



BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
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ISSUES OF HOUSING,
PLANNING, AND
RESILIENT DEVELOPMENT OF
THE TERRITORY
Towards Euro-Mediterranean
Perspectives

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Issues of Housing, Planning, and Resilient Development of the Territory Towards Euro-Mediterranean Perspectives

Conference Theme and Rationale

Albania, along with other Western Balkan countries, has undergone significant economic, social, and political changes in recent years. As a result, housing, planning, and the resilient management of territorial development have emerged as critical issues. This is because these regions face significant challenges in providing affordable housing, addressing the impact of urbanization on the environment, fostering evidence-based decision-making on the territory, and bringing forth the commitments towards climate neutrality.

The organizers use the term “multi-modality” to define complex situations (in matters of territorial planning, management, architecture, housing, public space, technology, etc.) that have historically encompassed Western Balkans and Mediterranean cities in a logic of coexistence and value co-creation. A combination of knowledge and heritage that throughout time and history have given life to civilization in this region of Europe. The active involvement of Albania in the existing network of the Mediterranean Basin and the EU, through a joint action plan with UN / UNECE, and the Albanian and regional authorities, including reputable scientific bodies such as the Academy of Sciences of Albania, makes this conference even more intriguing to explore fascinating areas of research. The conclusions, to be considered as a stage for open innovation, will include recommendations for further scientific and applied research, projects, and events.

The geographical focus of the conference covers three dimensions: i) Albania; ii) the Western Balkans; iii) Euro-Mediterranean countries. POLIS University aims to focus on the above-mentioned research areas that are of common interest to both Western Balkans and Mediterranean cities, including, but not limited to: housing policies, urban history and architecture typology, innovation and digitalization in urbanism, energy efficiency, resilience and environmental sustainability, governance and smart technologies for city management, education and gender aspects in urban planning research.

In this regard the main aim of this international conference is to bring together scholars, policy-makers, and practitioners to examine the pressing issues of housing, planning, and land development in these regions, in a context of transition fatigue, climate challenges and post-pandemic realities.

Issues of Housing, Planning, and Resilient Development of the Territory Towards Euro-Mediterranean Perspectives

Conference Aim

The main aim of this international conference is to bring together researchers, policy makers and practitioners to examine the urgent issues of housing, planning and land development in these regions, in a context of transition, climate challenges and post-pandemic realities.

Objective

- Consolidation of the cooperation network between Albanian and non-Albanian researchers, lecturers, managers, with the aim of participating in joint research projects at the regional and international level;
- Support of local authorities with contemporary data, on the state of housing issues, planning and sustainable urban and environmental management, as well as representatives of public and private institutions operating in this field.

The conference is organized by POLIS University (U_POLIS) in cooperation with the Academy of Science of Albania, and supported by other local and international partners.

In the framework of resilience, the main conference theme is devoted to Issues of Housing, Planning, and Resilient Development of the Territory from a Euro-Mediterranean Perspective, including Albania, Western Balkans and the Mediterranean Basin. This event aims to bring together academics, policymakers, researchers, experts, practitioners, and stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to discuss and address critical challenges related to housing, urban planning, and the development of resilient territories.

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Exploring the balance between common and private spaces A case study from Tirana

Hera MARJANAKU¹
Ph.D. Candidate. Marsela Plyku DEMAJ¹
Dr. Llazar KUMARAKU¹
¹Polis University, Albania

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Abstract

This article explores the relationship between private spaces (dwellings), common spaces and the presence of the human factor. In the consideration that the dwelling space as a phenomenon takes place in both the inside and its outside immediate urban setting, these levels of scale are often intertwined; they are inextricably linked in a complex entanglement of interests. Changes on one level have immediate implication for others. A search on urban design should consider all levels as intertwined in a constant search for improvement as a whole.

The aim of this paper is to explore the changing relationships between the community and private and common spaces through the history of urban transformation in one of the dense urban areas close to the Tirana centre. Tirana is a particular example displayed throughout its history and still continuing to display great and fast urban transformations in its territory. The case study area displays signs from the most distinct urban transformations of the city.

