direct impact on the spatial structures of the country in that period. As Aldo Rossi points out in his seminal book *The Architecture of the City*, many forces influence the structure of a city and land ownership has an important place among these forces. He claims the private land ownership as "one of the most important, perhaps the fundamental problem of the city, one which constitutes a strong constrain on urban development."¹⁰⁵ Whereas in Albania after 1976, not only all the land was the property of the state but also all the buildings and flats belonged to it. With the collapse of the socialist regime in 1991, the democratic society had to

¹⁰³ E. Dojce, (2002). Property Relations and Urban Space in Albania Before, During and After socialism: A Case Study on the City of Pogradec, Master Thesis, METU, Ankara, p.53

¹⁰⁴ A. Rossi, (1982), *The Architecture of the City*, Cambridge Mass: The MIT Press, p.152.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

re-examine the property rights issue in conformity with the newly adopted capitalist system. In the very first stage of the transformation, the privatization, and to begin with the restitution of the property rights, but also the rights to use and lease were principal. The World Bank Office in Tirana, in its researches based on the agricultural Albanian laws, defines four main categories that had to be ensured in this framework:

Firstly agricultural fields were to be distributed equally to the members of each farm by providing them with a legal document that in Albanian is called “tapi”.¹⁰⁶ Secondly flats and apartments that were property of the state were to be transferred to the dwellers by means of purchase and sale documents and the houses will remain in the ownership of the occupant.¹⁰⁷ Thirdly any object, trade or industrial plants, or buildings and land may be privatized and have an ownership. And, lastly the land owners before 1945, meaning before collectivization, were able to regain their properties and when it was impossible for different reasons they were to receive another property or they were to get a financial compensation.¹⁰⁸

As Ervin Dojce mentions in his research, the process of privatization was not an easy one in Albania, but on the contrary it had and still have many problems.¹⁰⁹ The 1990’s transition, rapid changes in economy, politics and of course demography, the malfunction of the construction policy and the inability to control the planning and urbanization in the cities, lead the citizens not to obey the rules aforementioned and build on land illegally. This issue is studied by Dojce, under the name “Land grab” considering it as a problematic aspect of the transition years.¹¹⁰ Most of the constructions took place in the periphery of the city where large districts of informal buildings are created. At the moment these represent a large number of real estate that is in the process of legalization. These kind of informal/illegal constructions are present even in the city centres and especially in Tirana city which will be explained in detail in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁶ The World Bank Office, Tirana. (2006). Status of Land Reform and Real Property Markets in Albania, Tirana, “Tapi” (“tapu” in Turkish) means “title-deed”

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ E. Dojce, Property Relations and Urban Space in Albania Before, During and After socialism: A Case Study on the City of Pogradec, p.54

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p.55

3.3 Tirana City

Tirana is one of the most dynamic cities in Europe when the speed of the urban transformation is concerned, and the impact of the transition process on the city is still continuing today.¹¹¹ The functioning of Tirana as an urban system and its enhanced role as the driving force of the new Albania, have been accompanied by an increasing identity crisis of cities rooted in the mass migrations, which transform Tirana in a heterogeneous city in terms of population and culture.

3.3.1 Planning of Tirana: A Historical Review

The history of Tirana goes back to 1614, when Sulejman Pashe Bargjini created the heart of the city which was completed later in 1789 with the start of the construction of the “Mosque of Et’hem Bey” and half a century later in 1839 the “Clock Tower”.¹¹² (Figure 5)



Figure 5: View of Ethem Bey Mosque (B. Aliaj, K. Lulo and G. Myftiu, Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development, p.19)

¹¹¹ B. Aliaj, K. Lulo and G. Myftiu, Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development, p.12.

¹¹² OSCE, Statistical Bulletin. (2005). Tirana Municipality Archive

The Mosque and the clock tower are two urban elements and two objects that are reminiscent of the past of the city. This is the reason why under the socialist regime they survived the demolition as they were converted into museums. It is also the reason why at the moment they are treated with special care in every urban operation. The mosque and the tower represent the Ottoman past of the city; i.e. the Ottoman occupation which had begun in the XIVth century and lasted until the proclamation of the Independence in November 1912 in the city of Vlora by Albanian patriot Ismail Qemali. During the same year, on December 1912 in the London Conference the independence of Albania was approved and the borders of Albanian territories were defined while regions which were inhabited by a majority of Albanians were left outside, discourses on which still continue. At the same time they proposed a German Prince for Albania as in the case of Greece, but he left 6 months later.

During all this time the capital city of Albania was the city of Durres. Tirana has become the capital in the Congress of Lushnje on February the 11th 1920.

In 1925 the first Albanian king Ahmet Zog, short after proclaiming himself as the Albanian prime minister, declared himself as king. He ruled for about 14 years. During that time he brought somehow stability to Albania, but his monarchy was knocked down by the Italian occupation on April the 7th 1939.

The end of the World War II was at the same time the beginning of another period for Albania, that of socialist regime which lasted till 1989 when the multiparty administration system was set in Albania. Administrative buildings and the government were transferred to Tirana with the declaration of its being the capital city.

Koco Miho, an Albanian urban planner, argues in his study that the fact of being chosen as the capital city is one of the events that erected the history of Tirana, while the second one was the attempt to create an appropriate infrastructure.¹¹³

Professor Miho, based on the researches that he had done on the everyday printed media of 1920s, claims that the engineer Eshref Frasheri prepared a regulatory plan for the city of Tirana in these years, but for different reasons this plan was not approved.¹¹⁴ The first known regulatory plan is the work of Austrians in 1923, but

¹¹³ Koco Miho. (2003). Shqiperia: Veshtrim Urbanistik, Tirane: EXTRA, p.132

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.141

actually it in which conditions it was developed is not mentioned in any of the sources.¹¹⁵

In 1925 begins the era of King Zog. During this period within the context of SVEA, a second plan was prepared by the Italian specialist Armando Brasini and with the investments and the influence of SVEA.¹¹⁶ SVEA was a credit loaned by the Italian Government to the Albanian government. The *Societa per lo Sviluppo Economico dell'Albania* (Society for the Economic Development of Albania) was created parallel with this loan. This enterprise undertook the first large scale road construction in Albania before the Second World War.¹¹⁷ The Italian influence played a significant role in the urban development of Tirana city and its centre, as the King had chosen their assistance for this process. Miho stresses this influence by pointing out the documentation concerning the first sketches of the city centre design which belong to the well-known Italian architect Armando Brasini.¹¹⁸ He is known for the restoration of Palaco Chiggi in Venice and the design of Italian pavilion in Paris, regulatory plan of Tripoli and Libya, etc. He was invited in order to make a study and a proposal for the centre of Tirana by the King Zog Government.¹¹⁹

Its aim “was to create a Roman isle in the city without combining it with the rest that had been marked by a prominent Oriental character, an isle that would serve as a connecting joint between the old town and the modern one that was to be built in the future”¹²⁰. It was the proposal of Brasini which put down the idea of a wide boulevard on the North-South direction with a monumental design, which was realized and has been carried on to the present time. (Figure 6)

Cities go through many regulatory plans, approved or not approved, that changes the image and composes the historic core of the city. The Albanian capital also went through these steps and has been subject to several regulatory plans in its history.

¹¹⁵ B. Aliaj, K. Lulo and G. Myftiu, Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development, p.28

¹¹⁶ K. Miho, Shqipëria: Veshtrim Urbanistik, p.143

¹¹⁷ R. Almagia, Review: Modern Albania: A review, Geographical Review, Vol.22, No.3(Jul., 1932), pp.464-473 (available online: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/208976/seq=9>)

¹¹⁸ Op.cit., p.148

¹¹⁹ B. Aliaj, K. Lulo and G. Myftiu, Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development, p.30

¹²⁰ Ibid.

The first regulatory plan, as previously mentioned, is said to be that of 1923 prepared by the Austrian architects and engineers, who proposed a regular orthogonal street network while not touching the centre and the bazaar.

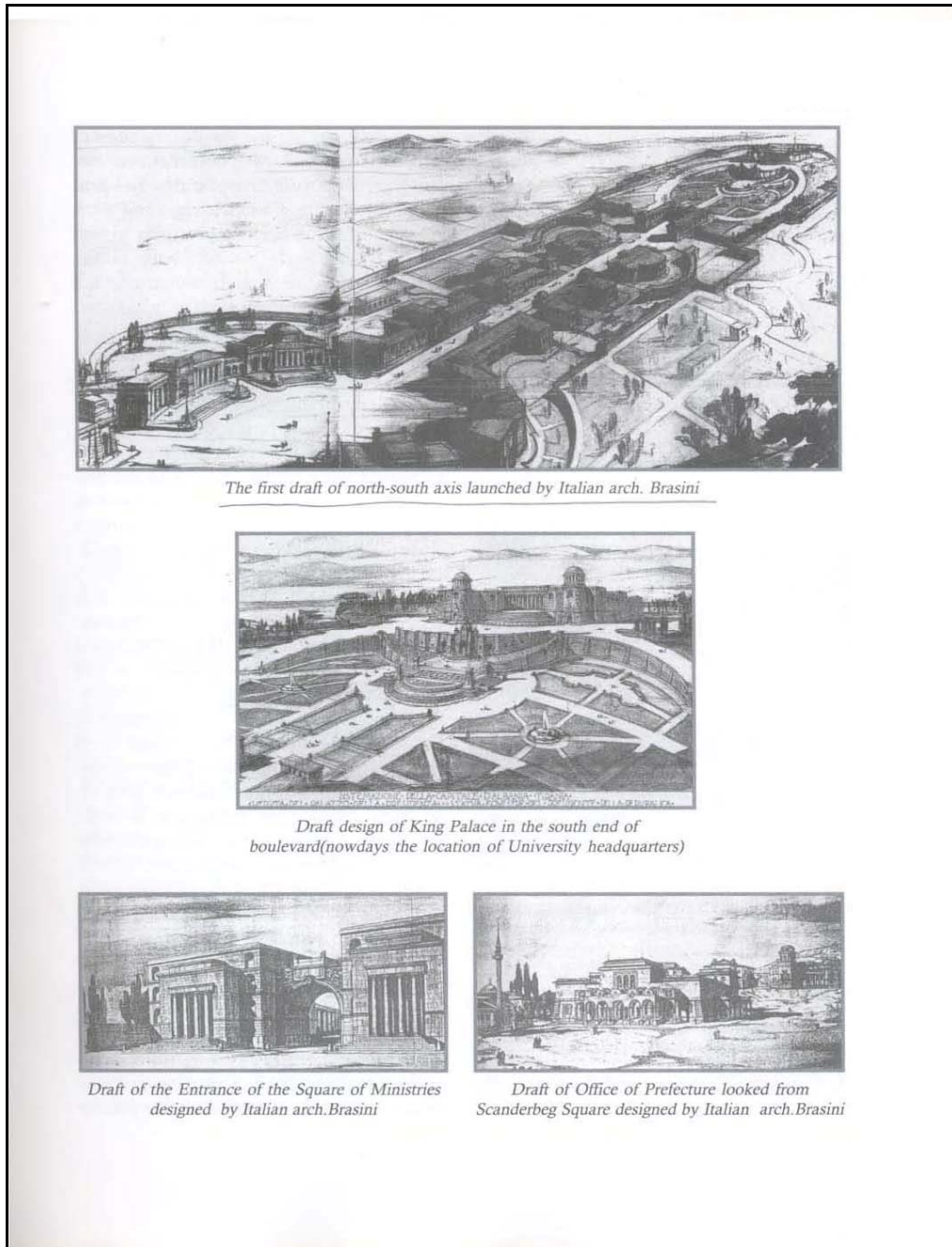


Figure 6: Brasini's Proposal, for Tirana City Centre (B. Aliaj, K. Lulo and G. Myftiu, Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development, p.31)

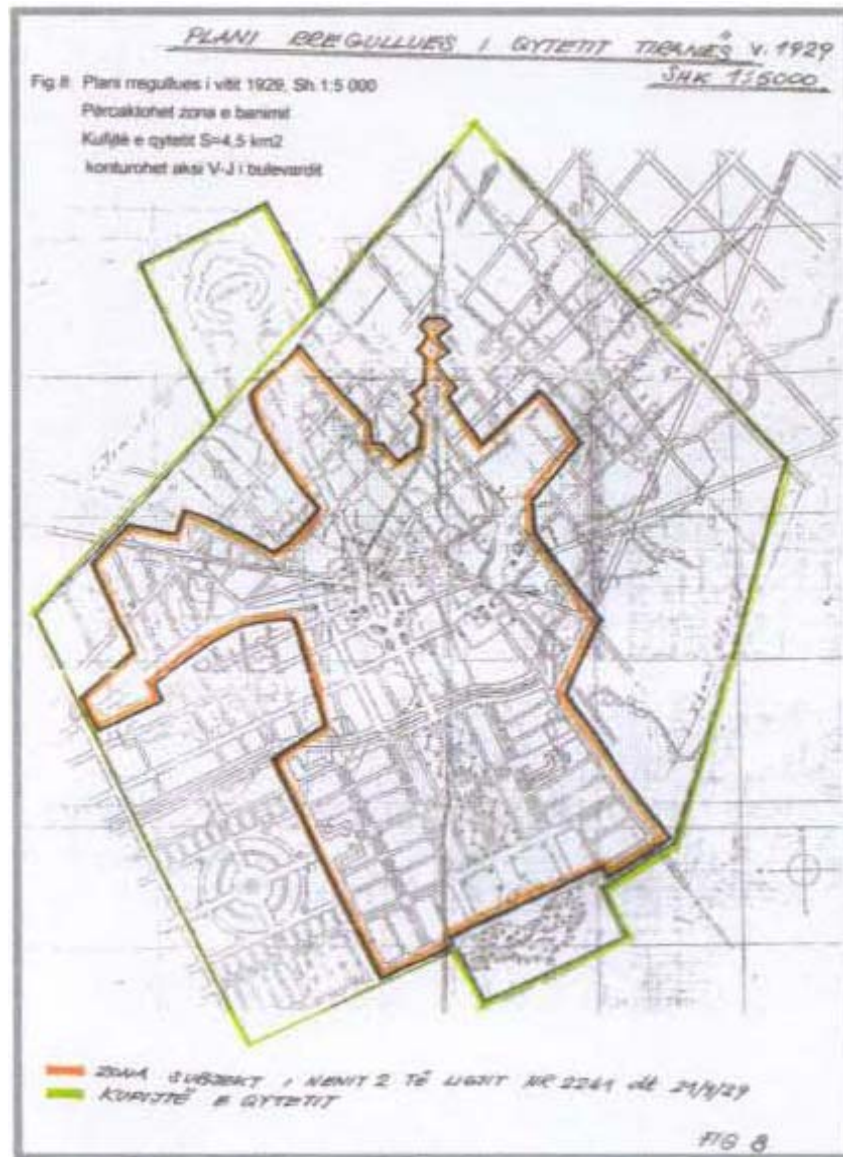


Figure 7: The urban plan of Tirana dated 1929. (B. Aliaj, K. Lulo and G. Myftiu, Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development, p. 35)

Because of an economic and political chaos, this plan could not be implemented. Later a second plan was prepared by the Italian engineers based on Brasini's ideas.¹²¹

This second regulatory plan that aimed the “materialization” of Brasini's idea of a North-South axis dates to 1926.¹²² A third regulatory plan followed it two years later.

¹²¹ Ibid, pp.28-29

In 1928, the Austrian architect Kohler proposed a plan based on a quadratic street network. In this plan the North-South axis started from the bazaar to the royal palace, now the University.

The fourth regulatory plan, which was prepared just one year later, extended beyond the bazaar up to nowadays' train station, the place of which was reserved for a stadium.¹²³ The figure 7 above shows the urban plan of 1929 where the limits of the central area structured by the North-South axis and the borders of the Tirana city are clearly marked.

At that time a large number of buildings were constructed and as Miho points out a large number of the buildings of that period are built upon projects which are obtained by competitions both national and international.¹²⁴ As it is aforementioned, Tirana from an ordinary village changed to a capital city, in not more than two decades. In the two decades that followed the Independence (1912-1932) it was transformed into the largest and the most important economical, social and administrative centre of the country. The centre of the capital city went through variants and alternatives in design. The very first variant followed and took as reference the first regulatory plan of 1926.¹²⁵

This design was very interesting; it's most characteristic point was the square, which had the shape of a semi-circular fan. It develops according the South-North axes and most of the ministry buildings are put in radiating form at the northern part of the square, having as a reference the centre of the square. The other ministry buildings are put in the southern part to define the surface of the square. The plan of the buildings was a symmetrical, monumental in which the influence of Neo-Roman architecture is clearly present. This style began to be used widely in the Fascist Italy, when the country was under Mussolini's rule.

Brasini proposed three plazas that Aliaj qualifies as of "classical style" in conformity with the Italian school of neo-classical architecture of that time.¹²⁶ The first plaza, on the north, is arranged in front of Karapici Mosque and the present Ethem Beg

¹²² Ibid., p.32

¹²³ Ibid., p.35

¹²⁴ K. Miho, Shqipëria: Vështrim Urbanistik, p.160

¹²⁵ B. Aliaj, K. Lulo and G. Myftiu, Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development, p.38

¹²⁶ Ibid.

Mosque. The second one, which is a semi circular square, with a fan form is called the ministry plaza. The third plaza in front of the monumental King's palace would constitute the end of the North-South axis. Aliaj describes Brasini's project and the image that it would bring to Tirana as "the materialization of a project of western culture of that time" communicating the intentions of the government to have a modern and fashionable architectural environment.¹²⁷ The plan proposed a monumentally designed administrative centre, the characteristic of which was a fan form plan surrounded by symmetrical, monumental and geometric buildings.¹²⁸ (Figure 8)

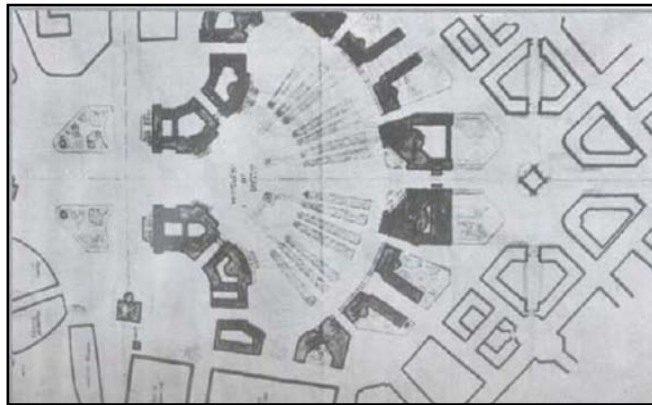


Figure 8: Tirana city centre in the sketch made by the Italian Architect Armando Brasini. A proposal that was not approved. (K. Miho, *Shqiperia: Veshtrim Urbanistik*, p.149)

The second variant proposed by Brasini was reflecting the same design approach characteristic of the Roman architecture of the early 20th century. Different from the first proposal, the central plaza is a circle this time and the important buildings are placed around that circle. Aliaj makes an analogy of it with Italian plazas and claims that Brasini's second proposal was very similar to that of Saint Peter Square in Rome.¹²⁹ The third variant was similar to the second. It was to be taken and adjusted

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ K. Miho, *Shqiperia: Veshtrim Urbanistik*, p.150

¹²⁹ B. Aliaj, K. Lulo and G. Myftiu, *Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development*, p.39

by another Italian architect, Florestano de Fausto in another planning proposal in 1931.¹³⁰ (Figure 9)

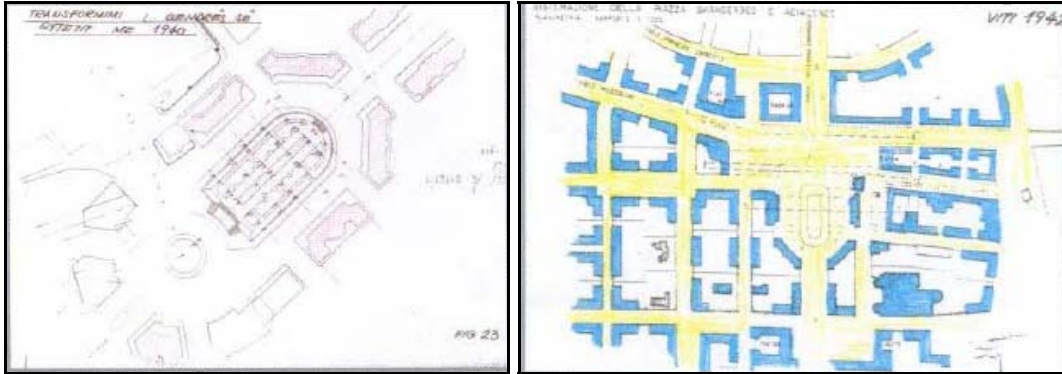


Figure 9: The fourth proposal for the city centre by Florestano de Fausto (B. Aliaj, K. Lulo and G. Myftiu, *Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development*, p. 40)
Figure 10: Adjustment of 1942 (Ibid.)

The plan of the centre of Tirana came out after a number of alternatives and only the third option was almost entirely realized. The construction of the city centre was finally completed with adjustments during the Italian occupation, according to the regulatory plan prepared by the Italians in 1942. Aliaj states that “This urban operation brought to Albania, the influence of the Italian architecture and town planning especially of the times of Fascism, whose predominant feature is their rational character.”¹³¹ The idea of Aliaj about the rationality of this plan must be a relative approach, comprising it to the one of Brasini, which was more complex including more radial roads and more buildings in number.

The regulatory plan of 1942 was important as it continued to be a reference in all decision making in Tirana for more than 50 or 60 years. It proposed the demolition of the northern part of the old city in order to construct new buildings and the city hall in its place. (Figure 10)

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.40

¹³¹ Ibid., p.46

It is worth accentuating here that in all alternative plans put forward for constructing the city centre, the dominance of the north-south axis is apparent. Additionally, it should be said that during this time, parallel to the urban development efforts for the centre, major roads that lead to the centre were also completed. They were paved, asphalted and lighted. Along with the road network, the infrastructure was partly constructed, new buildings were erected along the newly opened streets and an architectural harmony was created in the built environment. As the time passes, the immediate response to the necessities of the city and its citizens brought as well an urban transformation to Tirana.

