



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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The peripheral areas, a new classification for Tirana

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Abstract

The peripheral areas of Tirana have witnessed a significant development in recent years, reflecting the rapid urbanization of the city and population growth. The expansion of the city, especially after the 1990s, combined with insufficient legislation to regulate territorial growth, has led to the emergence of informal settlements on the outskirts of Tirana. Consequently, a double city has been formed, with differences between the center and the periphery in terms of urban structures, types of development, resident population, etc. Despite this, it should be noted that the peripheral regions are closely connected to Tirana and are considered an important part of the city's urban structure. Since the suburbs are not separated from the core of the city, it is difficult to tell where they begin and end. Therefore the exact definition of a suburb still remains a question: what exactly constitutes a suburb and how does it differ from the city center in terms of characteristics? This study aims to redefine the concept of the periphery based on different theoretical frameworks and identify the peripheral areas of Tirana through a Geographic Information System (GIS) analysis to determine their distinctive features.

By explaining the concept of the periphery, this thesis presents a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the periphery and related terms. Also, the thesis presents an innovative approach by developing an integrated matrix of indicators that will be integrated into the GIS system, serving as a tool for similar studies in Albania.

The objective of the study is to provide guidance to planning institutions and stakeholders, whether public or private, to identify peripheral areas and implement appropriate policies and strategies for their sustainable development.

Keywords

Indicators, periphery, spatial justice, urban sprawl

Introduction

According to the book “The Challenge of Urban Development in Tirana” (Aliaj, Lulo, & Myftiu, 2003), the city of Tirana’s early roots are tied to the Old Mosque of Sulejman Pasha. In addition to the mosque, other buildings with various uses, such as hammams and bakeries, were constructed, dividing the city into a number of smaller districts. The urban nature of this place, especially in its surrounding districts, was conditioned by the affiliation of a significant number of the people with farming, raising livestock, and crafts. After Albania gained its independence in 1912, Tirana started to see population expansion and urbanization. The city grew outside of its historical center, and new suburbs began to sprout there. These neighborhoods can be thought of as the first suburban developments.

When Tirana was proclaimed the capital in 1920, it still maintained an organic shape with medieval characteristics that had been established without the aid of any prior project. With the projects started to modernize the city during the reign, the first attempts to give new forms to this organism started (Dhamo, Thomai, & Aliaj, Tirana - Qyteti i Munguar, 2021). Tirana became a more significant urban center as new government buildings, schools, hospitals, and cultural institutions were constructed. We have migratory movements throughout this time period, primarily as a result of the rise in living standards, which also influenced the development of the city.

The initiatives for the city continued under the communist regime, with an emphasis on giving Tirana a new dimension and image. These projects ranged from the construction of the new historical district to the extensive interventions for the formation of new zones that primarily served as residential and industrial hubs. Urbanization persisted at this time, and suburbia started to expand. To accommodate the expanding population and offer essential amenities, the state constructed brand-new apartment buildings and housing complexes in the suburbs. Suburban areas such as “Blloku” served as residential areas for the elite of the time. However, throughout this period the city’s growth was strictly controlled according to regulatory plans (Dhamo, 2012). This growth trend shifted dramatically after the 1990s.

The demise of the communist dictatorship in 1990 brought about enormous socioeconomic and physical changes. The tactics for managing the territory were drastically altered, shifting from a limited and rigorous expansion of the city to an extended urbanization with irregular territory development (Bosetti, et al., 2020). This phenomena spawned an assortment of issues, including uncontrolled land use, deterioration of the urban environment’s quality, excessively crowded urban structures, different socioeconomic and health issues, a lack of suitable infrastructure, a lack of public services, and more (Aliaj, Lulo, & Myftiu, 2003). The sharp increase of the population and urban areas, along with insufficient regulations to manage territorial development, resulted in the establishment of informal communities on Tirana’s outskirts.

The aim of this research

Peripheral areas frequently have different political requirements than urban or rural areas. Policy-makers can get insight into the distinct issues and opportunities that these communities confront by studying the suburbs. These insights can be used to influence the creation of policies and actions addressing challenges such as infrastructure, affordable housing, education, health care, and local government. Understanding suburban dynamics assists researchers, policymakers, and urban planners in anticipating and responding to the changing requirements and needs of suburban communities. The objective of this research is to define and identify suburbs using a framework interlaced with indicators, which will then be incorporated into a geographic information system (GIS).

Literature review

More people will move to cities as the population of the world rises, and a sizable number of them will reside in areas that are already categorized as suburban. It is crucial to comprehend what a suburb is and its significance heading into the future.

Suburbs vary greatly in appearance, population, and actual significance around the world, making it difficult to define suburbia in terms that apply universally. Since peripheral territory is interpreted differently in many literary works, it is required to compile a number of concepts from various authors in order to define it. Suburbs can be categorized according to a wide range of criteria, including geography, transportation options, culture, and external appearance. Nevertheless, some terms have a certain stability and familiarity despite ongoing changes, significant spatial alteration, and heated discussion about the regions surrounding cities.

The Oxford Dictionary defines a suburban area of a city as “A residential district situated on the outskirts of a city or large town, typically characterized by single-family homes, gardens, and a low population density” (Murray, 1989). Individual homes on small lots, a variety of stores and services, and a mix of commercial and industrial uses are frequently characteristics of suburban districts. These communities typically surround large cities and provide a more economical alternative to residing in the city core.

According to the Dictionary of the Albanian Language, the suburb is defined as “The part that is located on the side of a residential center, far from the center of the city or village, the outer quarters of a city; the peripheral parts of a country, far from its economic, political and cultural center” (Akademia e Shkencave e RPSSH, 1985).

