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3.6 The impact of airport in urban development of area

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Abstract

This paper explores the potential role and the impact of Tirana's airport on urban development in the last decades especially the impact on the future urban developments. It also highlights the most possible scenarios of urban development of the area where the airport is located while taking in consideration the opportunities and constraints determined by various factors. Given the fact that Tirana's airport has a very good location and its projected future relation with other developed means of transportation such as highways, railway etc. will enable faster transportation of people and goods, the impact of Tirana's airport is going to permanently grow. In addition, it will have a huge impact on the surrounding urban development of the area and even beyond. Therefore, if we take into account this trend of movements, economic and social changes that have been taking place during the last two decades, the area near the airport is going to be a reference point for future developments or toward becoming an "Aerotropolis".

Key words: urban development, airport, air transport, impact, aerotropolis

Literature review

Airports are vital national resources. They have a key role in transporting people and goods in regional, national, and international commerce. If we review the history of the cities' establishment, it is easy to conclude that transport infrastructure was the main factor determining their locations whether it be a road, harbor or railway. In other words, most of today's major cities are located near the airports, main roads, railways or shipping harbor.

"Historically, airports have been understood as places where aircraft operate, including runways, control towers, terminals, hangers and other facilities which directly serve aircraft, passengers and cargo. This traditional understanding is giving way to much broader, more encompassing concept known as the Airport City which has become the 21st century way forward for many airports" (Kasarda, 2008). The impact of the airport in context of the urban development of the area is undeniable in city shaping. These impacts are determined as follows:

Economic impact

Air transport means wealth and prosperity because millions of passengers and freight arrive and depart at airports all over the world. Today we can see that many of the great worldwide airport cities are investing a lot in air transport taking into account the importance of the airports as an economic generator. In relation to this, Bruckner (2003) in his study gave the evidence that good airline service is an important factor in urban economic development and employment increase.

According to ACI-Europe & York (2004) the economic and social impact of the airports in the European countries can be characterized as:

- Direct - employment and income that is wholly or largely related to the operation of an airport;
- Indirect - employment and income generated in the economy of the region in the chain of goods and services (both on and off site);
- Induced - employment and income generated in the economy of the region through income spending by the direct and indirect employees; and
- Catalytic - employment and income generated in the economy of the region by the wider role of the airport in improving the productivity of business and in attracting economic activities such as inward investment and inbound tourism.

The area near the airports is increasingly the most preferable location for hotels, headquarter offices of international companies, educational and research institutions, conference halls, logistics, business parks, sport and entertainment events etc. The decision of the exporters regarding the location of their business is influenced by the benefits that an airport provides a region (Lovely et al, 2005). Concerning this issue, Bel and Fageda (2008) argued that the key factor in choosing the location of their international corporate headquar-

ters in European cities is the availability of direct non-stop flight. Regarding this issue, according to the report of ACI-Europe & York (2004 p.6)

“Global accessibility can be important at a regional level as well as at a national level. For example, 31% of companies relocating to the area around Munich Airport cited the airport as the primary factor in their location decision. A survey of business in the Hamburg area found that 80% of manufacturing companies reported air service connections as important to getting customers to look at their products. In 1995, it was reported that 93% of the top Irish companies used Dublin Airport for business travel. There is no reason to believe this proportion will have declined”.

This is happening now in many great airport cities in the US, Europe and Asia. We can also notice examples of these developments in major cities like Paris, London, Frankfurt, Dubai, Hong Kong, Singapore etc. On his theory on the aerotropolis as a form of the cities' future development Dr. John D. Kasarda pointed out that “Airports will shape business location and urban development in the 21st century as much as highways did in the 20th century, railroads in the 19th and seaports in the 18th”(TIACA Times, 2005 p.5).

Furthermore, the number of tourists using the air transport to travel to touristic destinations is increasing continuously. This increase has not only impacted the development of airport by itself but also the development of tourism as an economic activity. In Europe, airports have a great impact in the development of tourism. “Tourism is the second main element of catalytic impact. For the EU as a whole, tourism accounts for 5% of total employment and of GDP, and as much as 30% of the total external trade in services” (ACI-Europe & York, 2004 p.9). Good air service connections are vital for

many touristic destinations. The increase of the number of tourists influences the development of other economic sectors like services related to tourism etc.

Transport

Due to the huge progress of the technology, globalization and needs for faster movement of people and goods, airports are becoming the most significant form of transport. “If the combination of long distance and local modes of transportation drove and shaped urban space in earlier time periods – even when only a minority used those modes on a daily basis – it would seem that the combination of air transportation and automobile/truck transport would drive and shape urban patterns today”(Appold & Kasarda, 2006 p.6).

Today’s modern airports are usually closely linked to other forms of traffic like roads, railways, bike and pedestrian paths. “Airports are increasingly developing as multimodal interchange nodes. Their network positioning creates strategic advantages which enables them to ‘entice’ a broad range of economic activity, functioning as new development poles. This is evidenced by the development of Amsterdam Schiphol and Paris Charles de Gaulle (CDG) Airports” (ACI-Europe & York, 2004 p.6).

Airports are seen mostly as multimodal interchange nodes between:

- (a) Airlines and airports;
- (b) Passengers, airlines and airports;
- (c) Passenger ground transport, airlines and airports including private cars, taxis, car hire, bus and train; and
- (d) Freight, airlines and airports (ECMT, 2005).

