

## Introduction from the Editors

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This year, 2020, marks Tirana's 100th anniversary as the capital of Albania. Comparing photos of a bucolic Tirana in 1920 with the urban explosion witnessed from Polis University's fourth floor today, inevitably raises questions about the form of the city: What is the form of the city? Can the city have a form? Such questions express uncertainty, but they also introduce the concept of normativity, insofar as they posit a distinction between the form of the city and its lack. The nineteenth and twentieth century theorists and architects, as diverse as Cerdà and Camillo Sitte, adopted the normativity of organism in order to think the form of the ever-expanding modern city as self-generated. However, the frenzied and unbridled growth of our cities, especially in the current context of global pandemics, renders the concept of self-generation suspect. Theories like urban archipelagos turn out to be ineffective insofar they are preoccupied only with the normative islands but not with the non-normativity outside and between the islands. What is at stake today is precisely an updated normativity of the whole that is guided by a sense of self-limitation; that "contests production itself" and the "overriding principle"<sup>1</sup> of infinite growth and self-generation.

The objective of Forum A+P 22<sup>nd</sup> issue is to draw current research and design practices, as well as theoretical speculations on the topic of uncertainty and non-normativity in multiple scales and contexts, in and from the city of Tirana. The significance of addressing such topic from Tirana – with the certainty that these phenomena can also be found in international situations such as the sprawl emergence in the Italian countryside or the severe informal development of eastern metropolis such as New Delhi or Beijing - is that this city is a harsh and unmediated example of what is already a global symptom: a strong contrast between an ideology of normativity on the one hand, and its actual impossibility on the other; between the aim for responsible design practices and ethical boundaries impossi-

ble to overcome; between education and merciless economic reason, between daily ideologies of inclusivity and an increasingly predominant exclusivity, between plain design narratives and irresponsible political decision-making; between expensive normativity affordable only by few, and not-so-cheap sub-normativity for the many; between frenzied building development and destruction of urban artefacts; between 'glittery' shapes in the center and chaotic sprawl in the periphery; between style and non-style. What happens in-between is dimmed as 'uncertain'. We believe an updated normativity of the whole is predicated precisely in including the uncertain and non-normative in our inquiries about architecture and the city.

This research agenda was first explored in Tirana Design Week 2019. Given the ambition and scope of such agenda we asked the help of many national and international friends that could join us with their peculiar reflections and insights. The list of the keynoters/speakers of Tirana Design 2019 included researchers and professionals coming both from eastern and western world: Mario Botta (CH); Marcio Sequeira de Oliveira (BR); Ben Schouten (NL); Alireza Taghaboni (IR); Antonino Saggio (IT); Marcos Novak (US); Franco Purini (IT); Rudolf Lückmann and Gernot Weckherlin (DE); Kiersten Muenchinger (US); Maja Lalic and Jelena Matic (SR); Fernando Menis (ES); Dimitris Gourdoukis and Anastasios Teliolis (GR). We wanted them to focus on the specific reality of our city, using Tirana as a vector to raise ideas that could be then applied on a global scale, by addressing two questions: "*What do you intend for normativity and its contrary, the non-normativity?; And what from these concepts you can recognize or not in the current condition of Tirana*", and before their speech they were invited to a 'non-normative' city tour with us.

Their response was enthusiastic and captivating. We could not imagine such heterogeneity of topics and reflections that flourished during the event. From the non-normative condi-

tion of the Iranian city, we traveled through the urban playful appropriation (Dix 2007) of the Dutch public spaces, just in time to land in a precise intersection point between the impact of Information Technology in the last major paradigm shift in the history of architecture and its consequent materialization of third parties disciplines such as visual and performative arts, education, and dance. For almost three weeks, design, art, architecture, and urban planning intersected in multiple ways under the main topic of the event. The discussion went beyond the expectations we had when we started our curatorial work. We invited five among the keynoters to deliver a critical essay regarding their experience at TDW2019 and to deepen some of the concepts they dealt with during their time in Albania. These essays form the *'invited paper section'* of this issue.