With the end of the World War II, re-organizing and giving a different appearance to the city centre became one of the objectives of the socialist period. The government was determined to refashion the image of Albania, according to the socialist ideology, and a new town planning vision that surely was not based on an architectural program influenced by the Italian models. The thoughts to reorganize the centre of the city were inspired by the tendencies of the socialist authorities to deny everything that had a linkage and a connection to the past, and especially to the “monarchy of Fascism”. In their view, the history of Albania and Tirana should originate after 1945. The urban operations started in Tirana following the town planning studies of 1963 and 1974. The authorities’ attention was focused on the city’s centre once again as it was the space of representation *par excellence* of the state. It was a very delicate moment for Tirana’s identity.¹³² All the energy and power were to be concentrated on the transformation of the city. The first thing the regime did was to torn down some of the existing buildings in the centre. Generally buildings like religious monuments, civic monuments, and commercial structures are the very first ones to be preserved, but the socialist government’s attitude was the opposite. It was exactly these kinds of buildings that were demolished. The Italian identity in buildings was mixed with the new identity in architecture this time under the Russian influence. This influence can be defined as an international modernism style imported to Albania from the Russian school of architecture. The most important example of this architecture was the Culture Palace of Tirana. The city

¹³² Ibid., p.67

centre designed by Brasini was very different with what the socialist regime brought. Though the administrative buildings were kept, other buildings were demolished in order to create large open spaces. In this way the Old Ottoman fabric of the Bazaar of Tirana was destroyed to construct the National Historic Museum building. In other words, the period destroyed the history of the city and built in its place today's existing buildings, such as the National Historic Museum and public spaces, i.e. public parks and large plazas. (Figure 11, 12)

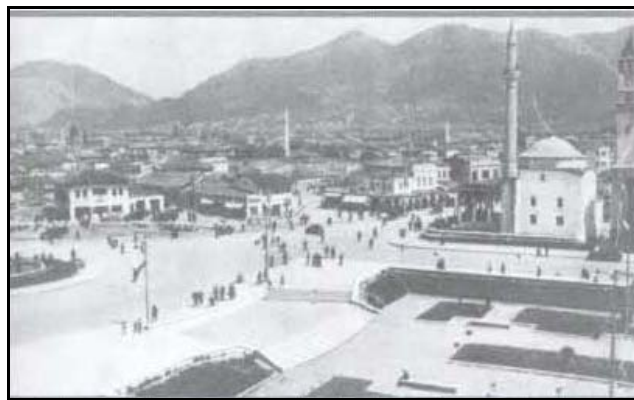


Figure 11: Tirana before 1945. On the left of the mosque was positioned the bazaar. (B. Aliaj, K.Lulo, and G. Myftiu, Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development, p.59)

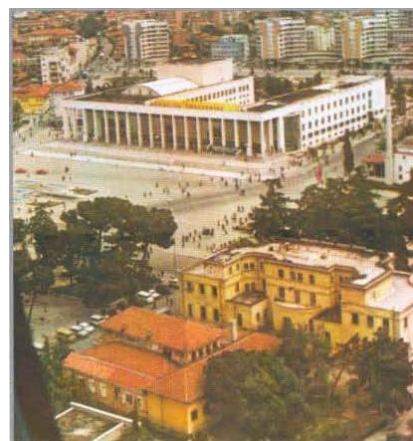


Figure 12: View of Tirana 1960. The Palace of Culture (the colonnaded building) was built in the place of the bazaar. (B. Aliaj, K. Lulo, and G. Myftiu, Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development, p.59)

3.3.2 Albanian Urban Situation and the City Centre in the Transition Period

The collapse of socialism is undoubtedly one of the major societal transformations for Albanians. In 1990 the city centre in Tirana was occupied by thousands of students that protested and walked from Enver Hoxha University through the streets and roads of the capital demanding the end of the dictatorship hoping for a better future. After long years under the socialist rule the city centre and its axis, which was used only for parades till that time, was converted into a space of manifestations for liberalization and democratization. The main feature of the post-socialist Albania has been a significant decrease in the state control and its nature. The one party regime was abandoned for the constitution of a multi party parliament while democratization brought liberalization and privatization. These political, social and economical changes were quickly reflected in the city life. The problems of a country, which was governed by a highly centralized regime that in turn was suddenly left aside, influenced the spatial structure of the city. The illegal constructions aforementioned were initiated as a result of migration, but this was not the only reason.

Giuliana Quattrone, in the 40th Congress of the European Regional Science Association in Barcelona presented a study on the Mediterranean region in general and on Italy in particular, where she mentions a number of causes of the illegal construction practices, some of which that are listed below are also valid for Albania.

1. The impossibility to get, in contained times, the authorization to be able to build legally.
2. Lack of urbanistic tools for the building,
3. The reluctance or insufficiency of people to pay the planning work and concessions to the Commune, as well as the personal work of the planner, the architect and even the manpower,
4. Immobility of the capital which is extremely restrained,
5. Not to owe to retrieve the area because it is a form of family building activity on territory of property
6. The quality of the realized buildings illegally doesn't have anything to envy those realized

by the enterprises in the legal market.¹³³

Alongside these aspects the Tirana municipality categorizes the illegal construction phenomenon according to the physical location as follows:¹³⁴

- a) Those which occupy the agrarian lands that once surrounded the socialist towns
- b) Those located on the hills around the towns
- c) Those situated in the areas integrated within the existing towns

Thus, the illegal construction activity has begun to be a very usual phenomenon. Meanwhile the privatization process changed the ideas and the respect that people had for the common and for what was public. Ervin Dojce states in his master thesis research that the people can not care about the land and the environment for the reason that some people can easily capture the land in front of their buildings and use it privately.¹³⁵ Some people were forced to do so because of the fact that the environment where they had lived was insufficient for them. In Albania, as generally the apartments and houses were very small, most citizens started to build illegally (a process that is still going on, though about 2 decades has passed since the fall of the socialist regime). In order to supply the lack of internal space, they have occupied the common property.¹³⁶ This situation is evaluated by Dojce as a change for bad and as an expression of irresponsibility about the situation out their space.¹³⁷

Beside the illegal construction around houses and building blocks, the construction of private businesses like restaurants, bars, shops and kiosks without a constructing permit on public spaces and largely in the city centre was one of the urban disorders of the time.¹³⁸

¹³³ G. Quattrone, Territorial planning and urban governance in Mediterranean areas referred to the problem of the increase of the number of housing, population decrease and loss of identity in the "Streat area", Italy, 40th Congress of the European Regional Science Association (29-August /1September 2000 Barcelona)

¹³⁴ Urban Data (Municipality digital archive, translated by the author)

¹³⁵ E. Dojce, *Property Relations and Urban Space in Albania Before, During and After socialism: A Case Study on the City of Pogradec*, p.54

¹³⁶ F. Nepravishta. (2003). "Public Private Community Partnership" In: *"Making Cities Work"*. Co-plan. Tirana.

¹³⁷ Op.cit. pp.54-55

¹³⁸ B.Aliaj, K.Lulo and G.Myftiu. *Tirana Challenge of Urban Development*, p.69

Land grabbing was seen all over Tirana and for example by the mid-1990s there were about 2000 kiosks, built in this manner.¹³⁹ Examples of land grabbing were concentrated mostly on the two sides of Lana River, a park inside the Tirana city's central axis named as "Parku Rinia" and the central square of the city "Skanderbeg Square".

Lana River is the river that passes through the Albanian capital city. Several bridges connect the two sides of the city. Their construction and the concrete banks of the river dates back to 1923-1931 period when a part of 250m long of the Lana River was taken in concrete banks.¹⁴⁰ At present, 3.5 km of 8.6 km river course that are within the borders of the municipality are built up.¹⁴¹ Another important turning point for the two sides of the Lana River is of course the new constructions after 1990. The green strip which once laid along the river was totally converted into a jungle of illegal constructions. The illustration below expresses best the situation of those years in that zone. The opportunity to encounter creative designs indeed was quite high there. Materials used varied a lot, such as stone, concrete, wood, zinc and even tissues and linoleums, and the designs are worth being studied for richness they brought in the architectural aspect.

"Parku Rina", which is the biggest green area in the centre of the city, situated near the central square, has a very rich history in itself. It also illustrates the development of post-socialist period. It is located in the vicinity of many public and governmental buildings. This first park of the city of Tirana was first created in 1950 with a surface of 29.810sq m and with about 102 trees planted during the park construction.¹⁴² In the post-socialist period every sq cm of the park was occupied by kiosks, restaurants and other structures for various businesses. In other words, "the park disappeared under dozens of illegally constructed restaurants, cafes and clubs"¹⁴³ being estimated to be about 2000 in number. Strange enough, the density seen in other areas was not

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ K. Miho, *Shqipëria: Vështrim Urbanistik*, p.157

¹⁴¹ <http://www.urge-project.ufz.de>, <http://www.urge-project.ufz.de/tirana/greensys.htm> (accessed on 10/06/2008)

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ <http://ourmanintirana.blogspot.com>, <http://ourmanintirana.blogspot.com/2005/12/in-rinia-park.html> (accessed on 10/06/2008)

valid for the park. The buildings were constructed “in between the trees and sometimes even the trees were integrated within the buildings with very sensitive details developed.”¹⁴⁴

The central square, “Skanderbeg Square” was another important area that was destroyed by the boom of the illegal constructions. Kiosks invaded all the vacant areas that were found all around. The identity of places of the capital city was subject to a deep crisis. That condition was a crucial urban problem of the 1990s.

In the “Human Development Report, Albania 2002” prepared by the Human Development Promotion Centre of the United Nations, it is stated that beside the level of development and culture, the illegal construction in Albania is the first and foremost “weakness of public and local administration” and the latter is more faulty for not guaranteeing the functioning of the rules.¹⁴⁵

The increased contact with the outside world led to the emergence of an interest toward global architectural movements among Albanian architects, developers and governmental leaders. Edi Rama, who was elected mayor of Tirana in 2001 and who is the present mayor of the city, started to plan and program the demolition of those illegal buildings that occupied the public spaces. This process is defined as follows by the Human Development Report researches:

The first demolition began rather as an attempt by the state authorities to demonstrate their resolution in the matter. They started from places in Tirana where there was a great concentration of illegal buildings. The demolition work was welcomed by the population. Encouraged by this, the central and local government authorities in the main towns of the country instigated a mass campaign for the demolition of these illegal constructions.¹⁴⁶

Definitely this was a rehabilitation project for the capital city which seems to be successful. The central areas and the Lana River were cleared off from that mess created in a period of ten years.

¹⁴⁴E. Dojce, *Property Relations and Urban Space in Albania Before, During and After socialism: A Case Study on the City of Pogradec*, p.56

¹⁴⁵ UNDP. (2002). *Human Development Report: Challenges of local governance and regional development*, p.86

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

Edi Rama made prepare the diagnosis and provided a striking renewal project which resulted in a “neat” city centre. It will not be the only project for a better future. It would be followed later by other rehabilitation projects like the renovation of the city facades and last the international urban regeneration competitions held.

In the illustrations below, the quantity and the quality of the changes that the demolition and the rehabilitation projects brought are seen. The radical change between two photos below, which indicate the colossal work done by the local government between 2003 and 2008, is indeed striking.



Figure13: Demolition over the Lana River of one the highest buildings erected along the river, 2003, (Source: <http://www.shqiperia.com>, http://www.shqiperia.com/galeria/main.php?g2_itemId=29193, accessed on 11/06/2008)



Figure 14: The present view of the Lana River, year 2008 (Source: <http://www.flickr.com>, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/rapsak/161778790>, accessed on 11/06/2008)

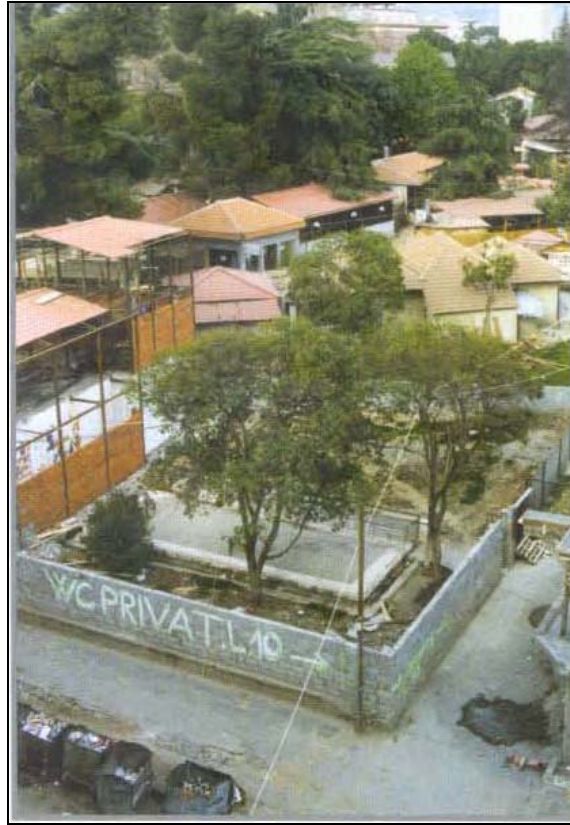


Figure 15: Rinia park, year 1993-1999 (Source: B.Aliaj, K.Lulo and G.Myftiu. Tirana Challenge of Urban Development, p.72)



Figure 16: The present view of the Rinia Park, year 2008 (Source: <http://www.galeriashqiptare.net>, <http://www.galeriashqiptare.net/albums/userpics/10067/parku-rinia.jpg>, accessed on 11/06/2008)



Figure 17: The view of the center of Tirana in the years 1993-1999(B. Alia, K. Lulo, and G. Myftiu, Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development.)



Figure 18: The present view of the city Centre, year 2008 (Source: <http://www.galeriashqiptare.net>, <http://www.galeriashqiptare.net/thumbnails-search-sheshi.html>)

3.3.3 City Spine

Tirana city centre has a main axis that lies north south. At the north end Train Station Plaza is located while on the other end the University complex plaza which holds the name of Mother Teresa is situated. The axis is exactly a city spine because many roads intersect to it in both East and West sides and it bears a special meaning because all the governmental buildings are located all along it. The city spine will be considered as divided into two parts. The first one starts from Tirana University Main Building until to the centre, including the Skanderbeg Square and the buildings surrounding it while the second one is the remaining part, until the Train Station. The reason of dividing the city spine in this way is connected to the fact that the first part includes monumental buildings, mostly with governmental administrative functions, while those of the second part generally have residential functions. In fact the first part of the city spine was built in 1930 and was called "Zogu I Boulevard". The second part from the centre to Train Station was called "Stalin Boulevard" during the Socialist regime Today "Zogu I Boulevard" is called "*Deshmoret e Kombit* Boulevard"(Martyrs of the Nation), and the "Stalin Boulevard" is transformed to "Zogu I Boulevard". Also the buildings of the first part carry historical values, while those of the second part having residential function and belonging to the Socialist period are more ordinary ones.

3.3.3.1 Significance of the City Spine

As mentioned so far, the North South axis was built with an idea inspired from the Roman architecture revival. Miho's research on the original idea of this axis confirms the hypothesis of the author's that it was inspired by the classical schema of "castrum"¹⁴⁷

Referring to Encyclopaedia Britannica websites the "castrum" is a roman town which was protected by "ramparts and ditches" that are joint by straight military roads where the army could march.¹⁴⁸ Characteristic of the roman towns are that of

¹⁴⁷ K. Miho, *Shqiperia: Veshtrim Urbanistik*, p.170

¹⁴⁸ <http://www.britannica.com>, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/topic-98862/castrum> (accessed on 12/06/2008)

“cardo” and “decumano” known as north-south and east-west axis respectively.¹⁴⁹

The city spine of Tirana is similar to the *cardo* of the roman *castrum*, while *decumano* was thought to be Kavaja Street which intersects with *cardo* at the Skanderbeg Square which in itself, it may be said, is a *castrum*, but nowadays Tirana has a *cardo* and a number of *decumanos*.

Tirana’s north-south axis, i.e. the “city spine” beside the richness of its original design, best illustrates the stages that the architecture and urban design of Tirana passed through, so it is essential to make clear and explain the components of the axis.

The city spine, due to its historical background and the existential meaning of the building has an essential significance for Tirana. It has been an urban element full of challenges for architects and urban planners from the time of nomination of Tirana as Capital city till nowadays. Due to its uniqueness with its dimensions and architectural quality, there has always been a tendency to add buildings on this axis. The construction of different buildings from King Zog time till present shows this tendency.

The centre of Tirana, Skanderbeg Square, is the “Zero Point”, where *cardo* and a series of *decumanos* intersect each other. Since the most important streets of Tirana meet and the most monumental buildings are situated here, when somebody arrives to the city centre he/she can easily understand that it is the “Zero Point” of the city.

Deshmoret e Kombit Boulevard signifies the place where the government is located. The civic centre of Tirana is exactly the spine. This is understood when you look at the governmental buildings. The demonstrativeness, monumentality and the robustness of the elements used in the buildings aim to give the image of a consolidated state. This Boulevard was used in a large extend especially during the Socialist regime for marches, parades and manifestations of many events, such that of 1 May. (Figure 19) Such manifestations are present even after the fall of the regime and still continue. *Deshmoret e Kombit* Boulevard is also used as a promenade, with big pine trees and some green areas along it. The width of the boulevard which is 42m makes it very spacious and every person who walk there to

¹⁴⁹Op.cit.

feel comfortable. The Tirana University Main Building, which is elevated and surrounded by Lake Hills, is on the perspective axis of the boulevard. (Figure 21)



Figure 19: Parade for the manifestation of 1 May in the *Deshmoret e Kombit* Boulevard, (Source: B. Aliaj, K. Lulo, and G. Myftiu, *Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development*, p.60)



Figure 20: The aerial view of Tirana (Source: Digital archive of Tirana Municipality)

“Zog I Boulevard” (Figure 22) must have been more monumental before but today it has lost a lot of its architectural quality. After 1990 when the regime changed, a lot of structures which have not respected the other existing buildings have been built there. The relation between these structures and objects on both sides of the boulevard is not harmonious.



Figure 21: *Deshmoret e Kombit* Boulevard and City Centre, (Source: digital archive of Tirana Municipality)



Figure 22: “Zogu I Boulevard”, (Source: digital archive of Tirana Municipality)

In a quick glance Tirana city spine is read immediately. It is composed of three plazas that are connected by two large boulevards which all together outline the city spine. Following the South- North direction at the south the spine starts with plaza in front of the university building named the plaza of “Nene Tereza.” The Tirana University main building is located at the southern end of the spine, where in Brasini’s master plan the king’s palace was proposed to be constructed. Its architect was another Italian architect Gherardo Bosio. The building is symmetrical and is elevated to a platform giving its monumentality. This building is constructed during the fascist occupation 1939-1944 and was originally built as *Casa di Fascio*. Its function as the University Main Building was established in 1957. This building has the greatest auditorium of the Tirana University while the other buildings of it are spread throughout the city.



Figure 23: A perspective from “Deshmoret e Kombit Boulevard” toward Tirana University Main Building (Source: digital archive of Tirana Municipality)

The other buildings that define *Nene Tereza* Plaza which is nearly in a square form, are the institute of Albanology and the Academy of Fine Arts which are designed together with the University Building by the same architect in the neoclassical style

which is described by Miho as a small scale replica of the *Esposizione Universale Romana*.¹⁵⁰



Figure 24: Tirana University Main Building and the Institute of Albanology from *Nene Tereza Plaza*, (Source: Odeta Durmishi, Author)

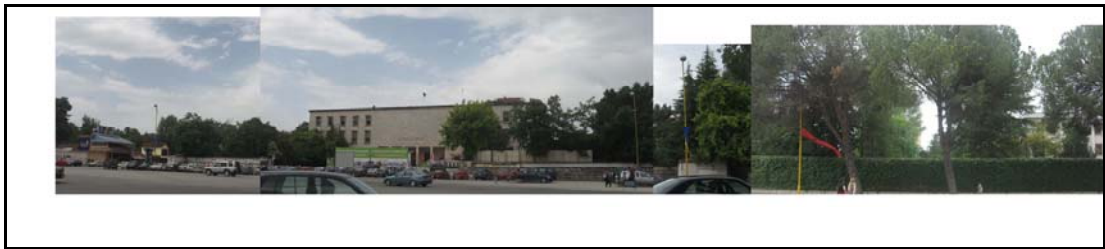


Figure 25: Academy of Fine Arts at the right side of the Tirana University Main Building, (Source: Odeta Durmishi, Author)

Leaving this complex and the plaza behind and proceeding towards Tirana city's main *decumanus*, Lana River, the axis is bordered in both sides by civic buildings like the Palace of Congresses, Hotel *Rogner Europa Park*, the Prime Ministry Building, and the Pyramid on the East whereas the Presidency Palace, the Civic Parliament Building and the Twin Towers are located on the West.

The Palace of Congresses is built during the Socialist regime for the congresses of the Labour Party to be held. It is constructed relatively late. The construction begun

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p.256

in 1982 and its architect is Enver Hoxha's son-in-law Kelement Kolaneci. (Figure 26)



Figure 26: Palace of Congresses (on the left), (Source: Odeta Durmishi, Author)

Hotel Rogner Europa Park. (Figure 27) It is a very new building, built after 1995 but very well integrated to the historical buildings of the boulevard. The important criteria that the architect considered in this building, was that of respecting the height of the other buildings. The façade of this building is too simple, when it is compared to the other ones.



Figure 27: Hotel Rogner Europa Park, (Source: Odeta Durmishi, Author)

Next to Hotel Rogner Europa Park the Prime Ministry building is located. (Figure29)

This building was part of the University complex that was designed by Gherardo Bosio¹⁵¹. It has the monumentality of a governmental building.



Figure 28: The Prime Ministry Building, (Source: Odeta Durmishi, Author)

The “Pyramid” designed as the Museum, dedicated to Dictator Enver Hoxha, (Figure29) was designed by Kolaneci in 1986. The design concept of the building was not thought only as a mere connection with history; instead it was thought as an institution producing culture throughout that history.¹⁵² After the change of the regime, it was transformed into a Cultural Centre.



Figure 29: Arial View of museum of the dictator Enver Hoxha, (Source: B. Aliaj, K. Lulo, and G. Myftiu, (2003), Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development, p.60)

¹⁵¹ K. Miho, *Shqiperia: Veshtrim Urbanistik*, p.170

¹⁵² Klement Kolaneci, from an interview given to an Albanian newspaper. (Available online: <http://www.tiranaobserver.com.al>, <http://www.tiranaobserver.com.al/20050608/speciale.htm> , accessed on 13/06/2008)

The Presidency Palace was constructed during the Socialist regime for the Head of the state and still continues having the same function. It is built with an international modern style. (Figure 30)



Figure 30: Presidency Building, (Source: <http://www.24-ore.com>, <http://www.24ore.com/arshiva/newsfoto/presidenca.jpg>)

Continuing on the West side of the boulevard, the Civic Parliament building is situated. (Figure 31) This building is designed in the neoclassical style. It is a four story high building. The façade is divided into two parts; the ground floor and the other three upper floors. On the façade the ground floor is accentuated with a robust stone wall. The upper part of the façade is emphasized by pilasters which are adorned with capitals of Corinthian and Dorian style.



Figure 31: The Civic Parliament Building, (Source: Odeta Durmishi, Author)

On the North of the Civic Parliament two high rise buildings, which were financed by Arabic Company were erected after 1990. (Figure 32) They are alien to the nearby buildings in terms of mass and architectural style. Their architecture does not have any relation to the Civic Parliament Building next to them. Locally they are called as “Twin Towers” of Tirana. Aliaj, Lulo and Myftiu signify them as “occasional interesting attempts”.¹⁵³



Figure 32: Twin Towers of Tirana and the park aside it, (Source: Odeta Durmishi, Author)

Lana River, a very dominant element of the city, lies in the East-West direction between the Pyramid and Dajti Hotel. On the two sides of it Tirana ring road is passing increasing Lana River’s significance. Dajti Hotel and The Gallery of Figurative Arts next to it are situated on the East of the boulevard. They were constructed during the Socialist regime and were designed in modern style. They maintain the same functions originally deigned.



Figure 33: The Pyramid (right), Dajti Hotel (centre) and The Gallery of Figurative Arts. (left), (Source: Odeta Durmishi, Author)

¹⁵³ B. Aliaj, K. Lulo, and G. Myftiu, *Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development*, p.88

Skanderbeg Square stands in the intersection point of *Deshmoret e Kombit* Boulevard in the south and *Zogi i I* in the north. Two other main streets for Tirana city were designed by Brasini to intersect in the Skanderbeg Square. They are Kavaja Street originally designed as the main *decumanus* of the city and Durres Street.

The square is surrounded by the Ministry Complex on the South, the Mosque, the Clock tower and the Palace of Culture on the East, the Bank of Albania and the National Museum on the West and Tirana International Hotel on the north.

