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Preface

Spatial Proposals for The Post Pandemic City. Panacea Planning and Architecture for The Third Millenium Settlement. The Case of Lezha Region.

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1. Introduction - This publication is the result of a research project, within the framework of the National Research and Development Projects (PKKZH) for the period 2021-2023, co-financed by Polis University (U_POLIS) and the Agjencia Kombëtare e Kërkimit Shkencor dhe Inovacionit (AKKSHI) / National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation.

In the call opened by AKKSHI in March 2021, U_POLIS in cooperation with Co-PLAN - Institute for Habitat Development presented a research proposal with the title "Spatial Solution for the post Pandemic City: The Case of Lezha Region". This research proposal won the call made by AKKSHI and in this way it was funded as research by AKKSHI and by U_POLIS in cooperation with CO_PLAN. According to the chrono-program, the two-year project started in October 2021 and ends in September 2023, even though the staff involved in this project had been working on this topic for months since the beginning of the pandemic problem. So this publication is the product of an almost three-year research on the state of settlements after the global crisis caused by the Sars-Cov-2 pandemic that had its beginnings at the end of 2019 in China and later spread throughout the planet.

The working group of this project was directed by Prof. Besnik Aliaj, Rector of U_POLIS, and consists of Dr. LLazar Kumaraku, Dr. Skender Luarasi, Dr. Endri Duro as members of U_POLIS and Dr. Rudina Toto and Dr*. Rodion Gjoka from CO-PLAN. The project began with preliminary studies of the condition of the settlements affected by the pandemic and later was detailed in specific studies by international scientific researchers who are part of the joint International Doctorate in Architecture and Urban Planning (IDAUP) that U_POLIS organizes in collaboration with the University of Ferrara in Italy (UNIFE). In this research project, beyond the working group, more than twenty other young researchers at different academic levels gave a scientific contribution via a scientific paper in this volume.

2. Previous experience of the applying Institutions - This project, which comes in



Source/ PhD Programme

cooperation between Polis University and the Institute for Research and Development CO-PLAN, is organized within the joint IDAUP program that U_POLIS organizes together with UNIFE since 2013.

U_POLIS and CO-PLAN as applying institutions have an experience of more than 25 years in the research and development of territorial and urban space. Polis University is an institution focused on scientific and applied research on the inhabited space. The focus of U_POLIS research goes from territorial and urban space planning to research on housing space and architectural or engineering studies related to it. Among the similar works that U_POLIS has carried out can be listed the research and proposals for Durana (2014), Albanian Riviera (2015), When a River Flows (2016), Projecting Shkodra (2017); Prishtina. The new Image of the City (2018); RURBAN SEQUENCES Inquiries on Dropull's states of Liminality (2019); and RETHINKING GJIROKASTRA - Can architecture and city planning stimulate hope and growth for shrinking cities? (2020).

On the other hand, CO-PLAN has an experience of almost a quarter of a century on research and urban development at the national and international level. There are many research projects at the spatial level carried out by this institute that have resulted in the drafting of many general local plans, but also the publication of research journals or monographies that are directly related to territorial and urban space. The extensive research experience of Co-Plan is documented and can be consulted on the website of this institute.

The framing of this project within the PhD program makes this research include international researchers with an interdisciplinary experience that belong to different academic levels, starting from PhD candidates to academics with the title of Full Professor.

This publication in the framework of the research project provides specific solutions at theoretical and practical level within the field of research on the human environment. The focus of the project is to provide specific solutions at I) Territorial and urban planning

level, II) Biodiversity and Environment conservation and protection level III) Architectural level in relation to Housing and its new forms.

3. Scientific argumentation of the Project - Identification of the problem and the importance of its solution - During 2020 and 2021, millions of people around the world quarantined, isolated themselves, and practiced physical and social distancing. Our lives, families and work have been drastically transformed into what many people increasingly consider to be the "new normal". People work, study, shop and even get health advice remotely. However, not everyone enjoys suitable spaces for conducting virtual life. While most of the public's attention has been devoted to medical experts and government guidelines; de facto, it is clear that the way we have so far designed and planned our houses and cities has a bearing on how we are facing the pandemic on an individual and societal level. Online reports and scholarly articles on the role of architecture, urban design and planning for post-pandemic life and the city are added daily.

Indeed, there are many fundamental questions to be raised about the societal response to the post-pandemic city, but this research will focus on issues pertaining to the "new" role that architecture and planning and environmental sciences can embrace in relation to the built environment. Architects, planners and city experts seem to be excluded from the expert groups that outline solutions to the current global crisis. This attribute is currently only entrusted to politicians and health experts. However, this is a historic moment where the contribution of architects, planners, environmental and urban experts is much needed in proposing a new agenda for the future state of our living environments.