This was just the top of the iceberg of what the events were. In parallel with keynotes and lectures, a series of workshops run by international young creatives involved the students from POLIS for six days. The majority of our workshop leaders were selected from the annual Idea Challenge organized by Future Architecture Platform, a worldwide known pan-European platform architecture museums, festivals and producers and one of the main sponsors of Tirana Design Week and Tirana Architecture Week since its foundation. The workshop leaders were Celine Baumann (FR); Sonja Dragović (MNE); Julio Gotor Valcarel (ES); Vojtech Rada (CZE); Stefano Romano (IT); Gaetano de Francesco (IT); Gregor Andoni (AL); Merita Guri (AL); Marco Pietrosante and Marta Lagna (IT); Thomas Schmid-Dankward and Stephan Pinkau (DE); Maki Morikawa (JP); Arben Shytlla (AL). Each workshop presented an original outcome related to the topic of Tirana Design Week and the personal research of the leaders. These contributions are collected in the editorial and are accompanied by images and comments regarding the experience.

While compiling the contents of this issue we started questioning ourselves if there was space for 'more'. Without a doubt, a scientific journal should not record just the memories of past events, but also further investigate the questions raised during those events. That is why, in January 2020, we launched an International 'Call for Paper' for this 22<sup>nd</sup> issue of Forum A+P on the topic of uncertainty and non-normativity. We received a wide variety of contributions that dealt with such from different scales and disciplinary perspectives. The final papers were selected on how they project new insights on the city as a complex organism: some offering direct solutions and strategies that deal with non-normative urban situations, others offering 'lateral thoughts' (De Bono, 1970) on the city as a complex and layered cultural artifact.

Artan Kacani's "Land tactics and the territorial impact on the informal urban growth in Albania," for instance, focuses directly on how to provide normative solutions to non-normative urban settlements in the post-communist context of Al-

bania. The research is supported by a systematic data analysis that leads to the author to provide different quantitative and qualitative strategies. Alessandro Melis's "Community Resilience through exaptation," on the other hand, explores the cultural and epistemic intersection of architecture and biology. He introduces the non-deterministic concept of exaptation in order to speculate about addressing different scenarios of uncertainty in the future. Amanda Terpo's "Facing Uncertainty With GIS, Using Non-Normative Tools To Plan Non-Normative Territories," focuses on uncertainty and non-normativity on the level of the procedures and instruments of planning. The paper proposes a major implementation of the GIS technologies to foster a more-informed and prediction-based methodology to support highly complex activities and decision-making practices [...]. Eled Fagu's paper "Theoretical issues on the socialist city and reflections on Albanian urban landscape" focuses instead on the intersection of ideological normativity and the city form, in particular the city of Tirana. The paper investigates how socialist ideology, national style and the accompanying process of de-urbanization gave shape the city of Tirana. Vincenzo Paolo Bagnato's "Design and public space: The university campus' open spaces between rituality and non-normativity" explores how a normative space par excellence like the university campus can create potential for non-normative spaces and encounters through the integration of smart communication technologies into its architecture.

This n°22 of FORUM A+P is the witness of the journey that precisely one year ago we undertook as curators. The last section of the journal poignantly called *Telquel* (as is) presents open ended yet informed opinions, arguments as well as drawings that speculate about the current state, problems and developments of architecture of urbanism in general and in Tirana and Albania in particular. These pieces will probably serve as trajectories of future issues of Forum A+P and events at Polis. We are glad that you have the chance to have it in your hand and read and we hope that, after doing that, you will be triggered as well and get back to us with YOUR personal view regarding 'Design and non-normativity'. We always welcome your opinions, insights and feedback.

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<sup>1</sup>Bruno Latour, "What protective measures can you think of so we don't go back to the pre-crisis production model?", <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/node/852.html>, accessed on September 20th, 2020. This article appeared in AOC on 29th March 2020: <https://aoc.media/opinion/2020/03/29/imaginer-les-gestes-barrieres-contre-le-retour-a-la-production-davant-crise/>.