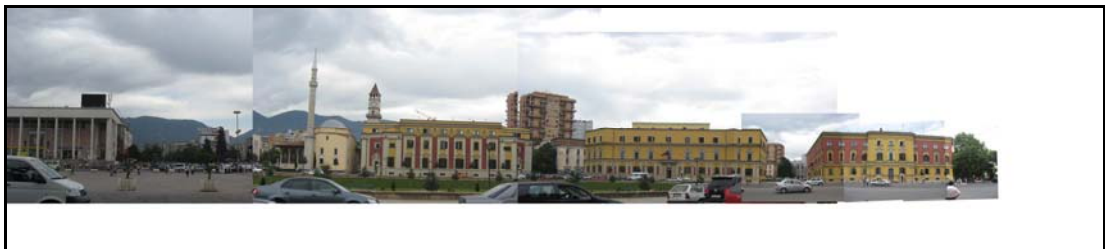


Figure 34: Centre of Tirana looking toward the governmental complex, (From the right to left, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Public Works Transport and Telecommunication, Tirana Municipality and Et-hem Bey Mosque), (Source: Odeta Durmishi, Author)

The Ministry buildings were designed to have a good quality architecture and a powerful tendency to impose and to show the power of King Zog's state. The complex of Ministries was realized using a pure Renaissance Italian style. Heavy entablatures were used in dividing the floors, frames in all the windows, different ornaments and small sculptures decorate buildings demonstrative entrances emphasize the gates. The neoclassic style was used to show the power of a new state that needed such pomposity in its process of consolidation (Appendix A)



Figure 35: View of ministries at the centre of Tirana, (Source: Odeta Durmishi, Author)

The Et'hem Bey Mosque and the Clock Tower were constructed between 1794-1822. It promoted vertical development of the centre of the city.”¹⁵⁴ The mosque is a domed one covered by lead, while the porch is covered with tiles. It has the prayers hall and the portico which are small. Its characteristics are mentioned in the competition brief for revitalisation of the square. The portico is described with “arcs and columns decorated with imitation of plants and flowers, as well as murals presenting different landscapes of Istanbul.”¹⁵⁵ It has a very important role in the history of Tirana as it was after the construction of this mosque that came the famous and noble Toptani family from Kruja to Tirana after which the town gained much importance. Today with its slender minaret, carved in stone it has become the symbol of the city. It represents values of Ottoman-Albanian architecture. (Appendix A)

Next to the mosque the clock tower is located the construction of which was “an economic and social achievement for the period”. It is considered as an object with specific character integrated into the city symbols and the silhouette of Tirana.¹⁵⁶

The Palace of Culture is built in 1963 in the place of the Tirana’s Old Bazaar. The first brick of the building was but by the Russian Socialist Leader Hrushev in 1959. It is a horizontally-spread building. The architect used high columns to break the horizontal effect. The building is coated by white granite and represents modern architectural values brought to Albania via Russia. (Appendix A)



Figure 36: The Bank of Albania (left tiled building) and National Historical Museum (right), (Source: Odeta Durmishi, Author)

¹⁵⁴ Skanderbeg Square Competition Brief 2008, digital archive of Tirana Municipality

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

The bank of Albania was built in 1937 and was designed by the Italian architect Vitorio Morpurgo.

The National Historical Museum of Tirana was built in 1981. It was built in the place of the former building of the Municipality of Tirana. (Figure 38) It is a question mark whether the decision of demolishing this Ex-Municipality building was good or not, but the Museum is one of the best modern buildings of Albania, which contains examples from national vernacular architecture of the country.



Figure 37: The National Historical Museum at the middle of the square seen from today's Municipality, (Source: digital archive of Tirana Municipality)

In this building the precious pieces of the national history and culture of Albania are conserved and displayed. The building has a mosaic on the front façade called “Albania”, in which are presented important figures of the Albanian nation from its beginning till nowadays. (Appendix A)



Figure 38: The Ex-Municipality building of Tirana (Source: digital archive of Tirana Municipality)

Tirana International Hotel was the highest building of Albania during Socialist regime. It was built in 1979 in the place that before was found the Autocephalous Orthodox Cathedral. In fact this church had a very big significance for the Albanians, because it was the symbol of Independent Orthodox Church of Albania proclaimed by the prime minister of Albania in those years, Mr.Fan Noli. It was named at first Tirana Hotel and was designed in a modern style. (Figure 39)



Figure 39: The Palace of Culture (right) and Tirana International Hotel (left), (Source: Odeta Durmishi, Author)



Figure 40: The centre of Tirana from Tirana International Hotel, (Source: Odeta Durmishi, Author)

In fact this was a very big challenge for Albanian engineers, who were assisted by Chinese colleagues. After 1992, when the regime changed the building was modified by the Italian Chain Turin Hotels society and its façades were completely altered. . (Appendix A)

There is a second boulevard that of *Zogu i I* which connects Skanderbeg Square with Train Station Plaza. In general “Zogu I Boulevard” includes residential buildings, except Queen Gheraldina Obstetric-Gynaecologic Hospital on the East and Ministry of Justice and the Faculty of Natural Sciences on the West.

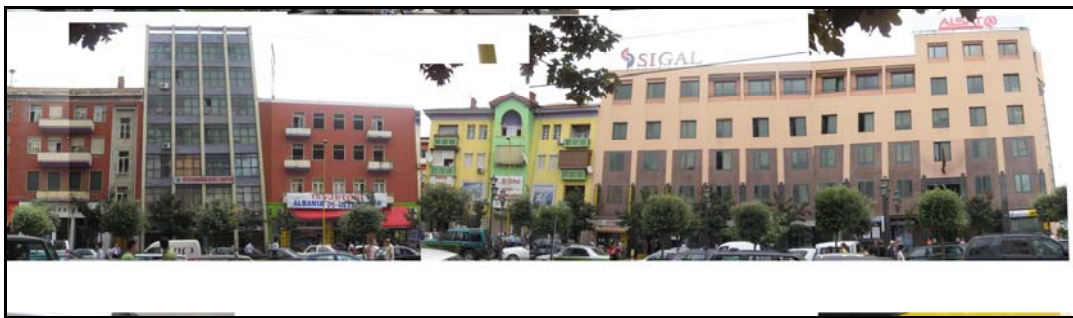


Figure 41: The beginning of today’s “Zog I Boulevard” or Ex-Stalin Boulevard, (Source: Odeta Durmishi, Author)



Figure 42: Continuation of the Boulevard Zog I, (Source: Odeta Durmishi, Author)

Queen Gheraldina Obstetric-Gynaecologic Hospital is constructed in 1937. (Figure43) It was built with the funds that were secured from the princesses or the daughters of King Zog. The hospital consists of two main blocks, which are connected by a passage that serves also as an entrance to the hospital. The building is important as it displays the architectural values of the time.



Figure 43: Queen Gheraldina Obstetric-Gynaecologic Hospital (Source: Odeta Durmishi, Author)



Figure 44: The continuation of the Boulevard Zog I (on the left the National Museum Building), (Source: Odeta Durmishi, Author)



Figure 45: Ministry of Justice (right) in the Boulevard Zog I, (Source: Odeta Durmishi, Author)

The Ministry of Justice building is constructed after 2000s. It is a new building and is coated with white travertine and silicon curtain wall. The connection between the building and the boulevard is done by using diagonal and inclined surfaces in its ground floor.



Figure 46: Faculty of Natural Sciences (right) in the Boulevard Zog I (right side), (Source: Odeta Durmishi, Author)

The Faculty of Natural Sciences was built in 1957 which is the year the Tirana University was established. It was designed in a neoclassical style. *Zogu i I* Boulevard is perpendicularly intersected with other roads. At the end of the boulevard is the Train Station Plaza which at the present is more as a traffic node. The intersection of the boulevard with the ring road and the people traffic that come from the Train station makes it a very important joint.

CHAPTER 4

“TIRANA-A NEW EUROPEAN CAPITAL CITY”

In 1991, Albania passed officially from a socialist state to a democratic one. There were the intellectuals and students who were activated in the revolts against the socialist regime and after its fall they led by present Prime Minister Mrs. Sali Berisha created a new party i.e. Democratic Party of Albania (DPA). DPA and the previously *Partia e Punës së Shqipërisë* (Albanian Labour Party) now Socialist Party of Albania (SPA), are two main parties that most influenced Albania during the transition process. DPA led Albania directly after the fall of the Socialist regime until 1997 when the beginning of a civil war started. During that year, Albania experienced a new 1991 people rebellion.

People disappointed by the DPA from the coming elections voted for SPA which was led by Fatos Nano.

Tirana, as the capital city of Albania has been in the centre of interest of the international media, which transmitted once more the transition Albania was faced with. Tirana city was turned to a war field beside the uncountable number of kiosks that were spread all over the public spaces. One of the main causes of this work is the improper function of the local government and national institutions.

Edi Rama was a candidate for the mayor of the Tirana In the local elections of 2000. He was an independent candidate that was supported by the SPA and he took the majority of the votes being selected consequently as the Mayor of Albanian Capital city. Edi Rama is a painter and he has been a professor of Arts in the Albanian Academy of Arts and he has served as Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports from 1998-2000.

The year 2003 was the year when Edi Rama set his candidate again, probably this was one of the reasons of making continues improvements and introducing new ideas for the city development. The most important attempt was the idea of regenerating the city centre through an international competition. By this competition the Mayor intended to make Tirana a European standard city with better infrastructure, better traffic, more greenery, better public spaces. The competition was announced under the name “Tirana- A New European Capital City”.

4.1 Competition: “Tirana – A New European Capital City”

Organizing a competition signifies putting forward principal directives of urban planning and design issues. A competition is a model of thinking about the city not only in architectural and urban terms but more widely, in economical, cultural and social terms. There are many actors and forces that have their impact in the development of a plan and the contemporary designs for regenerating a city.

This chapter searches on the actors that had an influence on the regeneration of Tirana city centre and will examine the aspirations of the Albanian government for change and how the competition put forward their goals and requirements to be fulfilled.

Competitions generate new ideas, new techniques, new models and consequently new visions in urban design. These different approaches were present in the Tirana city centre competition and probably this was the main aim of the municipality: to gather new visions for the future of the city, i.e. new ways of thinking the city.

“Tirana as a new European capital city” was the motto of the international competition announced on 2003. The aim was to find solutions to the chaos of the present and the future urban formations and reflected the concerns of the government about the future of the political, economical, urban, social and cultural development of the Tirana city.

Urban regeneration is believed to be an essential key in the upgrading of the city life. “As it is stated in the announcement of the competition, since the current level of

construction and the dramatic increase of traffic have created a hectic lifestyle and poses a tough challenge for the development of new urban planning of Tirana”¹⁴⁷ The Albanian government, in order to make it a capital city of European standards, announced officially a competition for the urban regeneration of the city centre on May 26th, 2003.

With this project the municipality of Tirana aimed the urban and architectural progress of the city, which was also expected to bring an improvement in the political, economical, social and cultural life of Tirana. This initiative of the Municipality of Tirana has become a model for similar projects in other cities of Albania. It is thought that contemporary urban design projects will be protagonists of a better Tirana city centre and will provide a better economic vitality.

Municipality’s initiatives for a regeneration of the city centre beside the supportive ideas have been criticized by intellectuals. From the very beginning many valid questions have been raised among planners, architects and politicians. Aliaj, Lulo and Myftiu include the discussions on this issue in their book.

What do we yield and what do we lose with the destruction of the illegal buildings? Should we design high-rise buildings or should we continue to construct up to 5 floors high? Does the old Tirana have real architectonic values? Should we keep traditional Tirana or should we change it in a new symbol of multi-storey building? When the situation in Albania is considered, should we first plan and then construct or just the opposite? May the municipality continue to provide the appliers with construction permission without first having an urban study?¹⁴⁸ Such questions and other similar ones were the discussions of the day for a long period in 2003. This was the year when the competition was started and the year when Albania attracted the interest of several international urban planners and architects.

¹⁴⁷ The competition announcement, (2003). Digital archive of Tirana Municipality

¹⁴⁸ B. Aliaj, K. Lulo, & G. Myftiu, *Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development*, p.129

4.1.1 Who Sponsored the Competition?

The demolition of the illegal structures converted the city centre into a battle field, making the government thinking about a regulatory plan. The Municipality of Tirana and the Albanian Government was going to realize such a plan, but how?

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) (German Association for Technical Cooperation) with the special assistance of World Bank and the Embassy of Netherlands and a donator who was very willing in the investment of the urban development of Tirana city, even higher than that of GTZ. Therefore, considering these donators the German Government would invest for the Tirana city centre and the World Bank and Holland Embassy investments are being planned to go for the whole study of the city. (A project that is still continuing) ¹⁴⁹

On these conditions it was decided that with the economical asset of GTZ an international urban competition would be held including an area of 500 m width from the two sides of the North- South axis, from Train Station to University Building.

Studio Mecanoo Architecten b.v. was chosen to perform the main services related to the competition. The contract ‘Lump Sum’ was signed between the Tirana city mayor Mr. Edi Rama, the Coordinator of Technical Cooperation Mr. Ismail Beka and the Architect/ director of Studio Mecanoo Architecten b.v. Prof. ir Francine M.J. Houben under the title “Conceptual Plan for Tirana City Centre, Albania”.

The winning office of the conceptual master plan for Tirana city centre, selected by an international jury, would be awarded by an amount of EUR 40,000 (EUR forty thousands) and the second place by EUR 15,000 (EUR fifteen thousands) Beside the Municipality and GTZ services are explained the Mecanoo Architecten b.v. contractual obligations.

4.1.2 The Competition Brief

The municipality instead of a competition brief prepared a document called “Terms of Reference for the Urban-planning teams” which at the same time communicates the municipality goals. The very first requirement was the urban-planning concept of

¹⁴⁹ Ismail Beka, (2007, October 30), *Competition Funds*, (O. Durmishi, Interviewer)

the north south axis with a width of 1 km, but it was free to go out this boundary if and only if the designers think that the centre of the city exceeds the 1 km width.¹⁵⁰

Another point that had to be considered was the traffic. Coming out of a system where the private car usage was a privilege only for the government leaders, to a democratic society where every one has the opportunity and the right to own a car, reasonably enough a traffic turmoil is what the Albanian cities experienced.

Mainly the competition asked to work out with the city spine to a scale of 1:2000 and for the entire city to 1:10.000 representing “the main streets and of the public and private transport network to explain the inner-city traffic concept.”¹⁵¹

The structural concept was another issue that had to be considered. The competitors had to represent the land-uses (public areas, green areas, residences, offices or public transport areas).¹⁵² A design plan up to 1:500 scale, a working model in 1:1000 scale, the project of improvement and redefinition of the train-station, was other requirements of the competition.¹⁵³

4.1.3 The Process

The competition was organized in three phases. Firstly, 400 international studios were sent a request for expression of interest, and the competition announcement was published in some international periodicals. Based on Alia, Lulo, Muftiu’s research the start of the competition was the announcement in the International Conference of ENHR. The announcement was organized by an Albanian NGO named as Co-PLAN whose role in the competition was very crucial.¹⁵⁴

In one of the Albanian newspapers, Aleksandra Bogdani, writes that the Municipality of Tirana among these 400 invitations had invited worldwide known architects like Daniel Libeskind, Renzo Piano and Kisho Kurosawa.¹⁵⁵ Despite the invitations and the effort of Edi Rama to have these offices in the competition, they did not participate.

¹⁵⁰ “Terms of Reference for the Urban-planning teams”, digital archive of Tirana Municipality

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ B. Aliaj, K. Lulo, & G. Myftiu, *Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development*, p. 130

¹⁵⁵ A. Bogdani, 28 May 2003, *Gazeta Shekulli*

About 48 studios from different countries entered the first phase, at the end of which, three studios were selected¹⁵⁶ as it was already stated in the competition brief. Its internationality is seen in the range of countries which participated. Offices taking part were from China, Greece, Germany, Croatia, Italy, England, Spain, Finland, Netherlands, France, Austria, Chile and Japan.

The three shortlisted offices came from Germany, France and Netherlands, Boles and Wilson, Architecture Studio and Mecanoo Architecten respectively.

The second phase was the one that selected the winning studio of the conceptual project of the Albanian capital city after 30 years. The work done by the individual studios were presented in front of an international jury and with the attendance of the national television channels.

The international jury awarded the French office with the first prize while Bolles and Wilson was selected the second and Mecanoo Architecten as the third.

The Architecture Studio developed the details of the conceptual design during the third phase, bringing the project in a more clear and acceptable mode.

The fourth phase is the phase for planning the other parts of the city and the components of the master plan continuing the competition tradition.

4.1.4. The final selection: A Broadcasted Jury Performance

The three shortlisted offices were asked to express their ideas graphically to be presented in front of the international jury and what is more important in front of the public jury since the competition were live broadcasted by the Albanian Public Television and in the presence of the media.

The jury of the First International Urban Competition for Tirana city centre for the second stage was composed of nine members. The fact that there is only one Albanian urban planner-architect was in the centre of the criticism, because the Albanian architects and planners know better the past of the city and Tirana reality. Including one or more Albanian designers in the jury might have brought other results. The judgement/selection would have been different and the discussions

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

among the jury members might have developed in different way. They know the Albanian reality, the Albanians life and their visions.

The jury for the second phase was composed of the following personalities:

Mr. Fatos Nano- Head of the jury, that time Prime Minister of Albania

Mr. Edi Rama- that time and present time mayor of Tirana, the initiator of the competition¹⁵⁷

Mr.H. Schroeder- German architect, ex-German Ambassador,

Mr.Jean M. Guenod- City Planner and Architect-France

Mr.M. Pisani- Designer, Historian and Critic-Italy

Mr.Rudie Stroink- Architect-Netherlands

Mr.Olafur Eliasson- Visual Artist-Denmark

Mr.Lothar Greulich- Architect & Urban Planner-Germany

Mr.Elia Zenghelis- Architect & Urban Planner-Great Britain

This jury was of the second phase in which three offices competed. These three shortlisted projects had come out of the first phase, from a different jury held on 20.06.2003.¹⁵⁸

Referring to the Engagement Letter and Terms of Engagement in relation with participation in the evaluation of proposals in the international competition “Tirana, a new European Capital” the jury task was stated as follow:

As a member of the jury you are expected to form an expert opinion on the proposals submitted by the three short listed companies, i.e. evaluate the adherence to the "Terms of Reference" as well as their specific merits. You shall discuss the three proposals and participate in a ranking exercise, leading to the award of a first and second price. Furthermore, you are invited to provide suggestions towards further implementation steps and the integration of the contestants' in the context of urban development of Tirana.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Aliaj, Lulo and Myftiu considers Edi Rama as very motivated to organize this competition in order to accomplish the promises that he had made 3 years before the competition for having a city regulatory plan. Writers support also the idea that this was the main force to drive this competition.

¹⁵⁸ Unpublished Report, Digital archive of Tirana Municipality (translated from Albanian by the author)

¹⁵⁹Engagement Letter and Terms of Engagement in relation with participation in the evaluation of proposals in the international competition “Tirana, a new European Capital”(Digital archive of Tirana Municipality)

Once the jury was created, the process of presentation of the conceptual plans designated by three shortlisted-offices started on 24/07/2003.

All the three offices had 1hour each, 30 minutes to explain their work and 30 minutes to answer the questions of the jury and to discuss. The first team to explain their project was Mecanoo Architecten bv. represented by Peter Clayes, followed by Architecture Studio from France represented by Rouelda Ayache. The third and the last was Bolles & Wilson from Germany represented by Peter Wilson. After these presentations the jury entered into a closed door *séance*.¹⁶⁰

They announced the competition results for the conceptual master plan by proclaiming the Architecture Studio as the winning project of the competition, and announcing with the second prize Bolles& Wilson and the third prize Mecanoo Architecten bv.¹⁶¹

4.2. Three Shortlisted Offices

The competition process was an important initiative for Albania and especially for Tirana city. The short listed entries of the competition brought forward three different visions for the future city, which are all equally valuable.

The urban design approaches they brought are worth studying in view of the fact that they solve the problems of the city centre considering the rich design character of their conceptual proposals by firstly enclosing a view of their background and their other projects.

4.2.1. Mecanoo Architecten bv.

This office was founded in 1984 by Prof. Francine Houben, architect and director of Mecanoo architects, which is located in Delft (The Netherlands). Prof. Houben is a very active architect, she has many publications and besides being a professor in Delft University of Technology she is the curator of the First International

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

Architecture Biennale Rotterdam.¹⁶² The extensive work of the office include project types like theatre, museums, congress centres, libraries, educational buildings, offices, houses, hotels, sports and high rise, landscape design and urban planning.¹⁶³ Prof. Houben has published a number of books, has been member of national and international juries and has won considerable amount of architectural competitions.

Urban design projects that the office had successfully completed are the Master plan of Gdansk, St Joseph Court in Nijmegen, Space for Rivers in Arnhem/Veessen Wapenveld, Regev terrain, “Redevelopment of the former Regional Power Station terrain with 330 dwellings and 1,400 m² small scale commercial facilities”¹⁶⁴ the latter was a result of a competition where Mecanoo architects took the 1st prize.

The Campus of the Delft University of Technology is another successful project of the office.

“Design a concept in which all aspects – quality of public space, a good harmony between the buildings, the environment and the program – are paid attention to” was awarded with the 1st prize - because Mecanoo designed an urban park that distinguishes itself from other parks in Amsterdam’s southeast through both its function and its distinctive identity. The Bijlmerpark is characterized by its clear boundaries and entrances. Sport and music form the basis for this multicultural leisure park. It is a colourful park with an identity of its own and a multitude of activities, but above all it is ‘A Happy Place’. The concept of ‘A Happy Place’ is reinforced by a clear park boundary and a slightly undulating ribbon development along the Flierbosdreef and the Gooiseweg with a variety of individual park houses and park apartments.”¹⁶⁵

Apart from these projects Mecanoo Architecten has experience in other competitions and is highly awarded with first prices, not only in urban design projects but also in the architectural projects.

¹⁶² Mecanoo-Architecten CV handed to Municipality as document requirements, digital archive of Tirana Municipality

¹⁶³ <http://www.mecanoo.com/>, <http://www.mecanoo.com/> (accessed on 08.07.2008)

¹⁶⁴ <http://www.mecanoo.com/>, http://www.mecanoo.com/html_project.php?PKY_OBJECTOID=231&taal=EN&ILL=1 (accessed on 09.07.2008)

¹⁶⁵ <http://www.mecanoo.com/>, http://www.mecanoo.com/html_project.php?PKY_OBJECTOID=209&taal=EN&ILL=1 (accessed on 09.07.2008)

4.2.2. Bolles and Wilson

Bolles and Wilson is an enterprise created by Julia Bolles and Peter Wilson in 1980. Their staff is composed of 25 members and their activities are wide range such as: Architecture, Urban Design, Interior design, Landscape planning and Product design. Being based in Germany they work internationally. Their works can be seen in Japan, Korea, Australia, Albania, Italy, United Kingdom and Netherlands.

In the field of urban design they have successfully fulfilled the Adidas world Headquarter, Bastion Quarter, Siemens City Master plan in Germany, Zurich Lakefront Study in Switzerland, Eemcentrum Masterplan, Masterplan Meinerswijk and Talmalaan Masterplan in Netherlands. Three of these works are the results of competitions.¹⁶⁶

4.2.3 Architecture Studio

Architecture Studio was created in Paris in 1973. It is a large team with about 8 associated architects and more than 100 people employed. It has a variety in its composition with architects, urban designers and interior architects from 25 different nationalities.¹⁶⁷ During their 35 years experience they have realized many projects among which hospitals, offices, hotels, accommodations, sports and shopping centres, schools, universities, programmes of urban development, institutional buildings, museums, cultural environments etc. can be mentioned.¹⁶⁸

Architecture-Studio that is known for the European Parliament Building in Strasburg, together with Jean Nouvel the Arab World Institute and Our Lady of Ark Covenant Church in Paris has also won a number of competitions like rehabilitation of the Maison de Radio France in Paris, the 2010 World Exhibition in Shanghai, the Opera of the Onassis Foundation in Athens, the Grand Theatre of Beirut, the City for the Arts of Reggio di Calabria in Italy.¹⁶⁹ The office has also many works in Urban Planning scale. In 1989 they worked on the Re-structuring of Headquarter *La*

¹⁶⁶ <http://www.bolles-wilson.com> , <http://www.bolles-wilson.com/flash/> (accessed on 10.07.2008)

¹⁶⁷ Documents presenting the Agency, digital archive of Tirana Municipality

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid

Défense in Paris and Urban Planning and Development Bovisa in Milan Italy. In 1998 a very similar project with the one in Albania is in Congo Republic under the name “Re-structuring of the city centre.”

Architecture-Studio has an agency in Shanghai China where about 20 people work. The interaction with other nationalities is one of their objectives. As it is stated in the document presenting the agency,

AS.Architecture-Studio China has for objective to manage and complete the projects it has conceived, by combining the spirit and the skills of both cultures, French and Chinese. In this worldwide period, Architecture-Studio believes that to assert ones own culture one must know the “other”.¹⁷⁰

4.3 Three Different Visions for Tirana

The competition process was an important initiative for Albania and especially for the city of Tirana. The three entries, which were selected at the end of the first phase of the competition, brought forward three different visions for the future city, which are all equally valuable. As already mentioned the competition is for Tirana city centre, along the entire city spine in 1 km width. The urban design approaches they brought are worth studying in view of the fact that how they solve the problems of the central city considering the rich design character of their conceptual proposals.