Based on a space syntax assessment from the field and using a diagrammatic analysis-comparison methodology, the following points are explored:

1. relationship between the individual and the common space
2. relationship between the individual and the semi-private territory surrounding the dwelling (courtyard / garden)
3. relationship between the individual and the private space (dwelling)

Conclusions obtained from this analysis of the existing situation will be compared in a formal way with the same relationships in a previous historic period, showing the level of transformation and changing levels of relationships between private and common spaces.

Keywords

common space, urban design, urban density, high rise, urban transformation, Tirana.

Introduction

In the last 30 years, while Albania has been and still continues to be in an economic and social transition period, its urban spaces and architectural character are continuously and rapidly undergoing drastic changes and transformations. Urban development problems are among the first effects of this transition period emerged while the cities need to provide proper infrastructure, cope with increasing needs for public transport, manage vehicle traffic and protect the environment.

The population of Tirana has increased in unforeseen numbers since 1990 due to uncontrolled and unplanned migrations mainly of the rural population but increasingly also from other urban centers all over Albania. Due to this fact, the experience with urban development during and after the 1990s in Tirana created one of the most singular cases of architectural and urban development models in Europe, especially for its dynamism and energy as well as for its irregularity and total chaos on the one hand, and the total absence of development plans and policies on the other hand. The situation of architecture and urban planning in this period is the best visual expression of the city's difficult transition. (Aliaj, Lulo, & Myftiu, 2003, f. p.66)

This paper explores the changes that happened in the relationship between private spaces (dwellings), common spaces and the presence of the human factor analyzing a selected case study urban area in Tirana in two distinct historic periods being during the communist regime (in the early '60s) and today. Both periods are selected with 30 years from 1990 which is the year that marked the fall of the communist regime.

Literature Review

2022 is considered a notable year for the Albanian capital, since Tirana was announced as the "European Youth Capital". It is obvious that the city is gradually going towards the concentration of the central government entities and organizations that act as gears of development. However, in face of this accomplishment which presents the city as a "Dream City" full of opportunities and promising a bright future and healthy living, the current and touchable everyday reality comprises concrete buildings and functional areas.

Numerous studies and published sources provide information on the process of urban and architectural transformation that Tirana has undergone in the last 30 years. (Aliaj, Lulo, & Myftiu, 2003) state that following the 1990s, Tirana is characterized by the extreme degradation in the quality of urban environments and the occupation of public lands by illegal development. In the same line (Velo, 2013) analyses the fact that in the 1990s Tirana inherited several peculiar characteristics the most significant of which was the horizontal extension bearing a great potential to conserve common open and green spaces. He further considers that after the 1990s in the course of only 10 years, due to the unplanned and spontaneous development that Tirana has experienced, it resulted to become the most chaotic and unesthetic city in Europe occupying its common open spaces with high-rise buildings.

Considering the morphological analysis as crucial to a good design, (Leupen & Harald, 2011) mentions the need for undertaking such an analysis also in the most chaotic parts of the cities. In exploring on how to better understand the morphology of an urban area, he refers to Colin Rowe who drew the buildings as black volumes against an empty background. Jean Castex who includes a number of influential works on urban form, describes the city as the outcome of a series of erosions of the typological diagram. In his studies he links typological analyses at building level with the analysis of urban fabrics and urban plan types.

Tools and Methodology

The methodology used for the development of this research is based in a two-steps approach which are:

- Separate figure-and-ground analysis as well as permeability analysis of the common and private spaces in two distinct historic periods being early '60s and today,
- Comparison of both analyses

The analysis-comparison process which is undertaken in parallel and using similar terms, is considered to be adequate for assuring the achievement of some concrete and well based conclusions from this research.

As part of the separate analyses the following three types of relationships will be examined:

- a. relationship between the individual and the common space.
- b. relationship between the individual and the semi-private territory surrounding the dwelling (courtyard / garden)
- c. relationship between the individual and the private space (dwelling)

The conclusions are derived from the comparison and the juxta positioning of the two-analysis based on the above-listed three types of relationships. The results are displayed in the form of an abacus showing the changes that happened in the relationships between common and private spaces. The facts and figures are the outcome of observations in field and historic research.

Case study area

General characteristics

The selected area is referred in (Bushati, 2012) as “Zone 1, it is located very close to the center of Tirana, (see Fig.1) confined by the Train Station (north), the “Dibra Street” (south), the boulevard “Zogu I-st” (west) and the “Barrikada Street” (east). It is considered as one of the first distinct roads in Tirana which has undergone a series of renovations between 1920’s and 1930’s. This a zone where the effects of the transitory period, that the city has been experiencing, are widely felt, and a variety of new ideas and projects are foreseen to be realized until 2030.