The use of the word city directly at the beginning of this project is due to exactly what this word reflects. After two centuries of growth in settlements, which, starting from the industrial city, passed to the metropolis, megalopolis (Gottman 1961) or ecumenopolis, it shows its crisis in the world situation affected by the condition of Covid-19. The end of the city was also theorized in Leonardo Benevolo's book (2011) "La Fine della città" but the crises of this ten-year period are still unclear. From here arises the need to rethink and redraw the settlement. In the Albanian context, this crisis of the big city was preceded by the earthquake crisis of September 23 and November 26, 2019. The images of thousands of families, on the one hand, who stand on streets because they could not get into their apartments due to the uncertainty of the constructions accompanied by the impossibility to gather in spaces that are able to guarantee the safety of the community and on the other hand the lockdown as a result of the situation caused by the pandemic, have in common the crisis that is currently investigating the contemporary residence, especially that with metropolitan dimensions.

After the global crisis of 2020, the settlement seems to be in an irreversible transformation. These major transformations affect: 1) the space where people gather, the way they gather and interact (the role of public squares goes from a gathering point to a point where the urban space is contemplated or "space" of interaction such as the telematic square); 2) financial exchanges (it seems like big businesses that are going online are dominating the market economy by overshadowing small businesses); 3) transport of persons and goods; 4) the housing space since it is appearing more and more as a space that tends to contain all the functions inside, where beyond the classical ones, the space for working/creating or even for recreation is added; 5) intelligent city administration; 6) transformations affecting social inequality; 7) the way of feeding or many other aspects. All these transformations necessarily are translated into transformations of the space inhabited by humans.

4. Purpose and objectives of the project - The purpose of this research project is to use spatial interventions as a kind of "vaccine" that is able to stop the degradation of the space of a settlement and prevent possible deterioration in the future. From this point of view, the intervention in space is seen as a kind of "cure" that is able to "cure the diseases" of settlements and the society that lives in these settlements.

Interventions in the space have always had a utopian character. Eduardo Persico (1945) asserts "E non conta che questa sua pregiudiziale sia rinnegata da coloro che più dovrebbero difenderla, o bandita da chi più, vaguamente, la tema: essa resterà, lo stesso, la fede segreta dell'epoca. Sostanza di cose sperate". In this phrase, which became the leitmotif of Italian architects and intellectuals after the Second World War, Persico clearly expresses the panacea character of architecture as an entity that carries and realizes the hopes of the inhabitant. On the other hand, Le Corbusier (1963) states that

architecture is made by happy peoples and makes people happy. The two intellectuals mentioned above show the positive charge that carries architecture, but the one that comes closer to our thought on architecture is the vision of Edoardo Persico. The Italian intellectual considers architecture as the essence of the hoped-for things, but in our vision we go further and consider it as a panacea, as an instrument that solves the problems of the moment but also prevents those of the future.

Based on the crises of the last few years at the national and international level, which have generated a series of new phenomena and needs for urban and residential spaces different from those of the previous period, the purpose of this project is to research on these phenomena and needs and to provide a solution at a spatial level, respecting the preservation of the environment, thus leading the spatial models of the cities of the future.

The objectives of the project go towards the proposal of solutions at the strategic level and at the level of concrete space interventions that are able to solve the problems caused by the crises of the last years. These crises that have caused a series of transformations have received through this publication a series of concrete strategic and spatial solutions. In relation to the above transformations (Point 3), this research project aims to find and propose alternative settlements that respond to the transformations and spatial crises generated by the situations that have emerged in recent years that include the Albanian context as well as the entire world.

These objectives affect three different spheres that are also related to the main focus of the project, which are I) proposals for planning and settlement models II) proposals for the protection and preservation of biodiversity and the Environment, III) proposals for innovative housing models that reflect the needs of contemporary society.

5. Organization of the research project - As stated above, this project begins with the identification of the problems caused by the shock of the earthquake and that of the pandemic. The activities on which this project was based are divided into the following categories:

Theoretical research activities to define the theoretical framework on which this project is based. As mentioned before the project officially started in October 2021 but immediately after the earthquake crisis of November 26, 2020 and the spread of Sars-Cov-2, the theoretical research in U_POLIS focused on facing these crises and providing a spatial response to the created problems.