4.3.1 Mecanoo Architecten Proposal, the Third Prize Winner

The office of architecture from Netherlands was declared the third prize in this competition. Aliaj defines Mecanoo’s project and the concept technically, but he

¹⁷⁰ Documents presenting the Agency, digital archive of Tirana Municipality

calls it “radical” and “expensive” because of the interventions they propose in the centre.¹⁷¹ The illustration below is the project they proposed, where all the building blocks on both East and West of the central area were to be reconstructed in the form of perimeter blocks.

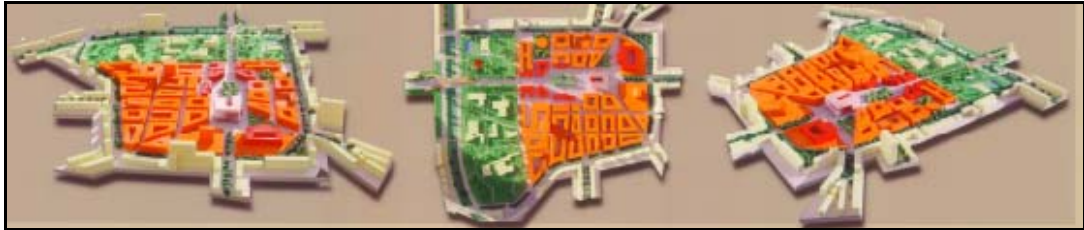


Figure 47. Proposal model of the Mecanoo Architecten, the building blocks around the central area were all to be constructed anew. (Source: digital archive of Tirana Municipality)

Even though Tirana has a past that dates to the Ottoman period, in their researches the Dutch group compares the city centre of Tirana with western/European cities. In this sense, Mecanoo is rigorous by following the aim of competition “Tirana as a new European capital city”. The main axis is dominant in their proposal and it is studied in different zones each having their own urban identity. (Figure 48)

¹⁷¹ B. Aliaj, K. Lulo, and G. Myftiu, *Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development*, p.131

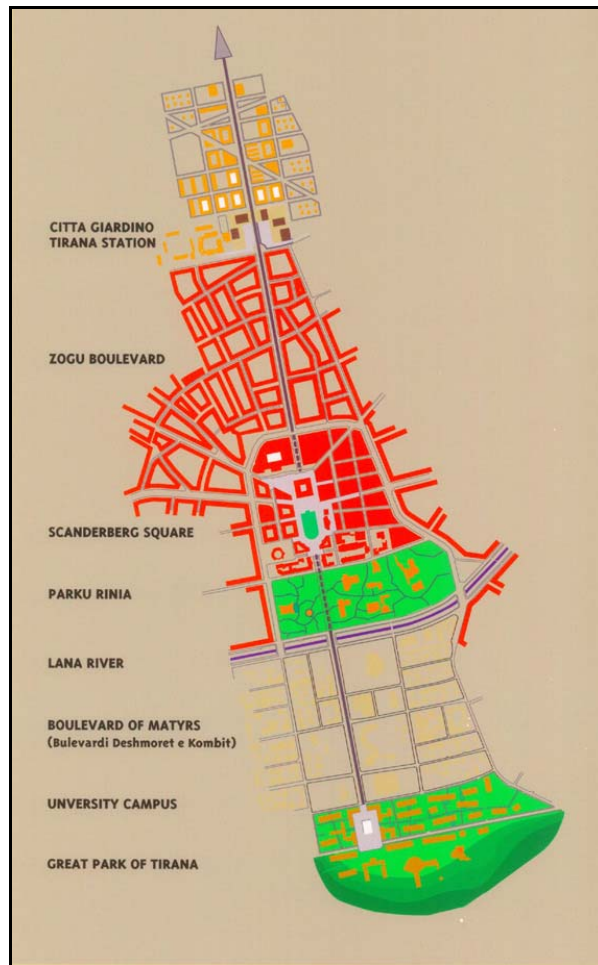


Figure 48: Eight zones in Mecanoo Architecten study of the competition area. (Source: Municipality of Tirana, Digital Archive)

An important requirement of the competition was to bring a solution to the circulation of the pedestrians and automobiles. Since the traffic of the city is chaotic Mecanoo holds the idea of maintaining “A good balance between public transportation, auto-mobility and the possibility to walk and even to bike”.¹⁷² The car traffic, public network and pedestrians are part of one overall mobility network since according to Mecanoo this is the only way different modes of circulation function properly. In other words their concept is based on the balance between public and private transportation, while they reserve the centre to the pedestrians. (Figure 49)

¹⁷² Ibid.

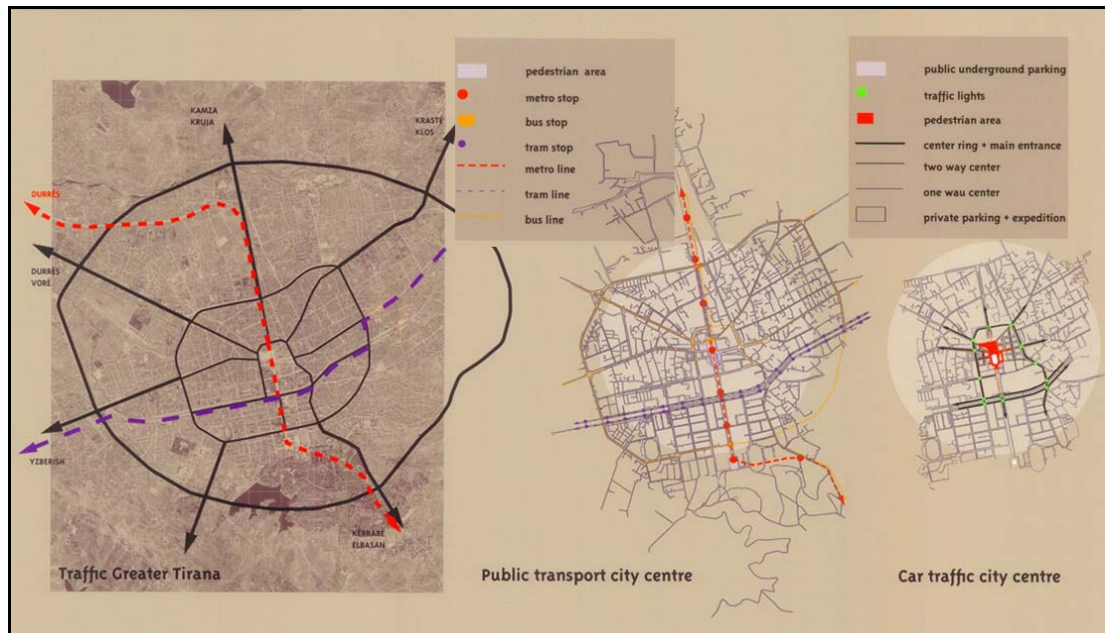


Figure49: Traffic of Greater Tirana, Mecanoo Architecten Proposal (Source: Municipality of Tirana, Digital Archive)

They proposed a subway system that would link Tirana city with the international ‘Nene Teresa’ airport and they put forward the idea of a tramline in a near future. Belina Budini, an Albanian journalist claims that the Dutch project was called also “Tirana of subways”¹⁷³

The centre is reserved for the free circulation of the pedestrians together with a part of the boulevard and the University Plaza, while the green areas are spread on both sides of the spine.

Obviously, the circulation network is an essential part of the design but they do not form the main idea of the project. In the presentation posters the intention is quite clear. They call their project: “City Centre Tirana: Return to Identity”.¹⁷⁴ In the presentation, the representative of the office argued that Tirana city centre had eight historical identities that were very different from each other and he claimed that

¹⁷³ <http://www.shqiperia.com>,
http://www.shqiperia.com/faqjapare/qendra_tiranes_projekti.php
 (accessed on 12.10.2007)

¹⁷⁴ Presentation poster, digital archive of Tirana Municipality

those zones should be preserved and besides being preserved they should be redefined.¹⁷⁵

Aliaj, Lulo and Myftiu raise the question that the office had already asked “for whom is the centre designed, for the citizens or for certain groups and the businesses?” This is a question that according to Aliaj, Lulo and Myftiu the municipality has not been answered yet.¹⁷⁶

Mecanoo takes as the basis of the master plan the characteristics of Tirana city. They mention the colourful facades which characterize the architecture of the city as the initiator of the optimistic city atmosphere, the greenery and the two km long axis as interesting characteristics that they considered in their design.¹⁷⁷

A tower in the centre of the city would be the only high-rise building of the zone since they proposed for the region not more than 7 storey high structures.

They proposed the widening of the boulevard in the north of the city which would ease the access to the international airport. The reorganization of the centre and the densification of it with structures no more than 5 floor high, are among their principal proposals.¹⁷⁸

Aliaj, Lulo and Myftiu consider Mecanoo’s entry as the only project which went further than just graphic conceptual design.¹⁷⁹ The urban spaces proposed by Mecanoo Architekten had the potential to transform Tirana into a European city because as Prof. Houben claims the European cities are based on “a good balance between public transportation, auto mobility and the possibility to walk and even to bike”¹⁸⁰ an objective that seems to have been well interpreted in the Mecanoo Proposal.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ B. Aliaj, K. Lulo, & G. Myftiu, *Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development*, p.132

¹⁷⁷ <http://www.mecanoo.com> ,

http://www.mecanoo.com/html_project.php?PKY_OBJECTOID=179&PKL_SOORT=project&taal=EN&ILL=13 (accessed on 17.12.2007)

¹⁷⁸ Op.cit., pp.132-133

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p.133

¹⁸⁰ Presentation poster of Mecanoo proposal.(Municipality of Tirana digital archive)

4.3.2 Bolles and Wilson Proposal, the Second Prize Winners

The German-Australian office was chosen the second in the competition. What was interesting for their case was the conservation of the modern architectural heritage of the city centre. (Figure 50) They imagine Tirana city as a mosaic, as a rug where each rug represents an urban zone. Budini defines their ideas and their project under the name “Urban and Cultural Rugs”, because the zones that the office presented respect the city’s history.¹⁸¹

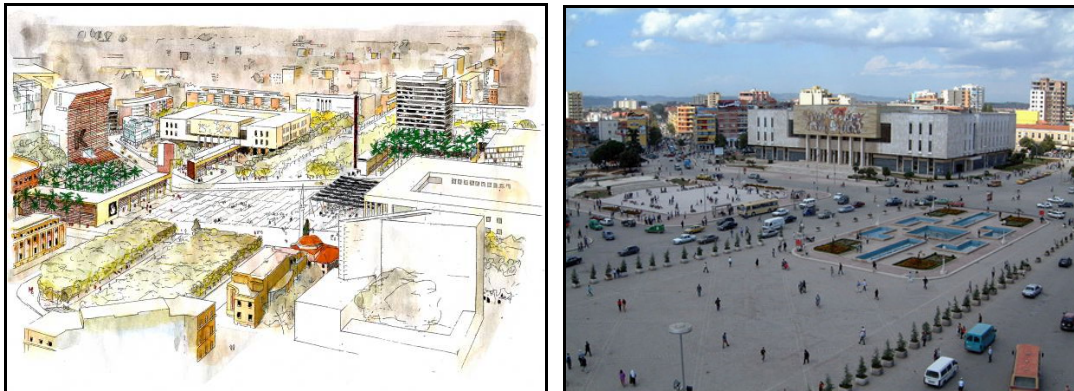


Figure 50: Proposal model of the Bolles and Wilson, on the left, present situation on the right. (Source: digital archive of Tirana Municipality)

On the other side Aliaj, Lulo and Myftiu find this proposal interesting for the fact that the central square was narrowed down and divided into smaller spaces that would have better usage than the current spaces, which they found oversized.¹⁸² However, this proposal has the risk to fragment the existing open spaces. (Figure 51)

¹⁸¹ <http://www.shqiperia.com>,
http://www.shqiperia.com/faqjapare/qendra_tiranes_projekti.php
(accessed on 12.10.2007)

¹⁸² B. Aliaj, K. Lulo, & G. Myftiu, *Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development*, p.132

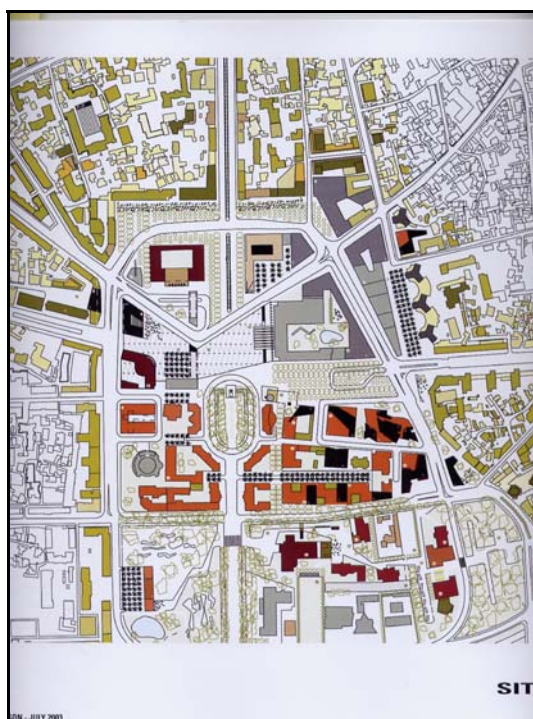


Figure 51: The Site Plan of Skanderbeg Square proposed by Bolles and Wilson ((Source: digital archive of Tirana Municipality)

During the presentation the representative of the group mentioned the large scale problems that Tirana has, and they do not hesitate to declare that the type of open spaces that are present in Tirana can hardly be seen in other capital cities of the world.¹⁸³ “City is the place of collective memory, and our plan is based on the existing history. The world dreams of such a plaza that Tirana has.”¹⁸⁴ Bolles and Wilson give particular importance to the existing modern blocks. They search the identity of Tirana in the modern heritage of the city. In their project they give a particular importance to the traffic concept and the road network by introducing two slipped loops creating “integration”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ <http://www.AlbanianMail.co.uk>, <http://www.albanianmail.co.uk/sofra/index.php>, (accessed on 12.10.2007)

¹⁸⁴ <http://www.shqiperia.com>,
http://www.shqiperia.com/faqjapare/qendra_tiranes_projekti.php
 (accessed on 12.10.2007)

¹⁸⁵ Unpublished report, Digital archive of Tirana Municipality

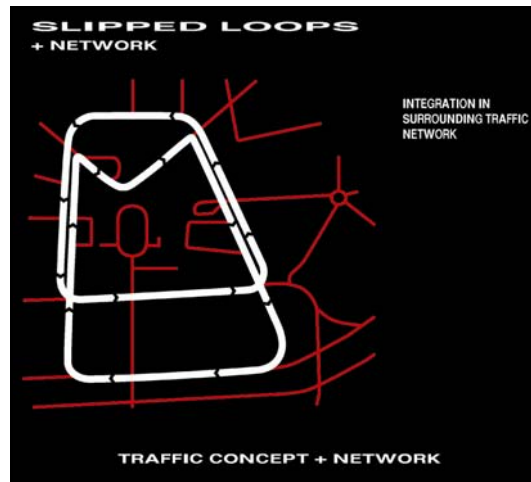


Figure 52: Traffic concept proposed by Bolles and Wilson. (Source: Municipality of Tirana, Digital Archive)

They proposed a two lane ring around the centre with recreational areas and with space for pedestrians to move comfortably and with small parking places. (Figure 52)

Big parking lots outside the city and wide roads inside the city that reaches up to 60m width were another proposal for the network concept in Tirana.

They proposed the use of empty spaces in the centre and along the spine by increasing the density of the environment with very modern and sometimes post-modern buildings.¹⁸⁶ Bardhi Sejdarasi finds their proposal of a large commercial centre near the Skanderbeg square as rational.¹⁸⁷

Sejdarasi says that the buildings outside the centre were proposed by the office as low-rise, but high rise ones were also present. Considering their presentation where they mentioned the fact that studying the city as a rug gave them a great number of design combinations.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Op.cit.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ <http://www.AlbanianMail.co.uk>, <http://www.albanianmail.co.uk/sofra/index.php>, (accessed on 12.10.2007)

4.3.3 Architecture Studio Proposal: The Winning Project

Certainly, Tirana city Centre International Competition was the first of its kind for Albania and for Tirana. This may be the reason why a clear and defined competition brief was not prepared by the Municipality's Architecture Office. Instead of a brief the municipal office prepared the competition requirements under the name "Terms of Reference for Urban-planning teams" according to which as already mentioned the participants were expected to prepare an urban planning concept for the centre in an area of 1km width of the city spine.

Architecture Studio considers the present Tirana as a "combination of order and disorder". By order they mean the past which expresses itself in the monuments that are present today in the city centre, and by disorder they imply the uncontrolled transformation and also the way of life.¹⁸⁹ In order to reorganize this disorder they propose: reshaping the Skanderbeg Square and plazas along the spine, rehabilitation of Lana River, solution to the traffic network and increase the recreational areas. (Figure53)

What the Architecture Studio suggested for the city is demonstrated step by step in their elaborated report handed to the Tirana municipality. In this unpublished report they firstly state their general concept and objectives of the project as:

The enhancement of the historical heritage, the creation of a quality architectural and contemporary urban heritage, the structuring and beautification of public spaces, the creation of planted promenades and gardens, the improvement of dwellings and neighbourhood life, the development and modernization of the road network, the development of a tailored public transportation policy, the creation of pedestrian spaces and underground parking, plans for the future extension of the city, the reconciliation of the city with its environment.... these are a few of the project's major stakes"¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Architecture-studio unpublished report, (2004), *A new master plan for Tirana city centre*, Albania: Tirana, p.8

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

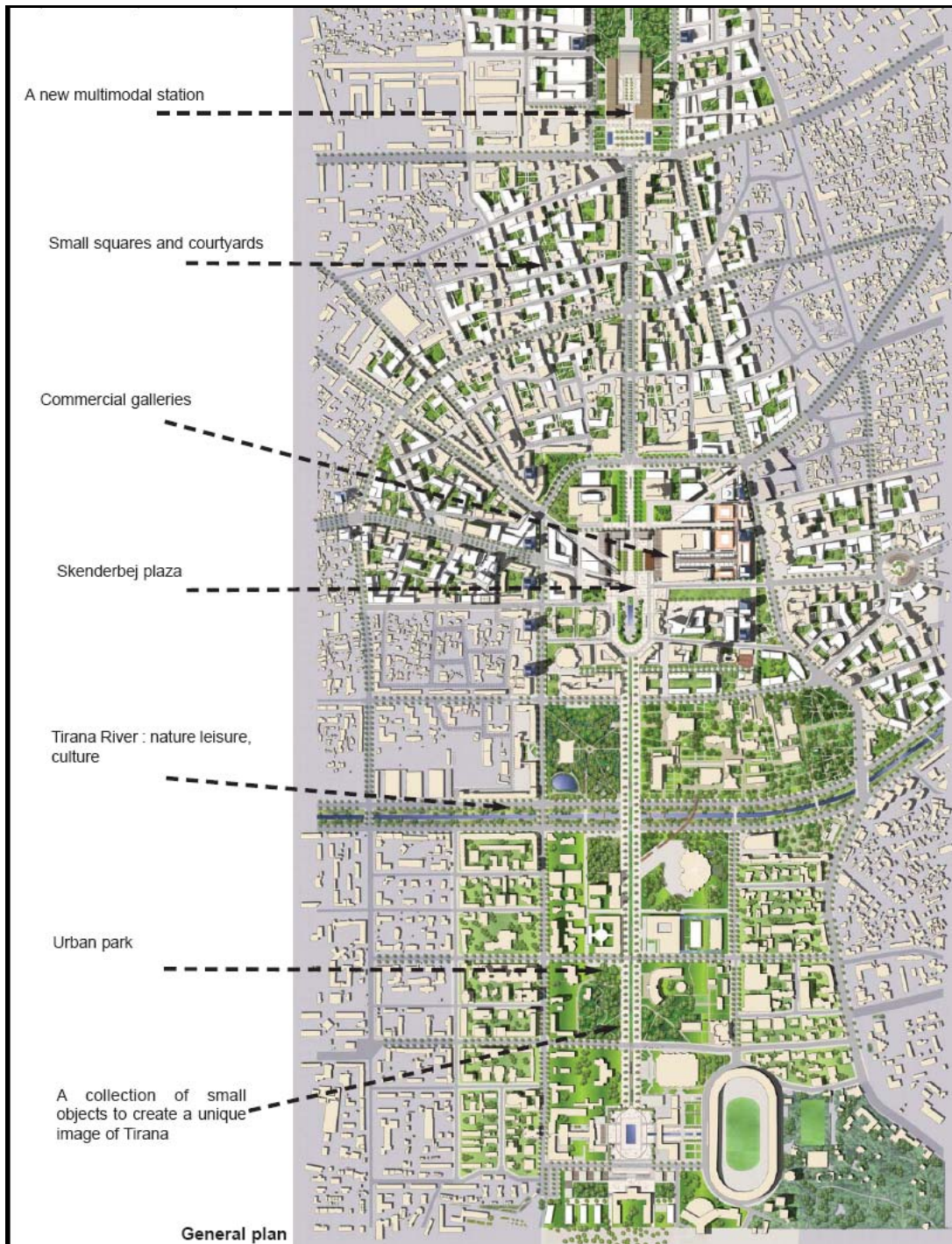


Figure 53: Master plan proposal of Architecture Studio, (Source: digital archive of Tirana Municipality)

Further, they support the idea that for having an economical development re-conquering the urban quality of the city is an obligation. Thus, as planning

objectives, they make a comparison of the present situation of the city centre with those of other European capital cities, which they consider important since according to them “the project will lead to develop but also to affirm its identity and particular characteristics.”¹⁹¹

The master plan explains the role of the central axis with its spaces and built-up areas. The diverse parts of the spine are explained earlier. Whether this diversity should be preserved or whether uniformity should be achieved for the whole spine, is a topic that needs discussion that will come later on.

After studying the centre they emphasize the need for reshaping the open spaces, which seems to be one of the main objectives of Architecture Studio’s proposals. The interaction of plazas and monuments with each other is defined as a problem to be solved. They achieved this conclusion after having compared a number of plazas of European cities with Tirana city.¹⁹²

Architecture Studio claims that the aim of the design is not to turn down the monuments, but instead to erect others, and hence to reshape the skyline of the city. “To modify the relationship of open and built spaces to the city: reinvent the link and interaction”¹⁹³ is the objective that they state. In other words their aim is to “reinterpret”¹⁹⁴ the plazas and the open spaces that are in need of transformation.

Reshaping and reinterpreting the open spaces and the skyline is not the only objective of the project. Reorganization of the transportation system and provision of car parking are some other objectives of the project they propose.¹⁹⁵

Their ideas were to create a garden for the city. Increasing the green areas was primary on their design and their sketches. Wherever it was possible, they transformed in a recreational space, emphasizing especially the areas along the Lana River. They state that they see Lana River as an important potential for what they intend, the city garden.¹⁹⁶ The idea of garden is emphasized by Architect Rodo

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p.10

¹⁹² Ibid., p.14

¹⁹³ Ibid., p.16

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p.18

¹⁹⁶ <http://www.shqiperia.com>,

http://www.shqiperia.com/faqjapare/qendra_tiranes_projekti.php

(accessed on 12.10.2007)

Tisnado, who in an interview the author made with him argued that the main idea of the project was to connect the “history and the open spaces with green areas”¹⁹⁷ in other words what he said was the creation of a “Central Park”.¹⁹⁸ (Appendix D)

Along the city axis, i.e. along the two sides of the main boulevard, high rise buildings were proposed. According to Tisnado they were necessary to enrich their main idea of creating a city garden, because they create a frame to the designed area from all sides of it.¹⁹⁹

Architecture Studio architects see the towers as punctuations, thinking of great architectural buildings that “will pace and frame the square”.²⁰⁰

Towers were just one element of the design. Roueida Ayache, Architecture Studio representative who presented the project in front of the international jury explained that they had studied Tirana in three dimensions: widening of the green areas, natural structure of the city and the reinforcement of the traffic system.²⁰¹

Studying the components of master plan components the question of what will change in the city centre may come into mind. The towers proposed parallel to the main North-South axis intend to “create a new silhouette pointing the mountains”.²⁰²

Widening of the existent recreational areas is one of the objectives and steps of the project aiming Tirana to be “a new green European Capital”²⁰³ The Architecture Studio planned very important interventions in the Scanderbeg Square and the area around the Train Station but minor ones in the University Plaza. Details of the project were presented to the Municipality in a project report.