The area under examination includes significant historic buildings bearing cultural values. They date back in the end of 19th century and also in the period between 1912- 1944, displaying interesting features and relationships with one another and with the inhabitants as well. These features can be considered as the starting point for this research.

Accessibility Analysis

The analysis of accessibility is conducted in the case study area in the two selected historic periods 1958 and 2022. It aims at understanding the level of permeability and the movement patterns in the case study area in each period. Also by comparing both analyses, an understanding of the changes in the accessibility of transition between common and private spaces can be conceived.

First, the main routes connecting bigger distances compared to close internal distances within the zone are identified. These are the routes used by a significant number of locals. Various social activities are established along them, such as services for both inhabitants and visitors. It should be highlighted that these routes contour “Zone 1,” and because of the high volume of movement, the linking routes between the east and west sides, was considered acceptable, resulting in a mi-

¹(Dhamo, Thomai, & Aliaj, 2021)

²The historic research and analysis was undertaken by H.Marjanaku, in the framework of the “Theoretical Deepening” class, during the 5th year of the studies (2022-2023) in the Department of Architecture, Polis University. The graphic elaborations are developed by H.Marjanaku under the direction and mentorship of Dr. Ll. Kumaraku and PhD Candidate M.P.Demaj.

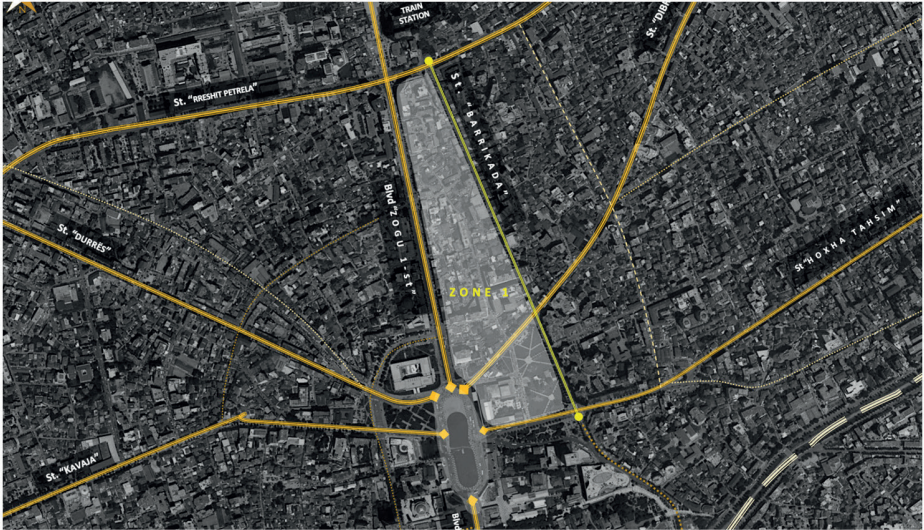


Fig. 1 Aerial view of Tirana – Zone 1 is highlighted in relation to the city centre

ni-zoning of the entire area.

Through the fragmentation of the whole, it seems possible to create the so called moderate access pathways. This is a term used to describe movement within a narrower radius of permeability. This is generally done to link two greater routes, to connect two ends of the whole, or to interconnect pieces from one end to another, within the mini-border. In terms of visual aesthetic, it has become the key characteristic, that concentrates into the main view.

It should be noted that over the time frame reviewed, that is during the 64 years, communal gathering activities take place on public routes, widely accessible to everybody, leaving the tranquility to the inner pathways having either moderate or limited access. This referring to the more intimate interior access, where just a few dwellings are collected and the population that lives there is rather small. These pathways, on the other hand, are not utterly cul-de-sacs since they develop the social activity of a specific group of people, who are linked by the fact that they share a common space. They use and these limited access - paths collectively.

The accessibility analysis allows for the clarifying of linear segments that contribute to the form of the urban settlement. However, as architects, urban planners, restorers, historians, journalists, and politicians, as prime ministers, citizens, and individuals, we must accept that a path/route/street laid with either concrete, cobblestones, bricks, tiles, marble etc., is never just one element of a passage. It is never just a street. The linear vectors of accessibility routes graphically presented in figures 1 and 2 should be considered as living elements and as such as elements that develop a chain of interactions with the every-day life of the users.