Airports are being supported through the development of other types of transport by widening highways and bringing them closer to the terminals, improving train transportation in the form of metros, light rails, and suburban lines. Today, some of the modern airports like the ones in Amsterdam, Frankfurt and Paris are directly connected to the European high speed network(s). This improved transport connectivity at a regional or national level supports the development not only around the airport area and corri-

dors surrounding it but also greatly impacts the development of areas between these corridors (Ksarda, 2010).

Land use

Modern airports with their entire following infrastructure in an area or city are often dominant land users, therefore, they have significant implications for physical and environmental features of the area or city. The links with other means of transportation is a crucial factor in the process of urban planning. The impact of airports on economic development and other means of transportation influences land use planning.

In addition to the fact that the airport is becoming a part of the urban space nowadays, it is also becoming a constituent part of the cities’ future plans. Consequently, it is very important thing to have a compatible land use plan for the land near the airport. Sustainable development for both airport and community is a practice for many airport cities all over the world which have conducted studies on the compatibility of land use for the areas surrounding the airports.

The main purpose of compatible land use planning suggests that incompatible structures with airports such as residential, schools, religious buildings be located away from airports and encourages land uses that is more compatible, for instance industrial and commercial structures, to be closer to airports.

Case study

Tirana is an airport city. The airport “Mother Teresa” in Rinas near Tirana is the only civil airport operating in Albania for the time being. It is located in the city’s northwest at a distance of around 13 km from the center of Tirana and 30 km from the seaport of Durrës in the triangle Tirana-Durres-Fushë Krujë. It lies between the two main road corridors as follows: the Tirana-Durres and the Tirana-Shkoder corridors. The Tirana-Durres corridor represents the main economic area of Tirana because of the infrastructure (Highway Tirana-Durres) but also because of the connectivity with

the Durres port and the unavoidable fact of the airport's presence. There is also a Tirana-Durres railway but for the moment it is in a very bad condition and new investments are expected in the future.

The airport has its own development history. During communism, its main use was for military purposes. Political and social changes caused changes in the airport's management and an increase in the number of airlines operating at the airport. From 2005, the airport is managed by a consortium company for the following 20 years. The concession included the construction of a completely new passenger terminal and various infrastructural improvements. A new access road is built, new parking lots, and a bridge over the old airport access road. These improvements have resulted in an increased number of passengers and goods per annum. The number of passengers has effectively increased to more than 1.5M with a turnover of 30 million EUR in 2010. Its best performance was in 2011 when the number of passengers was recorded as being 1,817,073 and the transport of goods as 2,656 ton (TIA, 2013 p. 30). The development of the airport has also increased the number of employed people, both directly and indirectly.

All these changes have resulted in a considerable impact on the developments around the airport area and farther. Because of its good position, the area near the airport has become a very attractive location for many businesses like hotels, shopping malls, offices, education centers etc. and for the inhabitants as well. Furthermore, in the vicinity of the airport a new business park is being built as support for the local businesses operating in the area. The authorities of Tirana's municipality already conducted a feasibility study for building a new multi-modal rail station close to the area connecting the airport with a light rail line which is going to increase the quality of airport services in the transfer of passengers from both directions (Tirana municipality, 2014). These improvements in infrastructure will also have a great impact in economic and social development.

Nevertheless, informality is an issue of concern and challenge for the urban planners and local authorities for the city's future planning. During the last two decades, a huge number of residential objects were

built in the area in an informal way. There is a lack of infrastructure and public services in these settlements. This can be an obstacle for the future extensions of the airport capacities. In the interest of both airport and community, the immediate need is to conduct an airport land use compatibility study for protecting the area from land use incompatible with the airport, such as individual residential buildings, schools, religion objects etc. This compatibility land use plan will encourage the use of land in a more compatible manner, namely, the development of industrial and commercial centers around the airport.

Taking into consideration the following facts regarding the Rinas airport such as: a very good location between the capital city and the main seaport city- Durres; direct vicinity to the Albanian touristic destinations; permanent improvements in infrastructure; promotion of Albania as a country with touristic recourses; constant increase in the number of passengers and freights; good strategic location of Albania related to the regional countries in terms of transport of people and goods, and, finally, the existence of no other airport in the vicinity enhance the importance of the airport of Tirana as an accelerator of economic, social and urban development.

Conclusion

Given that the airports are vital national resources and they have a key role in transporting people and goods in regional, national, and international commerce, their role is increasing tremendously. We noticed that many of the great worldwide airport cities are investing a lot in air transportation as a result of taking into account the importance of airports as an economic generator. Moreover, today's modern airports are usually closely linked with other forms of traffic like roads, railways, bike, pedestrian paths and they are increasingly developing as multi-modal interchange nodes.

In view of the fact that the airport is becoming a part of the urban space nowadays and also a constituent part of cities' future plans, it is very important to have a compatible land use plan for the land near the airport. This compatible land use plan will discourage land uses that are generally

considered to be incompatible with airports from being located near airports and encourages more compatible land uses to be located around airports.

Finally, taking into consideration the above-mentioned facts of the airports in general and the ones of Tirana airport as accelerators of economic, social and urban development the role of airports is very significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that the urban development area around the Tirana airport will move toward a development of a kind of Air-city or "Aerotropolis".

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