4.4 Comparison of the Three Proposals

There are different factors that made a city and its centre unique. That might be the location, the landmarks, the historical background and also the architectural heritage.

¹⁹⁷ R. Tisnado, (2008, April 10). *Thoughts on Competition*. (O. Durmishi, Interviewer)

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Architecture Studio unpublished Report, digital archive of Tirana Municipality, p.36

²⁰¹ <http://www.shqiperia.com>,

http://www.shqiperia.com/faqjapare/qendra_tiranes_projekti.php

(accessed on 12.10.2007)

²⁰² M. Velo, (2004), *Tirana: Arkitekture dhe Konkurse: 2003-2005*, Tirane: Bashkia Tirane, p.19

²⁰³ Ibid.

Tirana is unique in Europe, like every other European city, but it is in search of a more contemporary representation. The three finalist offices of the international competition for the master plan of Tirana city centre brought their visions for the future face of the city.

At first, in order to know closer the reality of the city all the three studios had made a field study before starting their conceptual designs. A staff of Albanian architects and urban designers, selected from the municipality of Tirana, accompanied them. Among them was Besnik Aliaj, currently rector of a private university in Albania. Tirana has not many architectural books written about it, and Aliaj is one of the few researchers who has studied and wrote a good one for Tirana. He guided the three short listed representatives of the competitions and gave them more in depth information about the city.

Aliaj found interesting the approach of Mecanoo Architecten. That was the only group that visited the entire city. They had visited even the squatter neighbourhood of Tirana city in order to know as much as possible about Tirana and accordingly Aliaj thinks that they could design a centre for all the citizens.²⁰⁴

Such analyses are important because they directly influence the urban design concept. Mecanoo Architecten for instance starts making a scale exercise. Even though Tirana has a past that dates back to the Ottoman period, in their researches the Dutch group compares the city centre of Tirana with western/European cities. They compare and visualize the Tirana city centre with those of European cities like Amsterdam, Barcelona, Paris, Rome, Firenze, Lucca and also with New York.

What is noticeable in this comparative analysis is the irregular form of Scanderbeg Square and its being out of scale when compared with other European historic centres and their squares.

Architecture Studio approaches the analysis in the same manner. Apart from the scale they were more concentrated on the shape of the square. (Figure 52) They demonstrated and compared some squares in Paris like: *Place des Vosges*, *Place*

²⁰⁴ Aliaj, B. (2007, December 15). Thoughts on Competition. (O.Durmishi, Interviewer)

Vendôme, Place de la Bastille and Place de la Concorde to Skenderbej Square. They concluded that the need for a redefinition of the centre was essential.

From the point of functional organization, the three offices brought their different proposals for the centre of this European capital city. Bolles and Wilson divided the Scanderbeg Square into smaller spaces each having a different function. The proposal is found interesting by Aliaj even though he thinks that there is the risk of having a cracked centre.²⁰⁵ All the existing buildings are preserved and besides them new, high rise, considered by Aliaj, Lulo and Myftiu as post modern buildings, are proposed. Bolles and Wilson propose massive greenery along the spine to accentuate the linearity that characterizes it. They went further on the idea on linearity and removed the north end of the axis i.e. the train station building. While the German-Australian office Bolles and Wilson open the space for the development of the axis further towards the north, in Architecture Studio's proposal, the north end of the spine is closed with a green area, The Mecanoo Architecten also proposes the extension of the boulevard to the north, and furthermore they propose for the future, the possibility of a metro connection from train station to the Tirana International Airport Mother Teresa.

On the other hand, Architecture Studio, which is more familiar to the Mediterranean people emphasized the Mediterranean way of life in their project by socialising the streets with their proposal of many cafés and shops. The residential environments are redesigned by integrating the green elements, while the first and second floors of apartment blocks along the Zogu i I Boulevard are renovated and converted to small shops and businesses. They proposed the reconstruction of the Train station building and converting it into a business centre. Multifunctional buildings are another novelty in the Architecture Studio proposal. Architecture Studio paid attention to the continuity of the spine. One of the strong points of the project is the emphasis put on the two axes, the Boulevard and Lana River, as the *cardo and decumanus of the city centre*. *Cardo* is the politico-administrative and business trade axis and *decumano* an important city park.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ Alia, B., Lulo, K., and Myftiu G. *Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development* (Albanian version), p.132, (translated from Albanian by the author).

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

The Dutch office, Mecanoo, reorganized the centre by increasing the density of the buildings and by introducing a transparent, seven storey high building in the centre which shapes the centre toward the ministries and with its transparency they want to keep the axis untouched.

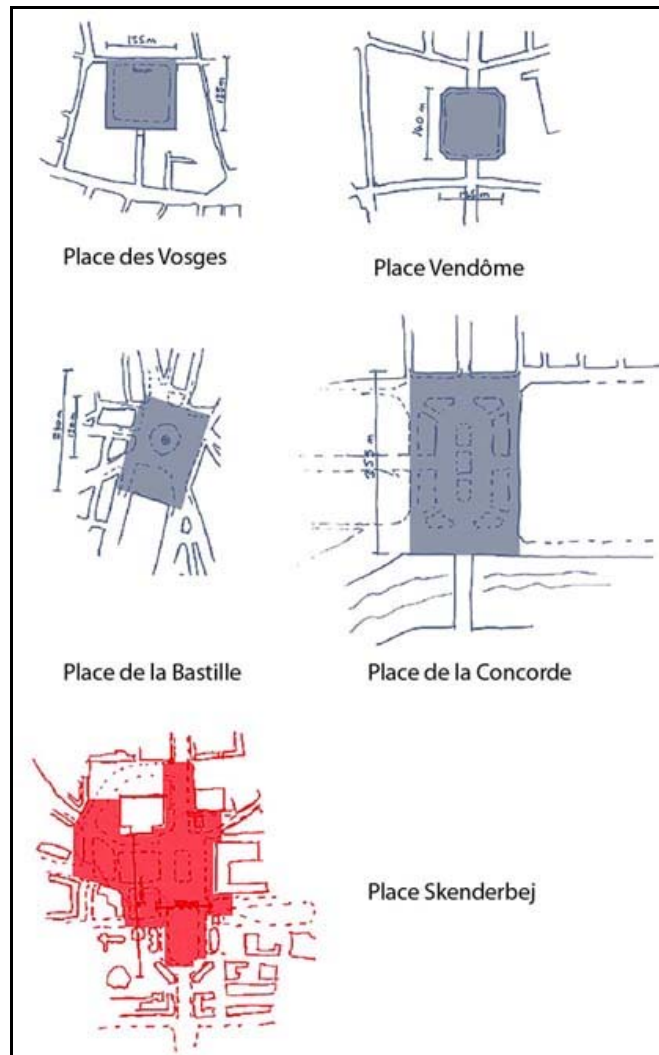


Figure 54: The Scale Exercise by Architecture Studio comparing the dimensions and the form of Scanderbeg Square with the historic squares of Paris. (Source: Municipality of Tirana Archive)

Another important aspect to be regarded as a crucial part of the conceptual plan was the pedestrian and vehicular movement. All the three short listed offices kept the centre for pedestrians and organized the vehicular traffic in ring roads. Bolles and Wilson proposed a two lane ring around the centre, 60 m wide roads and very large parking areas lots outside the city.

Other two architectural offices proposed three ring roads arranged into three different levels. One around the centre, another one as an urban ring and the third one the one as a peripheral road around Tirana. Mecanoo's concept is based on a good balance between public and private transport, while as aforementioned the centre is dedicated to the pedestrians.

Mecanoo also proposes a tramway line along the Lana River. The river banks are not used similarly by Architecture Studio which instead of considering Lana as a trajectory for the tramway, they proposed to rearrange it as a pleasant park for leisure activities. The tram train that they suggested by crossed the centre from North to South following the Boulevards *Zogu I* and *Deshmoret e Kombit*, which they propose to transform into a green carpet for pedestrians. This carpet is interconnected to the tramway line.

There are several features of the projects that make them distinguished from each other, but Mecanoo's proposal for removing the stadium, located near to the University Plaza is one of the most radical ones. They propose to transform that environment into a city park to be used by the students.

The lake, which is just behind the university building, is currently within a city park. Architecture studio does not propose the relocation of the stadium, but they increase the number of trees in both sides of the lake.

A general evaluation on the principal decisions of the three projects can be made. Mecanoo Architekten's proposal was realistic from the technical point of view, but in the centre they brought forth a number of interventions that were found "radical and consequently expensive".²⁰⁷ Their master plan was based on the division of the city centre into 8 zones characterized by the identity, the urban structure and the atmosphere specific to each of them. These zones had to be treated differently.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

Mecanoo designers proposed new urban spaces that would potentially transform Tirana in accordance with the historical European capital city models. The urban blocks to be reconstructed in the form of perimeter blocks constitute one of the most characteristic aspects of this idea.

What was interesting in Bolles and Wilson's urban project was the conservation of the modern architectural heritage of the city centre. They give particular importance to the existing modern blocks built after the World War II, i.e. during the Socialist regime. In other words, they searched the identity of Tirana in the modern heritage of the city.

The winning project's main concept was to transform of the city in a big garden; this is reflected in the increased density of the existing green areas in Tirana, in the new park in the train station region, in the planted Skanderbeg Square and university plaza and in the Youth Park and new proposed greenery behind the Dajti Hotel.

The projects that were proposed competed with each other for the new vision of Tirana. Each of them had its strong and weak points but in general they all were equally valuable.

4.5 Three Selected Entries of the Competition and the Students Project of "Durana"

It is already mentioned the process of competition which started with the invitations and followed by the applications of more than 45 international offices from which three were selected to design a conceptual master plan for Tirana city centre. The three shortlisted offices for 1 hour each presented and answered the questions of the jury. All the jury were open to the public and the presence of the national televisions made it a transparent jury. At the same day the jury announced its verdict about the winner of this competition announcing Architecture Studio as the winning office among Bolles and Wilson and Mecanoo Architecten offices.

Based on the procès-verbal of Tirana Municipality date 24/07/2003 Fatos Nano on the behalf of the jury appreciated Architecture Office for best achieving the Municipality's objectives mentioned so far.

On the other hand in a personal interview by author to Elia Zenghelis as a jury member, asked about what made the proposal of the Architecture Studio the winning project, Zenghelis thinks that behind the competition process are some political views that had changed the jury decision. Personally he had voted for Bolles and Wilson proposal and classified the Architecture Studio as his less favourite one. Furthermore Zenghelis communicated that the jury's selection was not the present result, in other words Architecture Studio was not the winning project decided by the jury.²⁰⁸ Professor Zenghelis do not remember how they “reached the result”²⁰⁹ or he abstained from enunciating his thoughts about this issue. He mentioned instead the project and proposal that the students of the Berlage Institute made in Albania as a good example that should be taken in consideration.

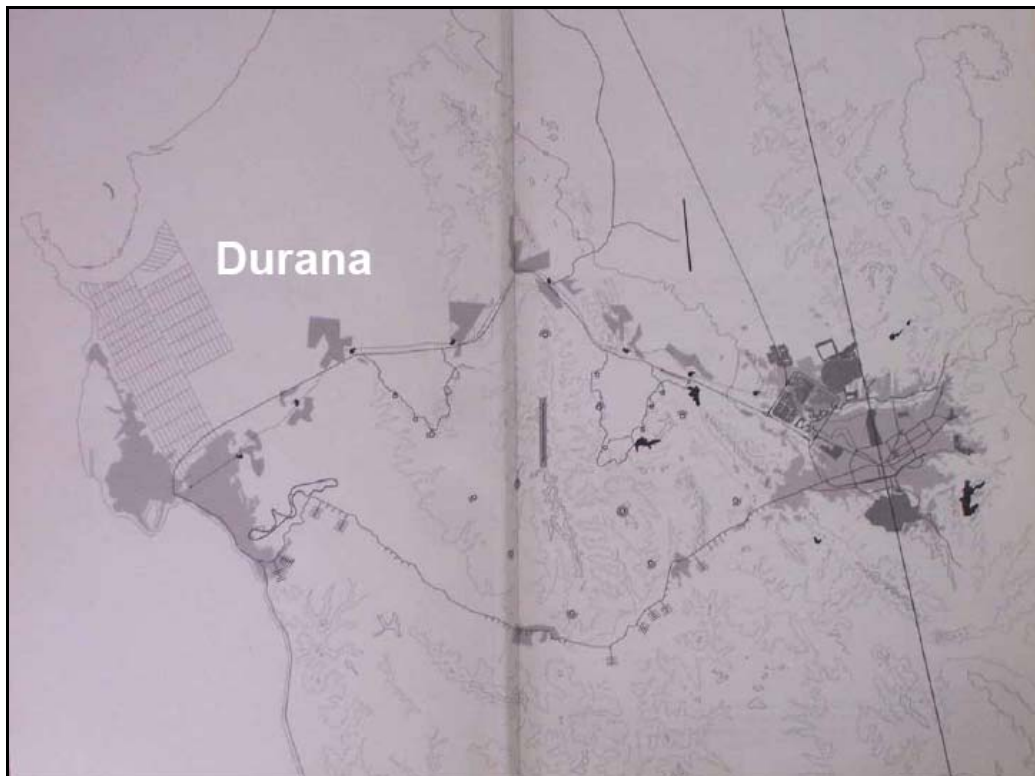


Figure 55 : Durana: the new vision the Berlage institute proposed for Tirana and Durres cities.(Source: Berlage institute study, Municipality Digital Archive)

²⁰⁸ Zenghelis, E. (2008, April 10). Thoughts on Competition. (O. Durmishi, Interviewer)

²⁰⁹ Ibid

Indeed, the research and vision developed by the Berlage Institute is very different from what the three offices proposed and from the way they approached to the project. The students of the Berlage Institute consider Tirana “not as a city in transformation but as a metropolis in formation”.²¹⁰ Since they call their project and their vision for “Tirana as Archipelago” they consider the new idea of the city in four main points. First they are after the “reinforcements of patterns and structures” by introducing a “platform for the installation of a more conscious urban condition”²¹¹ Then as “modes of concentration” Berlage Institute study puts forward the “configuration of strategic centralities”²¹²

The idea of the “parallel Tirana” they thought of as “radical new possibilities for development of Tirana” and the union of Tirana city with Durres city into a new metropolis called Durana, are worth mentioning here.²¹³ (Figure 55)

²¹⁰ Berlage institute study(Municipality Archive)

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid

CHAPTER 5

ELABORATION OF THE URBAN PROJECT FOR THE CITY CENTER

It is already mentioned that Tirana City Centre International Competition was a conceptual master plan competition. The Architecture Studio, winner of the second phase, elaborated the details of the conceptual design during the third phase, bringing the project into a more precise state for the implementation.

The jury listed a number of points to be considered by the winning team during the project elaboration. The journalist Belina Budini enumerates these jury suggestions made during the presentation.²¹⁸

First they asked them to keep the main axis of the city, then to preserve the identity of Tirana, to plan and develop ideas for the areas near the centre, to keep and enrich parks and recreation areas, to create optimal accessibility for the motorized traffic near the centre, to increase possibilities of public transport like subway and tramway lines and to finish the project in an optimal time.²¹⁹

5.1 General Layout

The designers of the Architecture Studio see the determination of zones as important since they are after the preservation of the diversity of the urban landscape.²²⁰ (Figure56) According to general layout plan Architecture Studio proposed in the

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Architecture Studio unpublished Report, digital archive of Tirana Municipality, p.34

Garden City, zones V1 and U3 in the plan, is aimed the preservation of the dominating planted aspect and existing buildings. The extension of previously planned Parliament and Prime Minister Buildings

While interrelating the green spaces with leisure activities and public facilities.²²¹

The squares zone that of Skanderbeg (P1), Train Station (P2), Market (P3) and the University (P4) are zones were Architecture Studio proposed commercial, cultural and leisure activities while the institutional and heritage buildings will be highlighted. The project for Skanderbeg Square aims its organization by introducing constructions harmonious with the Cultural Palace and the National Museum. “Punctuations with towers that must be remarkable buildings of a great architectural quality will pace and frame the square.”²²²

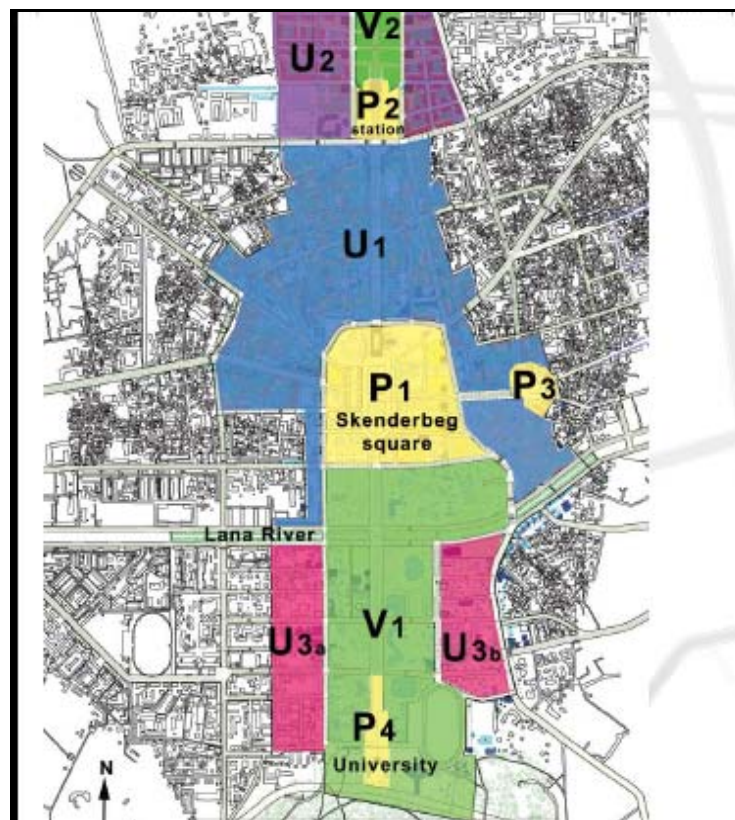


Figure 56: General Layout of Architecture Studio Proposal (Source: digital archive of Tirana Municipality, Architecture Studio Unpublished Report, p. 37)

²²¹ Ibid., p.37

²²² Ibid.

The zone U1 presently a zone that is mostly composed by apartment blocks is aimed to be structured and renovated. As mentioned in the report “the constructions will be renewed by following the alignment of the roads to form a dense fabric but one that is nevertheless airy due to the visual openings into the heart of the blocks and public squares.”²²³ The same is for the zone U2, where they propose blocks of the same type.

5.2 Functional Organization

After defining the general layout of the spaces the French office makes a general functional organization of the spaces. (Figure 57)

The area around the Ministry complex and that on the south of the Lana River which includes *Deshmoret e Kombit* Boulevard and the University Plaza, in the masterplan project is preserved and its functions are aimed by Architecture Studio to be strengthened.²²⁴ They design the boulevard as a planted promenade which most probably is inspired from the French tradition of promenades.

In the Skanderbeg square they propose cultural and leisure activities, cafes and shopping in order to smash the idea of being a civic centre where only administrative buildings are situated.²²⁵

The buildings along the other boulevard on the south i.e. Zogi i I indicated as zones U1 and U2 zones are preserved in the project for shops and small businesses, while at the north end of the spine the Trains station is planned to be a business centre.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid., p.70

²²⁵ Ibid.



Figure 57: Functional Plan proposed by Architecture Studio (Source: Architecture Studio Unpublished Report, digital archive of Tirana Municipality, p. 71)

5.3 Road System

The traffic is one of the main problems not only for the centre of Tirana but for the entire city. To find a solution to this disturbing aspect of the Tirana city life Architecture Studio has studied the transportation network depending on their master plan and the traffic system they already proposed in this plan. (Figure 58, 59)

Having reconsidering these plans they have formulated their main idea based on a number of principles that are enumerated as: “to favour accessibility for all modes of transportation, to ensure high performing inter-modality in connection with car parks outside the city centre and to ensure links with the different neighbouring districts.”²²⁶

The project suggests two emergent measures for the present situation and the chaos that the motorized traffic has caused at the city centre:

- “- to prohibit the free crossing of the city centre by drivers in transit.
- to restrict the use of cars as much as possible and to this end improve the mass [public] transportation networks.”²²⁷

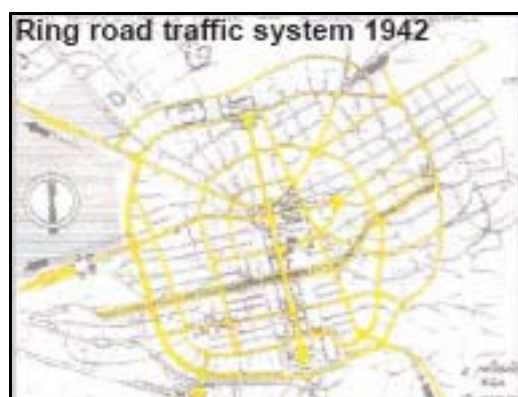


Figure 58: Ring road, traffic system of 1942 which has very similarities with the system Architecture studio proposed (Architecture Studio unpublished Report, pp. 46-47, Municipality of Tirana Digital Archive)

²²⁶ Architecture Studio unpublished Report, p.46

²²⁷ Ibid.

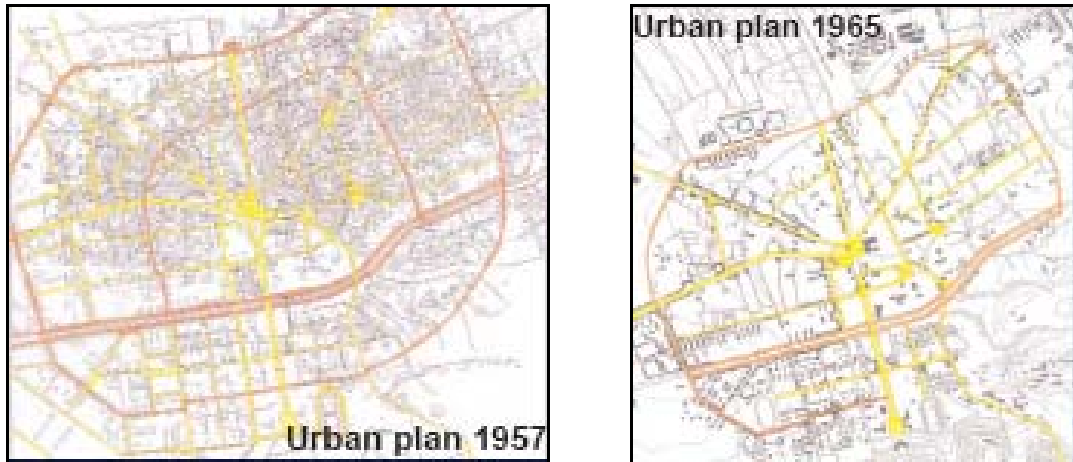


Figure 59: Road system solutions for Tirana in different years (Architecture Studio unpublished Report, pp. 46-47)

The illustration below gives an idea about the three hierarchic road systems Architecture Studio proposed.