Fig. 2 - Accessibility analysis, map of 1958



Fig. 3 Accessibility analysis (2022)

Several observations listed below can be drawn from the accessibility analysis:

1. Zone 1 was in 1958 a more compact urban unit mainly framed by main routes and having an internal structure of moderate access routes and limited access (more private) areas, while today due the increase in population density the developments have been extended towards the internal structure of the urban unit creating main access routes and a new division of the whole.
2. Today Zone 1 can be considered of being composed of 3 sub-zones (south, central, north) which are defined from the east-west routes that have gained more importance over the years.
3. Moderate and limited access spaces providing kind of quiet and semiprivate spaces, have diminished in the course of 60 years, in favor of direct access areas and more publicly used and crowded spaces.
4. What is immediately noticeable is the prominence of the green tone, not just as a frame color, as was shown in prior research, but also how the ease of movement transcends not only the vast surface but also the mini inner areas. Regardless of whether they overlap, it is noticeable that as the red hue begins in the primary diagrams, the green color becomes prevalent in the areas previously considered to be more private.

Relationship between the individual and the common space

This section aims to analyze the changes that have happened in the relationship between the individual and common spaces. A figure and ground graphic representation of Zone 1 has aided in the production of the following abacus, which categorizes the interaction that the individual buildings establish with the common street area in two different historic periods (1958 and 2022).

They are divided as follows:

1. Buildings easily accessible from the main road/s (direct access)
2. Buildings accessible from secondary road/s (moderate access)

Buildings with limited access

The comparison shows that the progress of development does not exclude secondary roads either. Even now the internal paths with moderate and limited access have turned into derivatives of the main road, this pertains to the density and usage frequency of the area, where the flow of the population and the flow of rapid construction are directly influencing each other.

While in 1958 the direct access buildings were those that were built along the main axes framing the zone, today it is noticed that there is an increase in the volumes, and scale of developments (apartment blocs) in the internal part of the urban unit also. The smaller, internal areas comprised by mainly individual buildings which prevailed in the internal part of the urban unit in 1958 result today as very diminished in numbers.