Activities related to the extraction of the first hypotheses and the definition of the research question (point 6) which will lead to the first proposals on strategies and specific models suitable for the context of the case study,

Activities related to the direct analysis of the case study of the district of Lezhe. The analyzes on the Lezha region began simultaneously with the earthquake and pandemic crises and it was observed that in this region the impact of these crises was so significant that it was able to suggest concrete solutions that can be replicated in other similar contexts.

Treatment at the theoretical level and analysis of the results obtained from the analyzes in the field through concrete proposals at the spatial level on the specific case of Lezha and the transformation of these results into theoretical/practical instruments that are able to be applied in other similar contexts in world level,

Publication of these results in national and international conferences; publication in international scientific journals or in the series of publications issued by U_POLIS and CO-PLAN.

From the operational point of view, the above objectives expressed in point 4 were achieved by relying on the following steps:

A preparatory meeting in October 2021 between the project participants to discuss the collection of information, the state of art, the concrete organization of field visits, the way in which the information would be processed and the theoretical framework.

The determination of the final agenda for the organization of the site visit and contacting local actors to build an academic/administrative cooperation network. In this meeting was decided to invite international academics from the partner university of Ferrara in Italy. It was also decided that the working group in cooperation with the PhD students will meet with local actors and the administrative staff of the municipality in order to be aware about the physical reality of the case study. A few meetings were discussed among the project participants to determine and approve the final agenda of the study workshop that will take place in November 2021. The material and basic information was also identified and shared with the workshop guests and was discussed about

the professional figures that will be invited for lectures during the workshop. In this meeting, it was also determined that the international research workshop would be held from November 8-19, 2021.

A Field visit to analyze the condition of the area and determinate the crucial points and strategic areas with a special interest that present a critical character that requires immediate solutions. The site visit was part of the 10-day workshop where the group of this project collaborate with other guests from the academic and professional fields such as professors and PhD students. The general program of the workshop includes theoretical presentations, site visits and work in the studio to produce the first results. The workshop focused on three main topics on which three study groups with PhD candidates, PhD and Professors worked together. The first group that worked on infrastructure and facilities was led by PhD Besjana Qaja; the second group worked on environmental issues and resilience was led by PhD. Endri Duro; while the third group that worked on dwelling and Housing issues was led by PhD. Malvina Istrefaj. Each leader prepared an explanatory material for all the research work carried out, which is published at the beginning of the three main chapters that are related to the three main topics. The PhD candidates that took part in this project prepared a research that follows the introduction of the main chapters. All articles have gone through a double-blind review process that guarantees the quality and level of research in this publication. After the collection of research materials in February 2023, a round table was held with local actors and stakeholders to present and discuss the results of the work done since the beginning of the project. The leaders of each groups and representatives from Co-Plan presented the research done to experts from different fields on Lezha municipality. After this site visit and the discussion with local and administrative actors, the research was oriented towards the implementation of the suggestions received in these meetings. The reflection of the comments and suggestions made by the project participants and from the joint meeting with local actors and stakeholders was held in March 2023. These reflections are included in the final part of the conclusions of this publication.

This publication comes in 300 printed copies and is also available online on the official website of Polis University.

6. Project implementation methodology - From a methodological point of view, this project began with the identification of problems caused by the shock of the earthquake on November 26, 2020 and the critical situation caused by the Pandemic, not only at the national level but also at the international level. The problem identified by these two crises once again emphasized the "stiffness" and unsuitability of the spaces of the contemporary city to face strong crises. The research problem is posed on two different levels. The first has to do with the state of cities to deal with crises and the second with the research of the city spaces of the future that are able to "absorb" and transform in positive factors the shocks of the past.

This research methodology has been used in cases of different settlements in Albania where it was requested to solve different social, economic, spatial problems, etc. In the case of cities like Dropull (Aliaj B. Rossi L. Eds. 2020) and Gjirokastra (Aliaj B. Rossi L. eds 2021), the research aimed to solve the problems of Shrinking Cities and Heritage. The objective has been to stop the advancement of the shrinking of the city and preserve the Heritage through the interventions in the space. While the problem addressed in this publication is the post-pandemic city where as case study is the municipality of Lezhe. The objective of the is to propose coherent spatial solutions with the situation and settlements after the Pandemic situation. The final result of this research are concrete spatial solutions that seek to create a more suitable environment for living in settlements.

What unites these cases that is the innovation of this methodology, which has as a final result the creation of a procedural model, is the concept of intervention in space as a kind of "vaccine" that is able not only to solve current problems but also to prevent deterioration in the future. Here the innovation is translated into the consideration of the intervention in the space as a "cure" that "heals" the problems manifested by the settlement but also increases the "immunity" or resilience of the settlement itself.