Figure 60: Road System proposed by Architecture Studio, Legend: in red: the inner ring roads; in rose: the outer peripheral road; in orange: roads radiating from the centre; in yellow: pedestrian roads (Architecture Studio unpublished Report, p. 47)

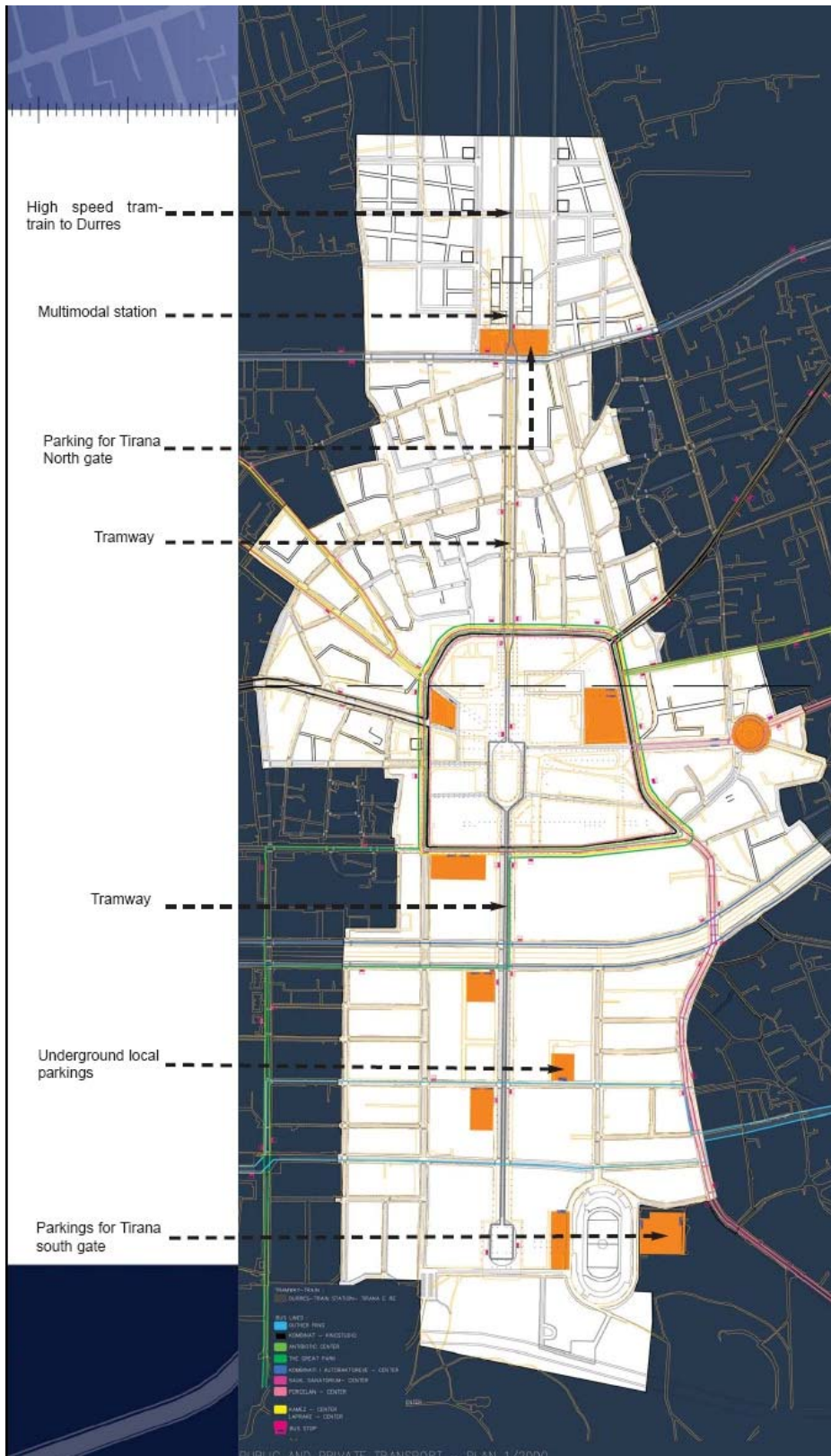


Figure 61: Public transport network, Legend: Light Blue: Outer ring, Black: Kombinat-Kinostudio, Light Green: Antibiotic Centre, Green: Great Park, Blue: Kombinati i Autotraktoreve-Centre, Light Pink: Sauk, Sanatorium-Centre, Pink: Porcelan-Centre, Yellow: Kamez, Laprak -Centre, Deep Pink: Bus stops, Grey: Train and Tramway (Architecture Studio unpublished Report, p. 53)

According to the proposal of the Architecture Studio for Public-Private transport (Figure 61) car parking are solved mostly underground, Skanderbeg square is preserved only for pedestrians and a tram line connects the Nene Tereza Plaza in front of the University building to Train station.

5.4 Specific Project Areas

5.4.1 Boulevard *Zogu I* and Boulevard *Deshmoret e Kombit*

Natural elements are integrated and brought in Architecture Studio urban design project inside the two boulevards, *Zogu I* and *Deshmoret e Kombit* creating the main axis of the centre and forming a completed avenue. The Central park is named the zone where they most integrate the greenery to the existing buildings. (Figure62)

The Central Park includes theme gardens that overlook the banks of the Lana River: the Pyramid Garden will offer its lawn and the shade of its trees to walkers in the summer.

-The Garden of a Thousand Scents will be a patchwork of flowerbeds, one planted with rose's bushes, the other with lavender, another with orange trees etc.

-A pedestrian walkway will connect this garden to the Pyramid garden.

-The garden of the Little Lake will be heavily forested to enhance the light reflected by the mirror of the lake.²²⁸

Beside the natural elements the axis is treated as an important transportation artery. French office proposes a tram train line which will link University with the Train station, converting so the boulevards into important public transportation axes.

²²⁸ Architecture Studio unpublished Report, digital archive of Tirana Municipality, p.30



Figure 62: The Central Park proposed by Architecture Studio (Architecture Studio Unpublished Report, digital archive of Tirana Municipality, p. 31)

5.4.2 Skanderbeg Square

Skanderbeg plaza is located just in the middle of the axis, it is known as the centre of Tirana. There is located the Albanian hero Skanderbeg's monument, from whom the square took its name. It has a particular significance for Tirana citizens and Albanians.

In the transition period the plaza changed a lot and its situation was chaotic. Architects and urban planners of the Architecture Studio after studying the scale and the form of the square of 188752 m², and after making a comparison of it with other

European city squares they state their intention in the design of the centre. Thus they aim to “shape the plaza and qualify it on a pedestrian scale, in harmony with the historic buildings”²²⁹ that surround the plaza. They “propose to build the contours of the plaza to offer a place for walking in the shade and which could host cafes, terraces, public benches etc.”²³⁰



Figure 63: 3D View of the Scanderbeg square designed by Architecture Studio (Source: Architecture Studio unpublished Report, digital archive of Tirana Municipality, p.7

First of the three zones of the project area, which is on the south of the square, where in fact they do not make any serious intervention, since that is the historical part of the centre and they keep it as it is by changing only the plants in front of them.

The very centre of Scanderbeg Square was reserved for cafes. They propose to plant there a number of palm trees to remind the people that Tirana is a Mediterranean city.

²²⁹ Ibid p.72

²³⁰ Ibid.

In the northern part of the square they tried to obey the jury suggestions. They keep the axis and try to mark it additionally by placing two pavilions on the two sides of the boulevard.

The illustration below expresses what they mean by the transformation of the city centre. Government historical buildings on the south, the “gate” they propose on the north of the square by also punctuating the axis and the palms planted in front of the Cultural Palace give a clearer understating of what they propose. Generally it can be said that the central plaza is defined and brought in a more human scale by bordering the opened, undefined spaces with canopies and green areas.

5.4.3 The Train Station

The Train Station has been the central station of the city until the change of the regime. As the central station of the city it was the main gate for those who arrive in the city by train, this last was the main mode of transportation until recently. Thus it is quite significant its location at the north end of the north south axis, i.e. the City Spine consequently having an equal significance with the University building situated on the other end of it. After 1990 its situation is not good. Even though it has a great potential and though its usage is not as high as it was during the communist period, the railway continue to be an important way of transport, especially by students that travel every day from Durres city to Tirana and vice versa in order to follow their University studies.

Architecture Studio plans this strategic region of 33889 m² in a “multi-modal interconnection point of altogether the railway network, the road network and the public transport network”,²³¹

They design as a recreational area the region behind the train station and they define then, the station building “as a city’s door, opening on the countryside”.²³²

²³¹ Ibid., p.80

²³² Ibid.

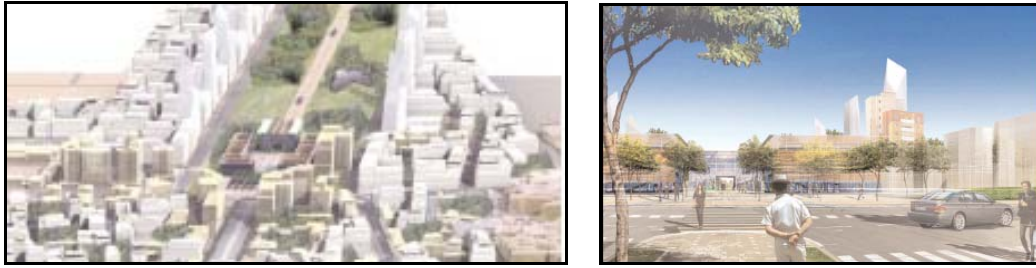


Figure 64: 3D image of the Train Station region designed by Architecture Studio with the proposed green area after it. (Architecture Studio unpublished Report, digital archive of Tirana Municipality, p.80)

Figure 65: Train Station Plaza designed by Architecture Studio (Architecture Studio unpublished Report, digital archive of Tirana Municipality, p.81)

On the both sides of the recreational areas they have located mixed zones of housing, small businesses and offices. 161453 m² is the designed area in the back side of the train station building, where every building block have its own green area.

5.4.4 University Plaza

Train Station building is situated on the northern end of the spine, while on the southern end there is the University building. As its history and architecture have already been aforementioned, the fact that the University building is situated at the end of the spine illustrates the importance given to the University as an institution. The plaza that is in front of it is being redesigned by Architecture Studio designers. The area to be designed was about 28.676 m².²³³ They propose to frame the University building with the help of the trees to be planted. A car parking is thought to be fitted in the basement and the replacement of the existing fountain with a simple water basin are other novelties they introduce to the citizens.²³⁴

²³³ Ibid., p.112

²³⁴ Ibid., p.86



Figure 66: University plaza. 3D view of the proposed changes. (Architecture Studio unpublished Report, p.87)

5.4.5 The Lana River

As mentioned before, the Lana River is one of the lungs of the city. It is an important element of the city i.e. *decumanus*. Therefore, the Architecture Studio thought to change it into a park with a lot of greenery. They propose promenades on the banks of the river while footbridges that will be used as bookshops are another interesting proposal of the French designers.²³⁵



Figure 67: View from a bridge on the Lana River (Architecture Studio unpublished Report, digital archive of Tirana Municipality, p.32)

²³⁵ Ibid., p.72

5.4.6 Residential Areas

According to the general layout plan prepared by Architecture Studio zones U1 and U2 are residential zones with existing apartment blocks and the ones to be constructed respectively. They propose the construction of new buildings in U1 zone along the main streets the first floors of which are proposed for shops and small businesses serving outside-in the block, while the left spaces are proposed as gardens.²³⁶(Figure: 68)

U2 is a zone with new, free constructions so that Architecture Studio proposed that “the blocks will only be formed with new built-up areas.”²³⁷(Figure 69)



Figure 68: The modification Architecture Studio proposed for the existing residential zone in *Zogi i I* Boulevard. (Source: Architecture Studio Unpublished Report, p.42, Municipality of Tirana Digital Archive)

²³⁶ Ibid., p.42

²³⁷ Ibid.

Residential area of U3 zone is a little different form these two others. More importance was paid to that zone during the communist regime because the government staff houses were located there. Architecture Studio does not make any intervention in this area besides reorganizing the private gardens within the blocks.²³⁸ (Figure 70)

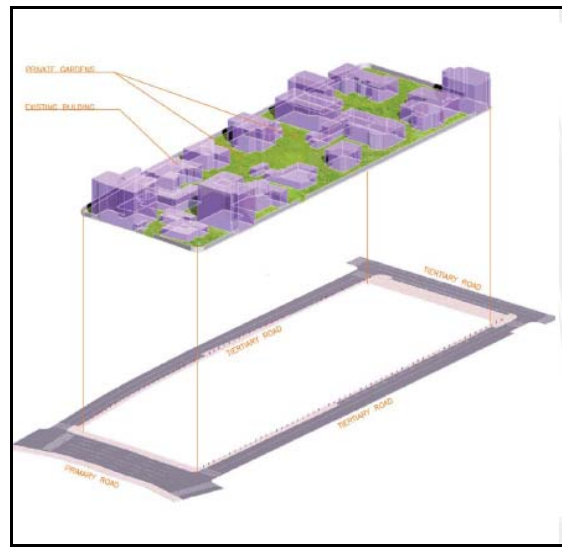
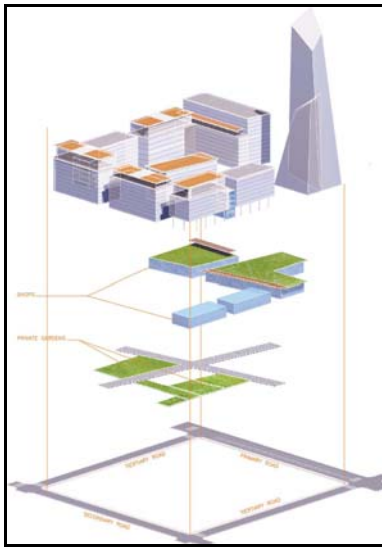


Figure69: Examples of the apartment blocks in U2 Zone (Source: Architecture Studio Unpublished Report, p.43, Municipality of Tirana Digital Archive)

Figure70: Example of a block with no new buildings in zone U3 (Source: Architecture Studio Unpublished Report, p.43, Municipality of Tirana Digital Archive)

5.5 Third Phase: Further Competitions

The master plan is going to be completed with other international competitions aiming at developing the sub-areas of the centre. Up to now, the Municipality has

²³⁸ Ibid.

organized a number of other competitions, including the three tower buildings, an urban complex and the one for Skanderbeg Square.

Regarding this initiative of the municipality, Elia Zenghelis, who was a jury member in the master plan competition and the Skanderbeg square competition, Rodo Tisnado, representative of Architecture Studio, Martin Rein, MVRDV office representative, with whom we made interviews, all find the idea of organizing international competitions positive. Rein stressed that “the experience that comes from abroad is a part of success” and it does not matter whether the projects are going to be realized or not.²³⁹ The crucial point in these competitions is to attract the attention of the international and well known architects and urban designers.

Zenghelis, referring to Edi Rama’s idea, whom he considers a person with “amazing visions”, asserts that the competitions have served to realize the mayor’s aspirations of gathering the international architects’ interests, and as a jury member he defines the procedure of jury as very exciting.²⁴⁰

Rodo Tisnado who represents Architecture Studio, thinks that beside the competitions which in themselves bring a novelty to the city, the funds founded, to make the implementation of these works possible, is also a very good aspect of the whole process. The financial support from the Government of Kuwait, in the last competition held in 2008, is a success of the Albanian government.²⁴¹ The funding requirements of the local government has also been met by the participation of the private developers, for the upgrading, redefinition and consequently the regenerated appearance of the city is seen as very positive even by Albanian architects who were critical on the way the projects were obtained. The graphic below illustrates the chronologic order of the phases of the master plan, the competitions held for the sub-areas and the towers, indicating also the competing studios of the ongoing

²³⁹ Rein, M. (2008, April 10). Thoughts on Competition. (O. Durmishi, Interviewer)

²⁴⁰ Zenghelis, E. (2008, April 10). Thoughts on Competition. (O. Durmishi, Interviewer)

²⁴¹ Tisnado, R. (2008, April 10). Thoughts on Competition. (O. Durmishi, Interviewer)

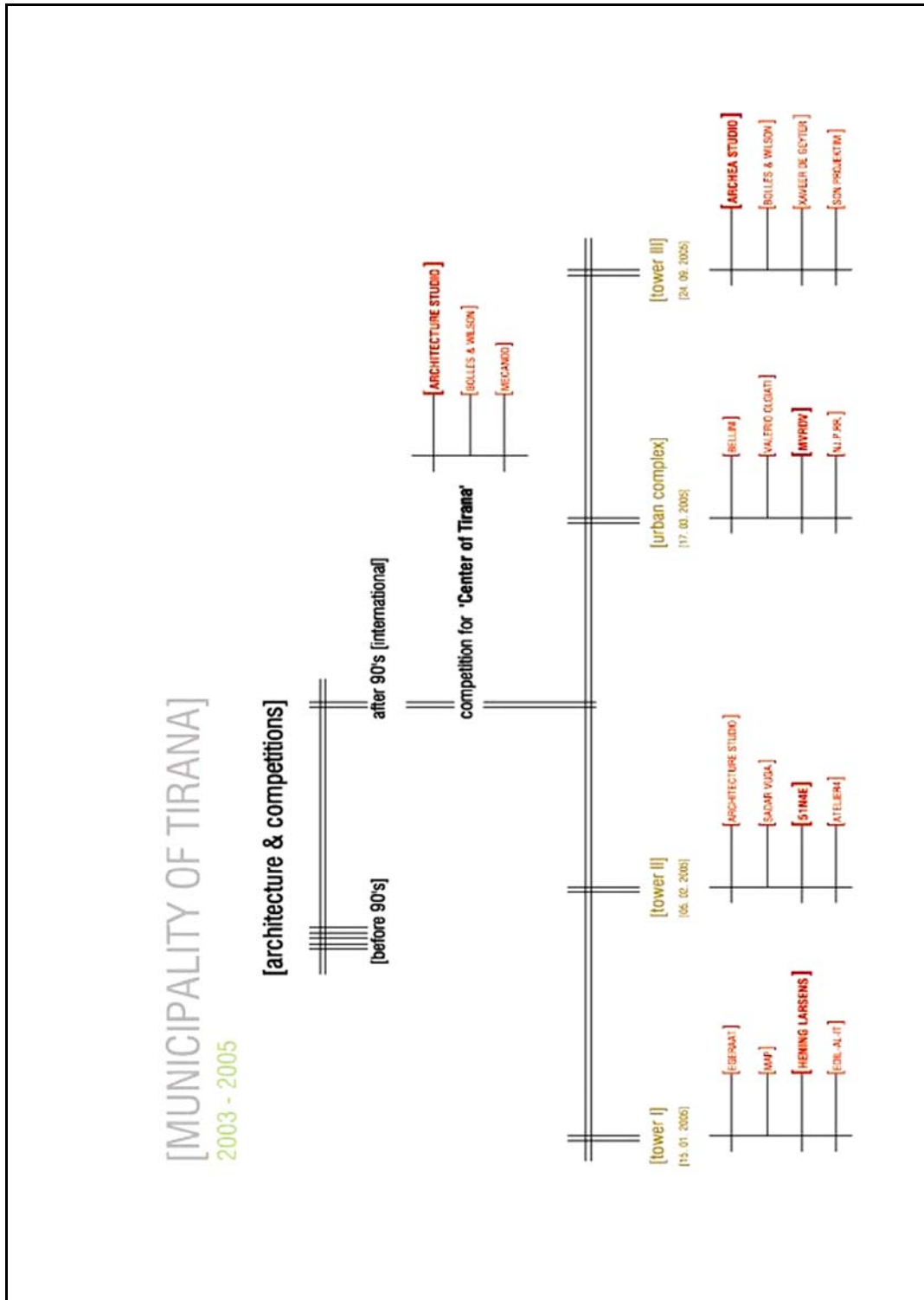


Figure 71: Chronological order of the held competitions (Drawn by Architect Adelina Greca, Municipality Archive)

competitions, all evaluated by international juries. In the graphic, the last competition, i.e. Revitalisation of Skanderbeg Square, is absent, because the graphic was prepared before this latter was held. (Figure 70)

The first competition for the first tower in Tirana was held in January 15th 2005. Four were the participants of the competition: Egeraat(Netherlands), MAP(Barcelona), Henning Larsens (Denmark) and Edil Al-it(Albania) among which Henning Larsens proposal were selected the one fitting into the surrounding urban landscape.

Henning Larsens Tegnestue A/S [HLT] designed the tower, called the “Eyes of Tirana”. It is the first tower building that will be erected in the Tirana centre. The building concept is evaluated as the most appropriate and applicable for the centre of the city. “Situated in the city centre the building will be the first visible result of a large-scale ambitious master plan for Tirana.”²⁴² In the Albanian summer the big atriums will be cool and pleasant and will appear like “eyes” in the tower overlooking Tirana with the high mountains to the east and the dry plain to the south.²⁴³ This is “The eyes of Tirana” tower concept. (Figure 72)



Figure 72: “Eyes of Tirana” by Henning Larsens Tegnestue A/S [HLT] (Source: Municipality of Tirana digital archive)

²⁴² Henning Larsens Tegnestue A/S [HLT] report (Source: Municipality of Tirana digital archive)

²⁴³ Ibid.

Architecture office 51N4E, from Belgium was the winner of the second competition, which was held on February 5th 2005. Architecture Studio (France), Sadar Vuga (Slovenia) and Atelier 4(France) were three other offices that joined the competition. (Figure 72)51N4E office in the project report presented to the jury set their objective for the second tower of Tirana centre as:

To develop a high-rise [building] for Tirana is to deal with the reality of Tirana. Importing models that already have been established will not do the trick. The opportunity that the specific reality of Tirana offers is to construct a building that would be unimaginable in Europe. Thinking outside the box, this high-rise project can turn things upside down: not importing European standards, but making a real contribution from Tirana to Europe instead.²⁴⁴



Figure 73: The tower designed by 51N4E office (Municipality of Tirana digital archive)

What is particular in this project is the use of traditional materials, so that the tower will not to be alien in the surrounding environment. At the beginning the 51N4E architects thought to use travertine, a dominating material in the buildings surrounding the Skanderbeg Square, but after a field investigation they had found out

²⁴⁴ Municipality of Tirana digital archive

that this material is not very welcomed in Tirana so they decided to use a traditional stone like “Berat stone”

Although this tower is under construction and it is probably worthless to talk about its location we must say that its position is very critical because the significance of the mosque and the clock tower as landmarks looks to be decreasing. Architecture Studio’s aim to punctuate the Skanderbeg square seems to make these towers compete with the sight we are familiar to see in Tirana. Its height surpasses the limits of being harmonious to the urban context of the square.