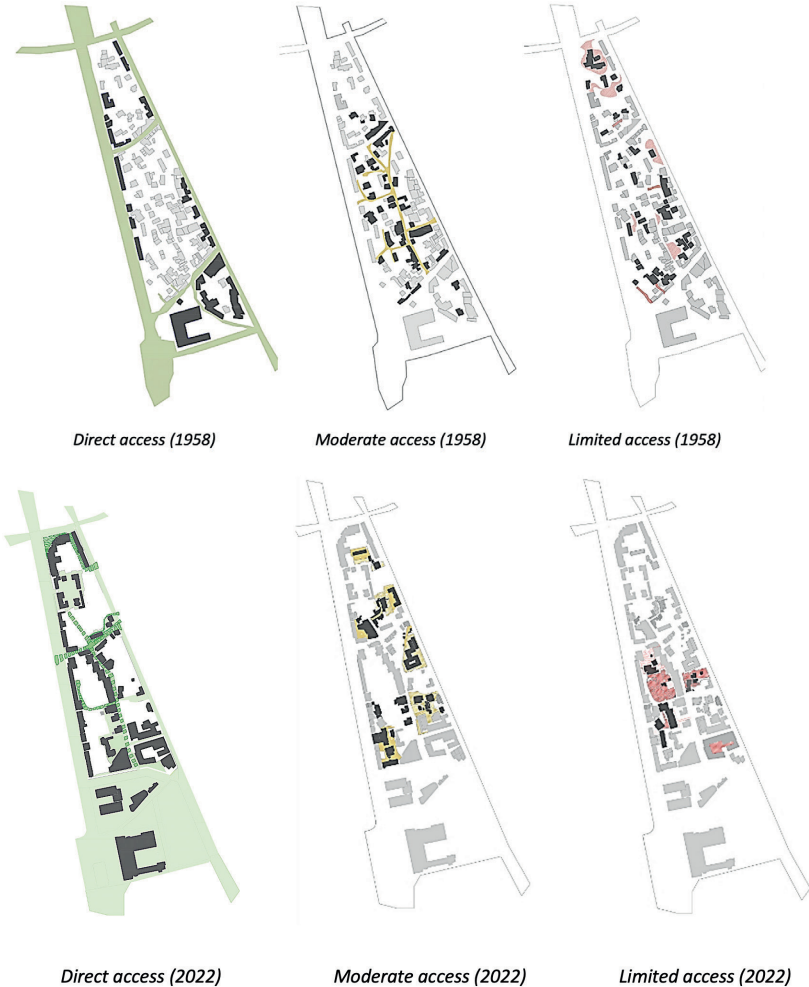


Fig. 4 Abacus showing the comparison of accessibility patterns in 1958 and 2022

Relationship between the individual and the semi-private territory surrounding the dwelling (courtyard / garden)

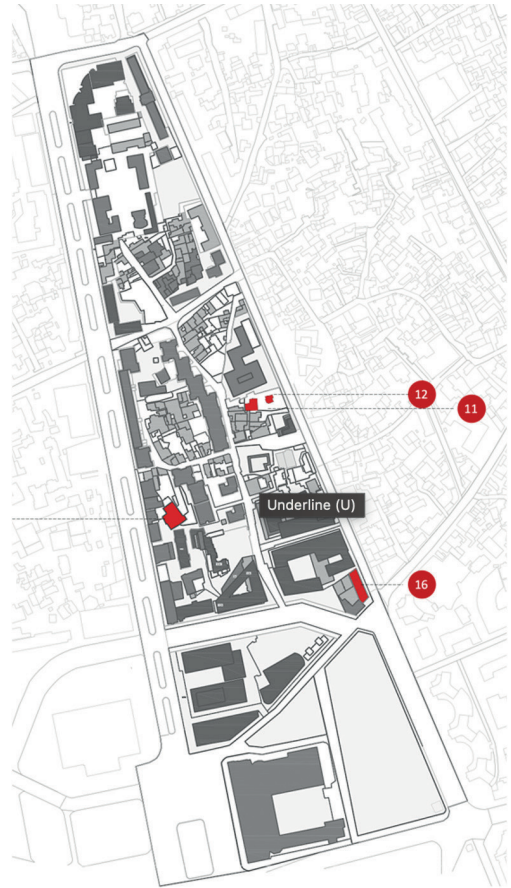
The following section takes into consideration three historic villas in Zone 1, that date back to the period between the end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century. Being permanent elements in the last 60 years, they can be an indicator towards how much existing buildings were influenced by the developments in their surrounding urban unit, in terms of accessibility, and based on their typologies.

Villa No. 11 is one of the residences of Petrela family. It is a two-storey villa built around 1900's. The presence of decorative elements in the façade as characteristic feature of the early 20th century is present in the exterior. The building faces the today busy and crowded "Barrikada street", however it still has conserved its courtyard providing a semi-private space for its inhabitants. The above serves to develop the sense of security as well as liberty, as the yard becomes the primary space from which family activities are carried out, completely independent of the outside world.

Building no. 12 is the Tekke of Sheh Dyrri, a religious building, however it has been constructed in the typology of vernacular architecture that prevailed in Tirana region until the end of 19th century. This building also follows the same logic of

providing an internal courtyard for the users while the main entrance gate to this courtyard faces the busy street. The following section takes into consideration three historic villas in Zone 1, that date back to the period between the end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century. Being permanent elements in the last 60 years, they can be an indicator towards how much existing buildings were influenced by the developments in their surrounding urban unit, in terms of accessibility, and based on their typologies.

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Fig. 5 - Villa no.11, photo credits M.P.Demaj



Fig. 6- Tekke of Sheh Dyrri, photo credits M.P.Demaj

Relationship between the individual and the private space (dwelling)

In reference to the similar relationship that exists between the individual and the private space / dwelling, as well as the person in relation to the personal spaces he is offered or creates, it is additionally important to highlight the Petrela family's second villa (villa no.16), which is located at the crossroads of two main routes, Barrikada street and Dibra Street. The three-story residence, built 27 years after the first Petrela's villa, has similarly found its answer for the enrichment of private areas separated from the outside world, which in this case does not include neither a wall nor the courtyard within it. The addition of the terrace element provides the needed private space in this case.