Considering space interventions as a kind of "vaccine" able to improve the current situation and to improve the responses of the settlement in the future to the same shocks, the research question of this project is automatically raised. At this point, the research question of this project is related to finding spatial answers that provide solutions to urban problems generated precisely by the transformations (Point 3) and

the crises of recent years. Specifically, the research question of the project is: how should a settlement be, from a territorial and urban point of view, able to withstand major shocks such as earthquakes, floods, fires, droughts, infectious situations both for people and for the chain of life?

In order to answer the question above, the project was divided into several steps that are not necessarily consecutive but overlap with each other.

The first step focused on gathering information at a theoretical level that is directly related to theoretical studies on resilient and innovative cities. Parallel to this step, detailed analyzes were done at the territorial and urban level on the case of the Lezha region, emphasizing the risks and dangers to which this region is exposed.

The second step involved the development of an intensive ten-day workshop in Tirana with national and international researchers. Part of this workshop were, in addition to the members of the research group of this project, were engaged other international guests and twenty students from the International Doctorate in Architecture and Urban Planning (IDAUP). In this intensive workshop, beyond the analyzes made in the first step, specific proposals were given at the theoretical and practical level that answer the research question raised at the beginning of this paragraph. The workshop entitled "Planning Cities for the (Post-)Pandemic/Crisis Era - Aspects of territorial sustainability and resilience @ Lezha Region, Albania." took place in Tirana and Lezha from November 8, 2021 to November 19, 2021. In the Workshop, three groups of researchers with PhD candidates were led by a group of professors from Polis University coordinated by Prof. Besnik Aliaj and Dr. Llazar Kumaraku, while other lecturers helped every day with selected interventions and presentations directly related to the topic. The participants focused special attention on three main dimensions: i) infrastructure planning and development; ii) Biodiversity and environment; iii) urban space and housing. In the workshop. The current situation was analyzed, including the main threats to a stable and resilient future such as: i) floods and fires; ii) earthquakes; iii) pandemics. During the analysis, other threats were identified and presented in the introductory chapters for each topic. The proposed interventions were based on following the antipole strategy (Kumaraku 2021) used in other urban projects as in the case of the lots led and planned by U_POLIS in the Academy of 100 Villages and in the case of the vision built for the city of Gjirokastra.

The third step of this research focused on the detailed research for the dimensions mentioned above, where each participant in the workshop gave a theoretical contribution in proposing new spatial strategies or models that are able to withstand shocks in the cities of the future. The proposed interventions are based on the new planning paradigms (Kumaraku 2020) where U_POLIS is a precursor to implementation not only in the Balkan context.

7. Results of the project - Regarding the objectives, the research activities and the methodology followed in this project, a series of concrete interventions for the case of the Lezha municipality have been proposed, which have the "nature" of instrumental proposals in all national and international contexts that have a similar character of Lezha. Concrete spatial proposals affect the sphere of the environment, risks and dangers at the environmental and planning level.

This publication presents new proposals for an intelligent infrastructure as well as for new proposals at the residential level, where the highlighted and previously raised issues related to the various risks to which the Lezhe District is exposed are resolved.

The results of the project have been announced by participating in various conferences and other research activities. Beyond this publication that summarizes the research results of all participating researchers, researchers participated in conferences or other national and international research activities, such as the presentation made by Dr. Llazar Kumaraku and Dr. Skender Luarasi held in Lezhe on April 21, 2022 organized by the Ministry of Tourism and Environment and Co-Plan. The final step of this project is represented by this dedicated publication of all the findings made in this project on instruments and new spatial models that are able to respond to shocks received by a settlement.

The publication is divided into several main parts. After an introductory chapter by Llazar Kumaraku and Besnik Aliaj, it continues with the part of interdisciplinary research on the Case of Lezhe. Three big chapters are dedicated to infrastructure and services issues, Environment and Biodiversity and Dwelling and Housing issues. The publication ends with the conclusions and suggestions for the specific case of Lezha and with the emphasis on the theoretical/practical instruments for the transformation of cities into

settlements that are able to withstand the shocks of the future.

8. Stakeholders - The beneficiaries of this project are divided into direct beneficiaries and indirect beneficiaries. Direct beneficiaries of this project are first of all the current scientific researchers but also those who will follow in the future. The second direct beneficiaries is the community of Lezha Region, which has at its disposal a series of concrete instruments at the territorial, urban and architectural level that are able to directly improve the quality of the space and, consequently, the quality of housing and the lives of the residents. Indirect beneficiaries are all space researchers, starting from planners, urban researchers, architects, environmental engineers or even other professional figures who deal with the study of the space.

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