The realization of an urban complex, a mixed used centre, was already in the conceptual master plan of the Architecture Studio. Four offices were invited: Bellini (Italy), Valerio Olgiati (Switzerland), MVRDV (Netherlands) and NJ.P.RR. (Albania). The office from Netherland, MVRDV, was the winning office for this project. (Figure 74)

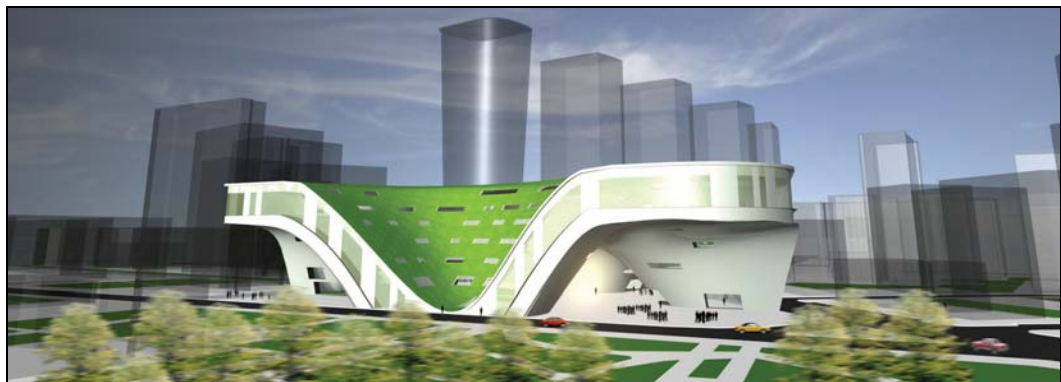


Figure74: 3D view of the mixed used centre designed by MVRDV office, (Source: Municipality of Tirana digital archive)

The location of this complex is next to the tower designed by 51N4E studio, on the South-East of the Skanderbeg Square, a situation which affected the design criteria of the team:

The urban transition of Tirana becomes dramatically visible. It is highlighted by the development of a ring of towers that surround the central square and that turn the centre of Tirana into a ‘space’. How can the development of the fringes of these developments such as the Toptani Square contribute to this urban suggestion? What ‘life’ can be imagined at the foot of this gesture? By creating a horizontal Figure, the towers get a pedestal, a podium. ‘It dramatizes’ the urban initiative.²⁴⁵

The competition of the fourth tower was won by the Italian **ARCHEA STUDIO**. This project, “entitled “4 ever green”, was chosen above Bolles and Wilson (Germany), Son Projektim (Albania) and Xaveer de Geyter Architects (Belgium) because of the way it manages to fit the tower into its urban context and create public spaces by narrowing the base of the building.²⁴⁶ (Figure 75) The following is stated in the jury report:

“The buildings motion and skin reinvent tradition, inspired the waves of the traditional fabrics from the Tirana area, transforming them into a texture which gives the building’s facades a vibratile, ethereal nature”²⁴⁷

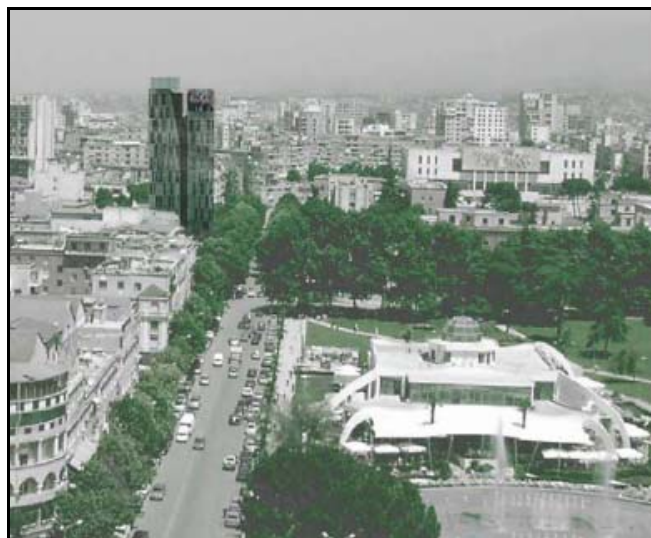


Figure 75: The tower designed by ARCHEA STUDIO (Municipality of Tirana digital archive)

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

The competition for the Rehabilitation of Skanderbeg Square is the more recent competition held. It was organized on April, 10th 2008. There were 6 offices participating in the competition which are: 51N4E the winner, MVRDV, MAP Daniel Libeskind, Architecture Studio and Atena Studio, from Belgium, Netherlands, Spain, New York, France and Italy respectively.

51N4E office has already won a competition on the towers and it is one of the projects that are being built. The project for the rehabilitation of Skanderbeg Square is financed by Kuwait. The project cost is 10 million Euros and the work for its implementation has already started. The Skanderbeg Square is going to have its new image in 2009.

According to the project, the Skanderbeg Square will be raised up in form of a pyramid at the top of which the entire square can be seen. Some fountains of different sizes and different colours are proposed within the square. They preserved the existing buildings, showing respect to the cultural and historical heritage of the square. They propose some new buildings of the same height thought to be as business centres. At the same time a civic building was added to the centre between Tirana International Hotel and National Museum. (Figure 76)

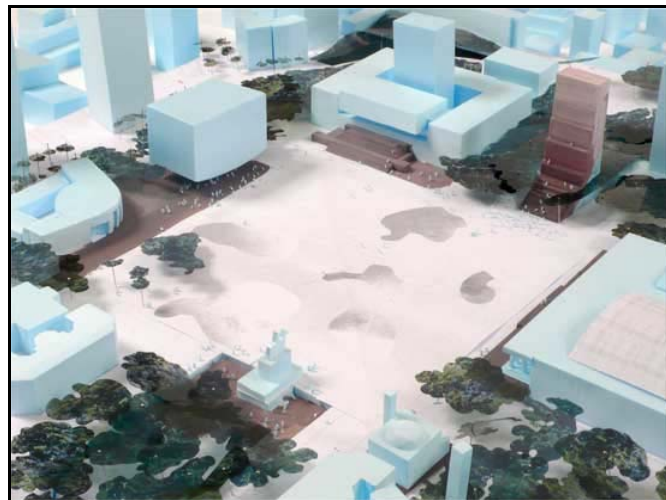


Figure 76: 51N4E proposal for Skanderbeg Square,
(Source: <http://www.skyscrapercity.com> ,
<http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?p=19758257>, accessed on 15.08.2008)

There is a broad range of competition types and each has its strengths and weaknesses. One is better suited to satisfy the intentions of Tirana municipality and one may be worse. But, what counts is the diffusion of the good practice which therefore contributes to the social progress.

The real test will be whether the competitions held up to now in Tirana leads us to the most successful regeneration of the sites, and whether the winning scheme will be robust enough to resist to the problems and forces encountered during the implementation processes. But if you believe in the transformative power of regeneration projects, the leading role of design will bring innovations searched and therefore the new vision of Tirana.

5.6 Implementation Problems

The Council of Territory Regulation of Albania, the head of which is the Prime Minister, Fatos Nano at that time, approved the implementation of the master plan proposed by Architecture Studio. In the meeting of the council, Nano defended the vision brought by the French designers as bringing the world experience to Tirana, and added that he saw the master plan as a new start for other international competitions.²⁴⁸ At the same time, the prime minister found the new vision of Tirana as a ticket to enter the “urban map of Europe”, an initiative of King Zog that was interrupted by the regime.²⁴⁹

In his speech Nano not only approved the master plan but he also put forward the support of the government for its implementation. In fact, the competition was originated by the German government which sponsored the competition, but of course the local government is the main agent responsible for what is happening. With the competition process it aimed to catch the attention of the international investors and to attract the foreign capital to the city. Even though the Architecture Studio proposal was the less expensive one, which according to Aliaj gave them the

²⁴⁸ Fatos Nano, speech on the Council of Territory Regulation, Albanian Public Television archive.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

trophy²⁵⁰, Albanian government could not afford its implementation at all. Consequently the main visible problem is the lack of funds.

This problem opened up the question of the scale of the realization. The implementation of some parts of the project has already started. The construction of certain buildings and lately Skanderbeg Square Revitalization is finance by His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of the State of Kuwait. The donation is offered according to the Contribution Agreement, signed between Amiri Diwan of the State of Kuwait and the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania, in the City of Tirana, on the 25th of January 2008. Although some Albanian constructing firms are willing to participate in the funding, they are not very strong financially. Moreover the project of Tirana city centre is a big project that probably will last for several years, so a kind of hesitation is seen in certain private partners.

As it is seen in the case of Skanderbeg Square, the investors prefer to build up the area parcel by parcel.

Zenghelis, one of the members of the jury, considers the Skanderbeg Square competition to “to have started on very good footings”.²⁵¹ As far as it is seen, Zenghelis considers the attempt of the local government in attaining financial support for revitalization of Skanderbeg Square as the proper way to be followed in other competitions. He finds it a very good tactic that should continue, because in this manner a solution for the implementation of the projects can be found. In other words private finance is a successful sector that should be searched for.

Problem related to landownership is another problematic issue besides the lack of financial funds needed for the implementation of the entire project. If the land is occupied, or if it has got an owner it will not be easy to construct there. After the communist period when the land had one owner and that was the state, in the process of establishment of the liberalist economic system, “land grabbing” has been a problem for Albania especially in the transition period. The same piece of land may

²⁵⁰ Aliaj, B., Lulo, K., & Myftiu, G. *Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development* p.132

²⁵¹ Zenghelis, E. (2008, April 10). Thoughts on Competition. (O. Durmishi, Interviewer)

happen to have more than just one owner. In this situation in order to build, their permission should be taken which is not an easy step.

Another important question mark is the political agency. It cannot be said that Albania has a stable political landscape, although the municipal politics has been stable for the last years. The local government is administrated by the opposition party; i.e. the Socialist party whose leader is the Mayor of the Municipality Mr. Edi Rama whereas the state is ruled by the Democratic Party whose leader is the Prime Minister Mr. Sali Berisha. Thus, being in such a situation the implementation of the project may have some problems. It is clear that, at the time when the government and the municipality were ruled by the same party, some works went better. For instance, in one of the most problematic traffic nodes at one of the entrances of the city, *Zogu i Zi*, the government designed and started the construction of an interchange which was thought to solve the problem in that joint. A massive structure was built with the investment of the government. When the governmental election was held in Albania and the government of Mr. Fatos Nano passed to the rule of Democratic Party, the construction was not finished yet. With the arrival of Sali Berisha, the *Zogu i Zi* interchange was reconsidered once more in the Council of Territory Regulation. The Council decided to demolish it, and so it was done. (Figure 77, 78)

As far as it is seen, politics have a great role in the project implementation. It may increase the number of project works and their realization or it may cancel them all. What is positive for Tirana case is that the local administration has been stable for a considerable period. Edi Rama has been the mayor of Tirana Municipality for 8 years. Zenghelis defines Rama as a man with amazing visions as he is the chief of the new vision the Tirana has and will encompass.²⁵²

²⁵² Ibid.



Figure 77: View from the demolition of the *Zogu i Zi* interchange.

Figure 78: The present view of the *Zogu i Zi* node.

For the time being, the local residents and the community in general do not have an active role in the implementation of the projects. In the public forums, where the projects are presented the discussants are architects and politicians. The society is more concerned with the complaints of the daily traffic disaster, with the insufficiency of the public parks and with the slow rate of the implementation of the projects.

Various factors appear to be in favour of the realization of the Master Plan and the individual projects, but at the same time, its implementation may be interrupted for many reasons. The time is going to demonstrate whether it is going to be totally realized or not. But something it's sure: the project has started to leave its prints on Tirana.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

During the socialist period, the former cities of the Eastern block had a different type of spatial structure under the *étatist* centralized economy when compared with the western cities, because the forces that formed and transformed them were very different. The real estate market is one of the main forces controlling the urban development in a free market economy. While under the socialist regime the land market and the construction activity were controlled by the state, after the fall of the regime, with the re-introduction of the free market economy, a considerable increase and liberation in the construction activities have been observed in the cities of the former socialist countries.

Since 1990 Tirana has been urbanized rapidly. The urban growth being mostly residential might have slowed down lately, but the number of residential buildings constructed continues to rise each year. This is directly related with the flow of population to Tirana for the last two decades and also with the changing political culture as well as obviously with social, economical and political changes in Albania. The social structure of the democratic Tirana after 1991 is very different from the one in the socialist time. Contradictory to how it was under the socialist regime, people have started to be identified with their religion and the region they come from. The North-South distinction is strengthened with the newcomers to Tirana from the North of Albania perceived by the others as “primitives trying to integrate into the metropolitan way of life”. These kinds of social problems and others like the

unemployment and the increase of crime rate are due to the social changes faced in the transition period.

From the cultural point of view, Albania has a Mediterranean culture with a people having strong family roots. The practice of living on rent is being experienced lately in this country, where every family had its own house. The Albanian people have always struggled to own one. The existing residential buildings were mostly constructed after 1945. They can be classified as standardized architectural designs belonging to the period up to 1990. After that date, the residential buildings have mostly been constructed without an architect, which is characteristic of the post-socialist period in Albania.

In order to totally eliminate the private estate, both old and not quite old urban structures were torn down to be replaced by complexes of apartment buildings (often prefabricated) of a very modest quality after the World War II and after 1960s in particular.²⁵³ In this way Albania was introduced to the concept of urban renewal, applied by the socialist regime.

In the residential blocks built, flat sizes are rather small compared with the nowadays constructions. The average living space for a family of 5 members was only 30 m² in all types of dwellings in 1990.²⁵⁴ The majority of apartments in the cities had one or two rooms, only a few were composed of three rooms. Generally the material used was prefabricated concrete panels and brick. The dwelling types were basic and simple but they were suitable to fulfil the essential needs of a family. The motto of the period was "a house for everyone and the same for everyone", which may be the main reason why people urge to have their own house in priority.

After 1990 Tirana faced up to a heterogeneous and dense population which was accompanied by urban malfunctions. The urban fabric has changed drastically in the city centre as well as in the suburban areas and mostly in residential ones. As already mentioned, urban transformation means structural changes evident in the morphology of the city and in the urban functions. In other words, it is a process which is often the outcome of actions, a change which may be physical, spatial,

²⁵³ B. Aliaj, K. Lulo and G. Myftiu, Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development, p.62

²⁵⁴ Country profiles on housing sector-Albania p.10

social-cultural or economical. When it is an action that aims to ameliorate the living conditions, then it is either rehabilitation or regeneration, but transformation might be either a spontaneous or a planned change which might be for good or for bad.

The urban transformations that the city of Tirana has been subjected to, show similarities to those observed in other post-socialist cities. The transition to capitalism has deeply affected the city. Urban renewal projects have become one of the keys of urban transformation. "Slum clearance" is one of the objects of urban renewal operations that aim to build better environments to provide people with better living conditions. The existing structure of the city centre is subject to change for this purpose. On the other hand, urban regeneration aims to bring solutions to many social problems and to ameliorate the quality of life in an urban area. Tirana, the capital city of Albania, becoming a metropolis with its growing population, was in need of a prestigious vision for the future in this transition period. The regeneration started with the new movement that the Mayor of the Municipality launched under the slogan "return to identity". In this context, the renovation of the building facades by painting has transformed the city into a lively colourful environment. It is worth mentioning here Edi Rama's decisiveness to tear down the informal structures which made the city respire again, and resulted in his recognition as the "hero" of the period. In fact, his artistic background (being a painter), brought a new concept of urban design in Tirana.

The third effort with a great significance was the designation of a master plan in order to re-find Tirana's lost identity and promote its image in the international level. The latter was the motive that led to the organization of an international competition where prestigious offices of architecture were invited and a number of which showed interest in giving Tirana the new image of "A New European Capital City" and being part of this regeneration process. The work done by Rama was not undertaken before by any other mayor. Of course, a great influence has the combination of the local and state government, being led by the same party. With this initiative, Rama created some standards that are to be appreciated, because this is a long term project that will continue for a long time and his followers have to carry on.

As already mentioned the competition started by sending an invitation to international firms for expression of interest, but based on a procès-verbal done by the municipality this was not the only way of participating in the competition. The

Municipality of Tirana announced them in a number of periodicals the name of which is not maid known.

The invitations were sent to the international architecture and urban design offices, ignoring the Albanian offices. This might have happened for two reasons: first there might be some political linkage to the governments of the countries where the firms to which the invitation was sent were located, like the German Government which is the sponsor of this competition or other connections not being public for unknown reasons. Secondly, the selection of the offices was based on the urban design experience that the offices might have. In this context, Albanian architects and urban designers were discarded from this competition. On the other hand the competition was announced in the Albanian media and there was no restriction in applying in the first phase of the competition, which means that the Albanian designers were aware of the competition that was going to be held. In other words, though no invitation was sent to the Albanian designers they had the possibility and the right to enter to the competition.

At the end of the first phase three shortlisted entries were selected by the jury: Architecture Studio, Mecanoo Arkitekten and Boles and Wilson. In the second phase among three shortlisted offices, Architecture Studio's project was selected as the winning project at the end of the second phase of the international competition held for the regeneration of the city centre. It was July the 24th when the head of the international jury, the Prime Minister of the time, Mr. Fatos Nano, announced the result of the competition. He stated during his speech the points that the jury took into consideration in determining the winning project. First he mentioned the preservation of the vital structures of the capital city, and secondly the insurance of long-term visions of urban development.²⁵⁵ Additionally, Rama, the mayor of the Tirana municipality, besides sharing the same opinion with Nano, believes that the project proposed by the French office is a strong one and describes it as a rug where the history, buildings and spaces of the past, are perfectly well integrated with the

²⁵⁵ <http://www.balkanweb.com>, <http://www.balkanweb.com/sitev4/index.php>

new built-up areas that are planned to fill the empty urban spaces and the recreational areas proposed.²⁵⁶

However, in my opinion, whether the winning project accomplishes these conditions is to be discussed. Although the morphological transformations that the three offices proposed differ from one office to another, the common feature of these proposals is the increase of areas reserved for public facilities, the renovation of the infrastructure by introducing new modes of transportation, and creation of new environments and public spaces. The three conceptual master plan proposals, expressed, in their own way, the designers' awareness of the existing social, economical and spatial values and potentials of the city. To a large extent, all the three entries conserve and enhance the existing historical fabric of the city centre. They all preserve the buildings along the main axis and emphasise the city spine with the new buildings they propose according to their concepts. From this point of view, Architecture Studio's proposal is the project that best achieves the municipality requirements i.e. the preservation of the city spine and the buildings that characterize it. They do not make any intervention to the existing buildings, but instead they locate the new buildings that they propose parallel to the main spine. In this manner, the French designers protect the spine and the historical heritage that it constitutes in its integrity. At the same time they have thought of designing large green areas as the lungs of the city and combined them throughout the city spine with the public spaces and the buildings within it. Architecture Studio thought also for the long term development of the city by establishing new residential areas on the north, as the continuation of the spine. Beside all these design objectives, an important issue in the master plans put forward for Tirana was the identity of the city.

6.1. An Evaluation of the winning Project with regard to Urban Identity

It is complex to transform and even more complex to make the distinction and to attribute an identity for a place like Tirana that is in search of its identity and has, in

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

fact, a mixture of identities. Consequently, alternative identities with different visions of tomorrow were proposed for Tirana.

Identity of a place is as much a function of inter-subjective intentions and experiences as the appearance of the buildings and scenery, and it refers not only to the distinctiveness of individual places but also to the sameness between different places.”²⁵⁷

Based on this definition of identity by Edward Relph, whether these proposals fulfil the desired identity for Tirana, and whether the designers’ inter-subjective intentions and city experience is in the required grade to be reflected into their concepts for the master plan will be briefly discussed here.

Place is a “space with distinct character” argues Christian Norberg-Schulz in his book *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*. Tirana possesses its spirit that makes it different from other cities. How much did the offices experience the city and how much were they aware of the spirit of Tirana? Did they know that during the socialist period the highest building in Albania was the International Hotel located in the very centre of the city, and other buildings were not more than seven floors high?

It is important that during the transition period, the city spine is not touched except the two towers that were built in front of the pyramid, which in reality have received too many critics. In other words, the main axis has preserved its identity for a long time.

The three short listed offices of the master plan competition “preserved the vital structures of the capital city”. A number of towers that were designed on the two sides of the axis in the winning project have been in the centre of discussion for a long period.

The towers constitute a new typology of building introduced to the city. Since they bring a new height pointing the skies, most of the critics argued that they would look alien in the midst of the low rise building types that characterize Tirana. One of the best Albanian critics Fatos Lubonja, in one of his essays “Some Thoughts on the Monster of Tirana”, focuses on the towers proposed by Architecture Studio

²⁵⁷ Relph, E. (1976). *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion., p.44

qualifying them as a show off of power like every other building constructed in the centre of Tirana in different times. The so-called “monster”, one of the towers on which Lubonja concentrate in his essay, is criticized for the material used, for the size and what is more important for its location.²⁵⁸ This tower is designed to be located at the place where the Albanian socialist leader statue was positioned. The monument was attacked and it was torn down by the Albanians in 1991. Lubonja claims that the towers interact with the history of the city. He reminds once more the importance of the historic fabric by giving the example of Warsaw city, the historical centre of which was rebuilt identically the same after it was destroyed in the World War II.²⁵⁹ Besides that discussion, these high rise buildings have been in the centre of interest of businessmen for the new image they bring to Tirana and their use. Towers house offices, hotels, services of different kind and also residences.

Aliaj, on the other side, finds the towers idea interesting, although being reserved about their height.²⁶⁰ He claims the impossibility of realisation of some of the towers considering the fact that the spaces where they are planned are already occupied.²⁶¹

The strategy of the municipal administration for cultivating a new image of Tirana through an aggressive multi-storeyed architecture with modern shapes and such materials such as duralumin and glass, is expected to have a significant impact on the image and layout of the city, which presently is one of the most interesting cities in Europe in terms of its dynamics of development.

The force of an innovative design related with the specific place, improves the identity of Tirana city while the development of it gives Tirana the potential to be identified as an attractive European city with its own identity.

²⁵⁸ Fatos Lubonja, Some thoughts on the monster of Tirana.<http://www.osdir.com>, <http://osdir.com/ml/recreation.alb-club/2005-01/msg00193.html>

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Aliaj, B. Thoughts on Competition. (O. Durmishi, Interviewer)

²⁶¹ B. Aliaj, K. Lulo and G. Myftiu, Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development, p.62p.132

6.3 Conclusive Remarks

Throughout this study, first the discursive approaches on urban transformation, renewal and regeneration were introduced into the framework of the analysis. The criteria for an urban regeneration project to be successfully implemented were discussed. The research that we made on the international competition, on the competition brief and on the presentations made by the authorities and designers, showed that the aim of the municipality to regenerate the centre of Tirana corresponded with some of the objectives that urban regeneration projects are expected to contain. According to the research results expressed on the Chapter 2 an urban regeneration project has to cope with many principles; it should be based upon a detailed analysis of the conditions of the urban area concerned and a set of goals and objectives that should be achieved in this area.

Within this framework, let's evaluate the competition and winning project's achievements. The competition entries made a field investigation for about two weeks as a result of which the analysis of the urban conditions of the Tirana city centre is seen in their approaches. Scale exercises, present urban morphology and photographing all the present life in Tirana is observed in the offices' site analyses. High rise buildings in Architecture Studio and proposal are alien to the surrounding environment. They do not fit into the present building landscape. On the other hand the winning project is elaborated throughout further competitions. This constitutes a positive step for the future development, because for preparing these projects the participating offices in themselves make more detailed researches and consequently they have a clearer idea on the condition of the urban area and the building landscape of the city. This then will bring the integration of the proposed projects to the existing urban fabric. The winning project is successful in realising such a strategic impact not only on the Tirana city centre but also on the development of the city as a whole. Another principle of urban regeneration is that programmes of implementation should be parallel to sustainable development. Indeed, Architecture Studio besides thinking of further developments inserts the project to the present situation of the city.

Further competitions are organized as the funds are found, influencing in the course and the development of the overall project in time. In fact, the local authorities'

incomes come mostly from the taxes, which show directly the success of the local economy that is the indicator of the city development. In Tirana the project is still under construction and in reality, the municipality can not afford the implementation of the whole project; therefore the implementation goes on parallel to the changes and improvement in the city and especially with the international partnerships which are the principal agents in the realisation of the regeneration project. So, the project implementation will go parallel to the economic development. On the other hand, the implementation project may need a revision of the initial master plan in line with the changes that occur in time, and being aware of the fact that the elements of the same project may develop in different times. In other words, to have a successful city development a long term process is needed and a good partnership between different agencies, a route that is successfully being held in Tirana.

Having made the analysis of the spatial transformations of the city of Tirana complemented with a research in the planning history of the city centre and the phases that it passed, we believe that we have given here a better understanding of the formations and the transformations of the city core, the forces and actors that have shaped it.

We saw that the political system had always a great influence in shaping the city, and Tirana is a city where politics showed and continue showing its power by erecting buildings of different styles corresponding to different periods of the history. This has resulted in creating a unique city centre exhibiting its history. The international competition adds new designs to the open air museum of the city centre. In this respect we analyzed the winning project with regard to the strategies that are developed to solve the physical, economical and social problems that Tirana has faced since the transition period.