Fig. 7 - Villa No.16 – photo credits M.P.Demaj

The selected villas display a kind of relationship between common and private spaces that prevailed in Zone 1 until 1990s. While analyzing the changes that happened in these relationships the following catalog is developed. (fig..) where characteristics borrowed from present objects are recorded based on their location. The graphic presentation of the results in this section shows the changes in the relationships that the three selected buildings have with their surrounding urban unit. As noted in the introduction this Zone has experienced an increase in density but also an increase in height of new buildings. The fundamental principles of maintaining the appropriate distance between buildings have not been considered and the graphic representation of the urban silhouette close to the selected buildings displays this fact. Suffocation of historic 2-3 stories buildings is caused by the setting of high-rise structures in a relatively close proximity. Construction of the multi-story buildings in the immediate area, in these cases interrupted the boundary that belonged to them and also interrupted the space that belonged to them.

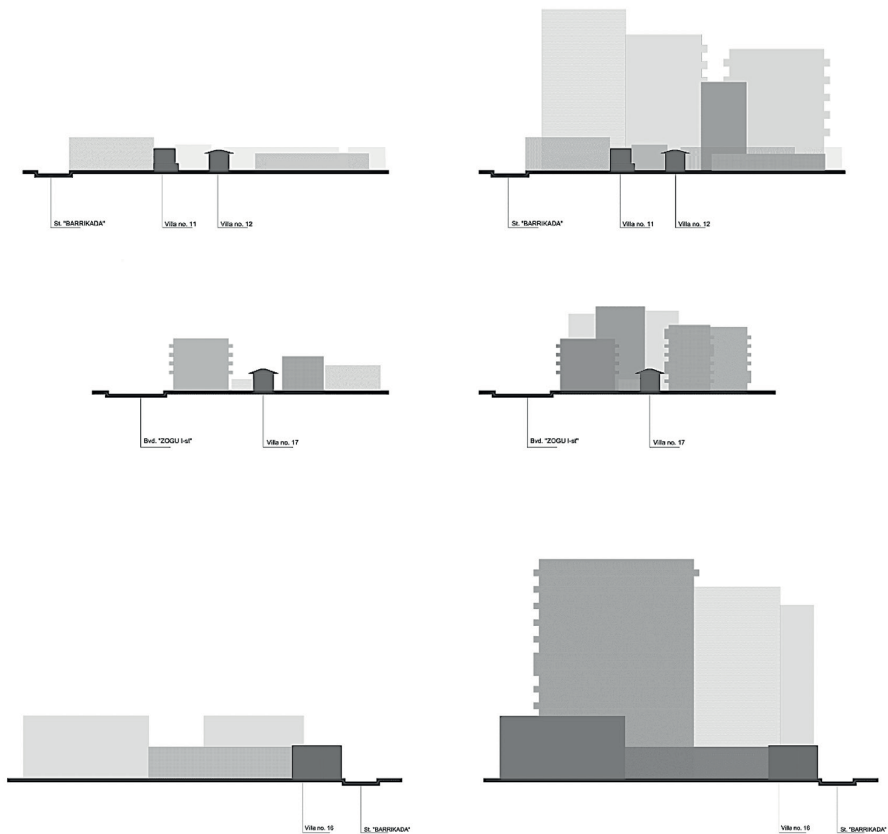


Fig. 8 - Comparison of the changes in the relationship of the studied villas with the surrounding urban unit 1958 (left) towards 2022 (right), schematic section

Conclusions

The analysis and comparison approach constitutes the core of the present research, which serves as a method for understanding and raising awareness for a situation that is currently happening and is expected to continue for the following years.

The analysis demonstrates that there exists an imbalance between the appealing city's ideals and the real circumstances that Tirana residents face on a daily basis. The observations derived by the comparison may be perceived in the following manners: (1) the people concept of their physical well-being and the goals wanting to attain for one's self has changed through time. So far, the essential shift consists in the inhabitants consciousness as citizens and makers of their personal space. What was formerly considered essential, that is transitory spaces from common to private (such as courtyards) has been changed and may have taken on a new form and value. (2) the common spaces are being reduced to movement axes and the urban units are losing their own peculiar characteristics made through an interconnection of common semi-private and private spaces. They are rather going towards the unification of the urban character, being limited to buildings and streets and lacking those small spaces that are linked to the local identity and diversify and enrich the urban form.

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