At the end of the research, we think that the success of the local government is evident for its leading role in developing and carrying out the scheme. It is important to attract investments to the city, in constructing a high-quality infrastructure and creating public spaces. According to my opinion this is what was aimed by the designation of Architecture Studio as the winner of this regeneration project. They proposed high-quality road networks and contemporaneous transport systems. The

increase that they brought in the overall surface of green areas, with the new parks and plantation of trees they proposed in the city centre; especially this green character is accentuated in the southern part of the spine. Adelina Greca and Valbona Koci in their essay, “Tirana is Now a Step Closer to a New European Capital City” argue that Architecture Studio used the spine “to organize different layers of the city and also to establish diversity within a general coherence”.²⁶² In this aspect and with respect to the principles of regeneration project mentioned so far in Chapter 2, their proposal is successful in accomplishing variety in the project area. Beside greenery, the built environment composed of governmental buildings in the south and residential ones in the north are integrated with the greenery emphasizing the continuity of the spine. The architectural variety in the project is preserved by the introduction of high rise buildings parallel the spine.²⁶³ The functional variety proposed through the spine is also worth mentioning here. Besides being a civic centre now people will have the opportunity to access in a wide range of social and cultural facilities like cultural centres, trade and business centres and also recreational areas interrelated with public spaces. On the other hand, besides variety there are some elements that do not fit to the overall city landscape. The high-rise blocks which are not well integrated with the existing historical heritage, may cause the existing buildings lose their monumentality.

Another principle expected from a regeneration project is achieving flexibility in design. Greca and Koci support the idea that the master plan elaborated by Architecture Studio is flexible enough, as it leaves space for reformation, remodelling and reinterpretation.²⁶⁴ French designers fill up the open spaces considered problematic with buildings and parks trying to have a balance between open spaces and the built environment. At the same time the introduction of commercial environments, shops and cafés, besides promoting spatial flexibility, increase the employment opportunities in the city.

Accessibility is an important principle for a successful regeneration project, which Architecture Studio seems to have solved well. A new mode of public transport like

²⁶² Adelina Greca, Valbona Koci, “Tirana is Now a Step Closer to a New European Capital City”, unpublished essay, Municipality of Tirana Digital Archive.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

the tram line, planned as the only transportation mode crossing the Skanderbeg Square which is reserved to pedestrians, is an innovation for Tirana. In other words, Architecture Studio succeeded to change the image of the city optimistically and brought a solution to the traffic problem with the new road system and the public transportation systems they proposed. The French Ministry of Equipment, Transport, Housing, Tourism and the Sea played a key role in the realization of the transportation network as an element of stability that supported the urban development proposals with the necessary infrastructure.²⁶⁵

After having considered the conformity of the Architecture Studio's Master Plan with the regeneration principles, the evaluation of the project and the process with regard to the economical, social and cultural development that it can bring is needed.

From the economical perspective, it is observed that the government was unable to afford the cost of the project by its own resources, although among the three visions for the city centre, the government obviously preferred the one that was the most economic.

Actually, the process itself aimed to revitalize the economy of Tirana. Besides attracting the international investments, an objective that still continues, given that only a small part of the master plan is under construction, the process aimed at promoting a better understanding of urban issues for achieving urban vitality. The involvement of the private sector, i.e. the businesses, in the regeneration is crucial for the achievement; beginning with the international competition, the municipality managed to attract their attention. Another optimistic view is related with the economic growth of Tirana which is directly related to the decrease of unemployment that the project implementation process will bring. Competitions were the first steps toward an economic regeneration but, time will demonstrate how much successful will the process be. However, the impacts of the projects on the city's economy are to be discussed. The winning project included the revitalisation of economy by introducing many new activities to the city spine, i.e. to the central area. They increased the retailing, improved the residential areas and created safe and attractive public and recreational areas.

²⁶⁵ Architecture Studio Unpublished Report, p.6(Municipality of Tirana Digital Archive)

The great role of the German Government as the main financial supporter, its relationship with the Albanian government and the local and national authorities as political agencies that directly influenced the competition and the implementation of the competition results, are crucial issues that the thesis explored during this study

In the social plan, the process was very successful in engaging the society into the urban issues of their capital city. Mr. Rama enabled the involvement of the public by organizing the competition juries open to public and by broadcasting these via the national television. In the last competition held for the revitalization of the Skanderbeg Square, he even recommended the public to vote for the best project they think it should be applied to the city centre. Even though their preference was not taken into consideration but just their vote contributed to the selection of the public prize, the encouragement of the public is worth being mentioned. In other words, the public participation in the process was somehow achieved by the municipality. The open forums on the television results show that the community is eager to have better life conditions in their city, but that is not enough. The competition process in fact is now more informed about the architectural projects but for a successful regeneration more effort should be spent on increasing participation of residents and citizens.

However, it is interesting to note that the public is not too much concerned about the winning project. They are impatient to see the new vision of Tirana, and whether it is the vision of Mecanoo Arkitekten, Boles and Wilson or Architecture Studio doesn't matter for the public.

Another novelty for Tirana is the cultural regeneration which is briefly discussed in chapter 2. The designation of Tirana city centre had in itself the intention of a cultural renaissance. The city spine is an artistic and cultural treasure as much as it is prestigious for its governmental historical building collections. The organization of such a competition attracted the interest of the best Architecture and Urban Design offices around the world, which brought their valuable experience to Tirana. In addition to that, Tirana is Albanians' main cultural city and with this new project it is valorised with the physical improvements and features that we can call as multicultural.

The present research aimed at contributing to a better understanding of the urban regeneration projects developed for the Tirana city centre, their main concepts, ideas and features. Considering the efforts for obtaining a master plan for the urban regeneration of Tirana city core and creating a city capable of supporting its functions as a capital, we believe that the competition process was a very good initiative to collect the world experience and to see their reflections.

Though there are many rumours on the way the winning project is selected, now there is no need to discuss this issue, since the firm is already appointed and elaborated the master plan taking the specific requirements of the Municipality into consideration.

Finally, we conclude this research by stressing the importance of the regeneration projects to revitalize the city centre both economically and socially and to integrate the past, the present and the future in the space of the city. It has been insightful to see the positive and negative aspects of the competition process. Since the monitoring and evaluation of the projects have always been debatable issues, besides the impact they had, we should mention that this was a very good experience for a small country that is currently developing. Since the project implementation has just begun, there will certainly be room for further researches on the issue.

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MINISTERIAL COMPLEX

<p>YESTERDAY</p>	<p>1. Who is the architect, or team of architects who did the project for this complex of buildings? Arch. Florestano de Fausto and arch. Giulio Brete' (1925-1935)</p>
<p>TODAY</p>	<p>2. Who is administering the buildings? According to the function of each of the buildings, most of the buildings of the complex are administered by several different ministries and one building is administered by the Municipality of Tirana.</p> <p>3. What is its function? Administrative and representative functions of the central and local governments.</p> <p>4. What are the annual activities? Daily administrative activities, press conferences, meetings at different levels, visits of foreign delegations.</p> <p>5. Are the activities, in addition to closed spaces carried out in open areas? No.</p> <p>6. Which are the open spaces the institutions are using? Ministry buildings and the Municipality do use the open spaces surrounding their buildings mostly for parking purposes.</p> <p>7. How many visitors register the institution/s in a month/ 6 months/ year? Number of citizens visiting daily these institutions is about 1,500 – 2,000 visitors.</p> <p>8. How many employees are working? There are 5 Ministries and Tirana Municipality with a total of 1, 200 employees.</p> <p>9. Are there other statistics? No official data available.</p>

TOMORRO	<p>10. Are there any plan / project to reconstruct these institutions? Actually, Ministry of Defense and municipality of Tirana have already completed and executed their rehabilitation projects.</p> <p>11. If yes, what are the plans? Further extensions of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection, and the Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Telecommunications.</p>
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HAXHI ETHEM BEY MOSQUE and CLOCK TOWER

YESTERDAY	<p>1. Who is the architect or team of architects who did the project for this building? Historical buildings constructed by artisans of the period.</p>
TODAY	<p>2. Who is administering the building? Muslim Community of Tirana and the Institute of Monuments, because of the historical value and their categorization as first class monuments.</p> <p>3. What is its function? Serves for religious activities and as a museum.</p> <p>4. What kinds of activities are held during the year? Religious activities and museum visits.</p> <p>5. What are the annual activities? Daily religious activities, Holly Fridays for the believers, religious holidays.</p> <p>6. Are the activities, except in closed spaces, carried out in open areas? Most of the activities are within the building. Great holidays, as well as the Holly Fridays are organized in front of the monument.</p> <p>7. What are the open areas used by the institution? On the occasion of special events and religious holidays surrounding areas of the mosque would be made available, like the pavement in front and frequently also part of the road, because of the limited space of within, and lack of an inner yard, as it is the tradition of the institutions of that sort.</p>

TOMORROW	8. Are there any plan / project for reconstruction? Yes, for reconstruction.
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PALACE of CULTURE

YESTERDAY	1. Who is the architect or team of architects who did the project for this building? The project team composed, among others by S. Mosko and F. Stermazi.
TODAY	<p>2. Who is administering the building? The building is administered by two public institutions under the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, Youth and Sports, and a third one, a ltd company with a mixed private and public capital, renting the spaces to different entities.</p> <p>3. What is its function? The building includes series of functions, such as administrative, recreation, cultural, scientific and commercial activities.</p> <p>4. What are the annual activities? Administrative routine concerts and shows, scientific activities and forums, meetings at different levels, as well as commercial activities.</p> <p>5. How many activities annually? Usually, there is a two-month calendar prepared, with 30-35 shows of different type, which are listed annually mounting to 200.</p> <p>6. Are activities, in addition to those in closed spaces, carried out in open areas? Most of the activities are organized in the inside spaces of the building.</p> <p>7. What are the open spaces used by the institution? The private entities, mainly, use the surrounding areas for their commercial activities, while the inner yard is under the administration of CDCC and used as parking space for all entities within the Palace of Culture.</p> <p>8. How many visitors the institution registers in a month/ 6-months/year? Opera has a capacity of 750 and it is frequented by approximately 700 people for each opera show and about 650 for ballet shows.</p> <p>9. How many employees are working? In total, there are 240 employees of different categories.</p>

TOMORROW	<p>10. Are there any plan / project for reconstruction? Except the Master Plan of the center, it is unclear why there is no concrete statement or commitment regarding future plans or projects.</p> <p>11. If, yes, what are the plans? It is planned the extension, according to the Master Plan, toward the square and on the back side of the building.</p>
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NATIONAL HISTORIC MUSEUM

YESTERDAY	<p>1. Who is the architect or team of architects who did the project for this building? The team led by S.Mosko – inauguration date: November 8, 1981.</p>
TODAY	<p>2. Who is administering the building? It is under the administration of the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, Youth and Sports.</p> <p>3. What is its function? The building is used for exhibitions, informative and scientific purposes.</p> <p>4. What are the annual activities? Administrative routine, exhibitions, informative activities, as well as those related to recreation.</p> <p>5. How many activities per year? There are about 70 exhibitions, annually, and 2-3 conferences per week, or 150, annually.</p> <p>6. Are activities, except in the closed spaces, organized in open areas? Main activities of the institution are organized within the building. In addition, the museum makes available for fairs and massive activities the areas of the inner yard, as well.</p> <p>7. What are the open spaces used by the institution? The Inner yard.</p> <p>8. How many visitors register the institution in a month/6-months/year? According to the statistics made public by the institution there are about 80, 000 visitors annually.</p> <p>9. How many employees are working? There are about 40 employees.</p>

TOMORROW	<p>10. Are there any plan / project for reconstruction? Not for the time being. The Master Plan of the center foresees the construction of a multi-store building in the inner yard to supplement spaces offered by the institution.</p> <p>11. If yes, what it is foreseen? For more information regarding the Master Plan, refer to the regulation attached to it.</p>
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TIRANA INTERNATIONAL HOTEL

YESTERDAY	<p>1. Who is the architect or team of architects who did the project for this building? The team led by V. Pistoli.</p>
TODAY	<p>2. Who is administering the building? It is under the private administration of "Tirana International" SA.</p> <p>3. What is its function? Hotel services, conferences and cultural and recreation.</p> <p>4. What are the annual activities? Administrative routine, conferences of different levels, press conferences, national and international conferences, and commercial activities.</p> <p>5. How many activities per day? There are counted about 10 different activities per day, and a maximum of 20. Usually, the hotel is up to 70% of its capacity, and sometimes it is fully booked.</p> <p>6. Are the activities, in addition to those in close spaces, carried out in open areas? Most of activities are carried out within the inner spaces of the hotel.</p> <p>7. What are the open spaces used by the hotel? Surrounding areas are used for parking purposes.</p> <p>8. How many visitors register the institution in a month / 6-months/year? There are no reliable statistics.</p> <p>9. How many employees are working? There are 145 employees of different categories.</p> <p>10. Is there any other statistic? Nothing published.</p>

TOMORROW	<p>11. Are there any plan / project for reconstruction? Actually, there are no plans for further extensions or reconstruction.</p>
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BANK OF ALBANIA

YESTERDAY	<p>1. Who is the architect or team of architects who did the project for this building? Arch. Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo-inaugurated in 1935.</p>
TODAY	<p>2. Who is administering the building? It is under the administration of the Bank of Albania.</p> <p>3. What is its function? Banking activities of a regulating character at a national level.</p> <p>4. What are the annual activities? Bank of Albania is the central bank of the Republic of Albania, sanctioned status according to the article 161of the Constitution, with the supervising monetary authority, and enjoys all primary functions of a classic central bank. The Bank of Albania has a Supervisory Board chaired by the Governor, with the headquarters in Tirana and 5 branches in Shkodër, Elbasan, Gjirokastër, Korçë and Lushnje. In its organization structure there are 19 departments and units.</p> <p>5. Are the activities, in addition to closed spaces carried out in open areas? No.</p> <p>6. Which are the open spaces the institutions are using? Except to the actual space of the inner yard, the bank, use for parking purposes the whole road strip and sidewalk surrounding it.</p> <p>7. How many visitors register the institution in a month / 6-months/year? No official data available.</p> <p>8. How many employees are working? No official data available.</p>
TOMORROW	<p>9. Is there any plan/project for the institution building reconstruction or extension? A competition for the reconstruction of the bank is under way.</p> <p>10. If yes, what it is foreseen? It is planned the extension and the construction of the back side of the bank.</p>

Appendix B: Interviews

Interview with Elia Zenghelis, jury member.

Odeta Durmishi: What is your opinion about the competition held for Tirana city center master plan?

Elia Zenghelis: To say the truth I didn't like the project at all. Julia Boles and Peter Wilson was my far most inspiring proposal and in a way I sense that... I don't know what happened, I sense somehow, to tell the truth I don't even remember how we reached the result, how we reached the result. I think that, I may be wrong in what I say, so you know be careful, but I think that the appointed one was not the one we gave the prize but we somehow did. I think that in the end the decision involves some political controversy which I am not aware of. But I think...its very long time ago and its hard for me to remember the project. But the one that was chosen, if I remember correctly, had no vision but was entirely based on static and economic considerations I think. But really, you know, I am an old man and I am scratching my memory. I just remember that it was the least favorite of mine. I mean, I remember I ranked Boles& Wilson the most inspiring one and then Mecanoo.

O.D.: What do you find inspiring in Boles& Wilson project?

E.Z.: I don't remember it.

O.D.: Ok, then! What about the competition processes? How do you find the process of the competitions followed by the municipality?

E.Z.: The competition today seems to have started on very good footings even though we don't know yet. Of course Edi Rama is a person with amazing vision. So he inspires always kinds of very good discussions. He inspires, he, he manages to attract a lot of interest for Albania, for Tirana especially, amongst the international architects I mean. It is only because of him that so many people are interested in. So the procedure of the jury has been always very exciting, but in terms of implementation what I understand it has some political problems to implement, so only some buildings that were permeated are getting built. But in the... I don't know I haven't follow, in fact, what is happening but I know that one of the Peter Wilson projects for façade is going ahead.[???] I don't know what else is going, I'm not that well informed.

O.D.: What do you think starting regenerating the center of Tirana without having a general plan?

E.Z.: The idea was to have a general plan but the winning project did not really proposed a general plan. The proposal of Boles and Wilson and Mecanoo proposed such a general plan. But, we can't go back to ask for another competition for general plan because one firm has been appointed for doing this.

We did the project at the Berlage with the Berlage students, where we took all these areas and did project for all these areas. You may ask and maybe in any part of the archive they probably are. That was how we handled we handled even the axis Durres-Tirana since it is a very important axis.

O.D.: Yes, they were exhibited in the city exhibition centre.

E.Z.: That's right, yes! So... Yes of course, but I think now in a way Scanderbeg's square is a square surrounded by very interesting buildings, but still is you know, the traffic, the noise, the centre is not used. I mean it means something and is very important it is the heart of the city.

Edmond Manahasa: But we have a completed space long time ago and we are still putting some concentration points like high tall buildings to enhance the axis, what about the other parts of the city that do not have this luxury, in terms of redefinition.

E.Z.: I don't know I think that these are political discussions; according to my opinion the projects we did with the Berlage students could be in some way realized.

Interview with Rodo Tisnado, Architecture Studio Representative

Odeta Durmishi: Why were you interested in this competition on Tirana? What attracted you in it?

Rodo Tisnado: (Laughs) Yes, you know! This is the Architecture Studio. (Gives me a brochure) We worked in Tirana long time ago, about 10 years, so we have done other projects before.

O.D.: So, you were sent an invitation?

R.T.: Exactly, so when you are invited you say ok and this is not only the curiosity but even the work. We are an urban design office and we had similar works in other countries. This is for you.¹

O.D.: Thank you, so as I understood you had the chance to experience the life in Tirana?

R.T.: Of course, we planned and designed as normal architects. When we arrived to the city, you see, for example you have a client in our case Tirana was, so we came because the architect must see the place to design. But after we made the project we were ask to take place 3 in this second big interesting project competition (meaning the Scanderbeg's square competition).

O.D.: What were your main ideas when you started to design the conceptual plan for Tirana city center and is the initial idea relevant to your final project?

R.T.: This is another... This is you know! We make all the city (showing the city on the paper) so we tried to, to ... we studied the area (showing the area on the paper) Tirana is a very interesting, because there are (showing the central spine and the Lana River)

This is Tirana as we found it (Aerial photo of Tirana city) with its extraordinary axis of the fascist period, the Italian theme. It is exactly this axis where you find this, the architecture of extraordinary, the fascist architecture and look all as Roman architecture. We find this axis very interesting in Tirana because since the Second World War until now it has remained untouched. Albania was a site fighting between the East and the West and so it is a kind of neutral city. If you see American or Russians way, it is not like a place where people fight. It is another way, it is isolated. But this is before isolation, because this is the Italian style and during the isolation period there are mediums that did not change the city, because the city must change all the time.

I don't know if you remember the time, extraordinary free city, and people come here to experience the extraordinary free town. You have the Muslim way of life with this Italian

¹ He gives me a brochure with other urban projects the had done in other countries

panorama but what is now is chaotic. So when we arrived here to work at this project we found that this was the start of the new mayor. Ok?

Open spaces, green spaces so maybe the continuity of these will find in this moment the city's extraordinary town. So we found the connection between the University and the train station as very important and is very important if we connect the green space and the monuments and left out of this the modern city by putting these (showing the towers) because it is necessary to put the towers for the life of now. So we mixed the historical, museum and the green Tirana. You have the garden you have the museum needed a new architecture. We mixed the buildings in the empty spaces and put the greenery to make a more continuous city, to make a more modern city. Now you are not any more isolated but you remain in your minds. Your minds are always isolated and you must discharge your minds too. The city must help to. Did you listen the presentation (meaning today's presentation) they say why soooooo

You see this is a political situation because this is the master plan for you but the politics do not combine someone is the president of the socialist and the other of communist party. I don't know exactly but he utilizes this to make the city as the capital of Albania. So this is not the place for political problems but when you make the city is not just for power is for everybody.

O.D.: What was your strongest point?

R.T.: Of course, issssss.... I talked about. The history and the open spaces we connected them with green areas, because this is the main idea of this project. You must put this in a kind of garden. This is like a central park. (Showing the designed area) During the socialist period this is cooked by the Italians???, because were Italians that built ok? If you make a central park you take a new city and touch. So, this is the power. For us this is very strong, we tried to build a central park, not a big garden, a real garden.

O.D.: What about the towers, you propose high rise buildings?

R.T.: We designed it during the master plan process, not today? We needed to make a big square. So they are as a frame. Here is not a Manhattan. What we propose is just a frame.

O.D.: Do you imagine who will live in those buildings and will they be implemented?

R.T.: I think this has to do with politics and international funds. Like coca cola or this hotel. It is something in between the American Sheraton and tradition Tirana life. It is not like Tirana hotel which is really socialistic. You must, you must, know exactly where the limit or border is because of the different regions you have, ok? You have Italian, socialistic and the free system buildings. The project is a linkage between them.

O.D.: So you think that they do not isolate the centre?

R.T.: No, these stops, this must be remained as a garden. (Showing the project) This is a park for the city and every one comes here. If you make the towers or the building inside there is not any more a clear city. This is the only specific city where in the city you have the garden.

O.D.: May you mention something about the development phases of the design?

R.T.: This is the canvas for the mayor of the city. Now, is the municipality that must find the other things to do? We just make a frame, a canvas. Ok? After, you see, for example: you have the property of the land, so the political power and the Albanian system are not very clear toward the property of a piece of land. Because you come from an Islamic lawyer (!!!), so you must find the solution. So we could exactly put towers in specifically points because the people say what happens if you move the tower a little bit on the left, because is better for me.

O.D.: There has passed 5 years since the project presentation. If you were to redesign it, what would you add or drop from the project?

R.T.: You know, the city is not [made by] an architect or an urban designer, they are not the only who play roles. That project has finished. We are here to finish the centre of the city. We made a new project for this place, and the people say, oh not do this not that why this? Why that? I think that this is a little of the political part. I think that what urban designer think is different from the politics. We put buildings around not to stop the axis but to emphasize, but I think someone in your politics do not like the axis because he think is the Italian memory. I don't know.

O.D.: How do you find the process of project development followed by the municipality? The project development through several projects competitions and phases?

R.T.: This is very good. He finds the money from Kuwait (Scanderbeg's square), an Islamic city, because it is very important for Islamic [...] to show Tirana as so because Tirana is a very important European city between the Christian and Muslim people, so it is necessary to connect it to Europe. It is not a mosque it is not a church it is a city, part of Europe but it is necessary to find the linkage and it is very good to find the money to build the most important piece of land in Tirana.

Interview with Martin Rein-Cano, MVRDV Representative

Odetta Durmishi: Why were you interested in this competition on Tirana? What attracted you in it?

Martin Rein: I think what is very interesting is: This is like a little white piece of sheet on the map. You know! So it is a little bit left over, but it is really interesting that it is not internationalized yet. You know! It does not look like everywhere a kind of thing [?]; it is like you can not find everywhere a kind of thing. I think this was really fascinating. It is a part of Europe that has a history that may not have any other part of Europe. It is unique. This is what I really like.

O.D.: What is your opinion about Architecture Studio proposal?

M.R.: Well, I like that green connection. I think it is very good. And I don't like the idea of filling up the space because what is really special when you look here is the emptiness in the city. It is something unique, and you see the impact. But this is the city. A kind of landscape city. So in that concept we didn't like the project.

O.D.: How do you think that the project would create the linkage to the other parts of the city, since the other part will be left out of the design?

M.R.: Well, in the end, the square is part of the city but also a little bit independent from the city, since it is a national square.

O.D.: What about the lack of a general plan in Tirana?

M.R.: Yes I would agree with you, but it doesn't have to. If you see at cities like London for example, they never had a general plan. It grows almost naturally and it is a wonderful city. So in the end there is no appropriate recipe to do these things. If you have sensitive people deciding I think there is no need for general plan. You can do them step by step and look at things.

O.D.: How do you find the initiative of municipality for the development of subproject areas?

M.R.: Any kind of competition influences a country. I am very fascinating to see how people are curious and how much motivation is around and I think that is great. It is very possible to say that at the end of competitions, the buildings are built or not is not so important, but the experience that comes from abroad is a part of success.

What I think is really important is to try to keep unique, because in the end is what counts and what makes us the Europeans. There are very different things around and to keep unique is important, without being nationalistic. Not to kill one another (laughs)