A Routledge study on the periphery argues (Forsyth, 2019), that the periphery can be described in terms of a number of factors, including geographical location, built environment characteristics, transportation, activities, sociocultural dimension, architecture and design styles, etc. Suburban regions are regarded as a significant component of the metropolitan landscape since they offer both residents and visitors homes, employment, and recreational possibilities. They frequently have a low population density, individual residences, and a mixture of industrial, commercial, and recreational purposes. They are close to large cities and can provide a more economical alternative to living in the city center. Suburban areas contribute significantly to the overall urban area by balancing and diversifying the metropolitan landscape.

Suburbs are frequently considered to be migratory zones characterized by depravity and poverty. For social groups fleeing the old city core, the suburbs offer a “new settlement” aspect. This links the notion of spatial justice and the periphery. A key component of spatial justice is “the fair and equitable spatial distribution of socially valued resources and opportunities to use them” (Soja, 2010). Previous studies have demonstrated that the population is impacted by the unequal allocation of public resources, services, and goods in metropolitan regions. Cities are expanding outward as more people move from rural to urban areas, widening the gap between urban and rural residents’ standard of life, particularly in low- and middle income nations. As a result, there is social unfairness in the allocation of public goods and services. The idea of a “15-minute city,” in which daily services including work, shopping, education, health care, and other activities are easily accessible within 15 minutes on foot from any area in the city, strives to lessen the uneven distribution of services.

According to Edward Soja (Soja, 2010), marginalized or suburban areas of a city or metropolitan area are referred to as liminal. Soja claims that families with poorer incomes, lower levels of education, and restricted access to services and facilities are frequently found in these “in-between” communities. These border regions might offer chances for different kinds of urban growth in

addition to acting as vulnerable and hostile environments (Soja, 2010). He emphasizes that because it challenges the dominant spatial order and provides excluded people with an opportunity to challenge established power structures, liminality is a crucial element of spatial justice. He highlights the significance of appreciating and embracing liminal spaces as sites of transformation and opportunity. Soja makes the case that it is essential to establish a “triangle of spatial justice” that encompasses the core, the peripheral regions, and the liminal areas in between. This triangle represents a more inclusive and egalitarian spatial paradigm that acknowledges the existence and significance of liminality in urban and social processes.

Sociologist and expert in urban studies Saskia Sassen investigates the peripheral in the context of globalization and global cities. Sassen explores how the effects of international movements of labour, capital, and information on suburban regions in her book “The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo” (Sassen, 2001). She highlights that suburbs are not uniform areas but rather have a variety of social, economic, and cultural characteristics. Sassen points out that suburban areas are more than just deprived areas on the fringes of major cities; they are essential to the operation of the global economy. According to her, peripheries are crucial to the global economy because they house a variety of economic activity like resource extraction, manufacturing, and low-skilled labor-intensive businesses.

Urban sprawl is another concept that is strongly tied to the periphery and is characterized as unplanned, uncoordinated, and uneven growth that is fueled by numerous mechanisms and results in unsustainable patterns of development (Galster, et al., 2001). This phrase has been used in a variety of contexts to discuss urban development patterns, the growth of urbanized regions, the reasons behind specific land use behaviors, and the effects that result from those behaviors. When referring to low-density, ineffective, and unplanned suburban development on the outskirts of cities, the term “urban sprawl” is typically used in a derogatory sense. The necessity to accommodate urban population expansion contributes to urban sprawl.

Tirana’s urban development through the years

Tirana’s origins could be traced back to the Ottoman Empire, when it was a small city with a dense urban core. The city was scattered around its core until the first quarter of the nineteenth century, when the main routes were opened in a radial shape connecting the center with the few populated regions. The relationship of a large portion of the population with farming, raising livestock, and crafts influenced the urban nature of this place, particularly in its outskirts. Tirana began to undergo population expansion and urbanization following Albania’s independence in 1912. The city developed beyond its historical core, with the introduction of new communities beyond the core that can be termed early suburban developments.

Beginning in 1917-1918, we witness the first attempts by several Austrian academics to map Tirana and its road structure. Based on this, Austrian engineers and architects created the first plan for Tirana in 1923. The goal of this design was to alter and rectify Tirana’s road system to a more rectangular shape while keeping the main radial routes of the old city (Dhamo, Thomai, & Aliaj, 2021). Other interventions in the city, particularly in the central area, included the opening of new axis within the existing street structure and the construction of new aristocratic districts, as was common of European towns at the time.

During the reign of the monarchy, projects to modernize the city were also established, Tirana became a more significant urban center as new government buildings, schools, hospitals, and cultural institutions were constructed. There were numerous migratory movements throughout this time period, primarily as a result of the rise in living standards, which also influenced the

expansion of the city.

Following World War II, Albania fell under the control of communists. A controlled planning strategy was put into place during this time, which had a big impact on Tirana's urban growth. During this time, the city underwent substantial deconstruction and reconstruction efforts with the goal of transforming it into a socialist city. Traditional structures were dismantled to create room for imposing civic spaces, broad boulevards, and public squares. Additional neighborhoods were also added, with housing and industry as their primary functions. The suburbs functioned as the elite's preferred neighborhoods at this time.

Among several countries in Eastern and Central Europe, Albania transitioned from a totalitarian to a democratic political system in the beginning of the '90s. The nation's urban planning industry was significantly impacted by this political upheaval. Mass internal migration caused rapid and unplanned development of Tirana's outskirts, leading to inadequate infrastructure to meet the requirements of the expanding population.

Tirana has kept on becoming more urbanized, and its suburbs have continued to grow. The growth of the suburbs has been aided by increased migration from rural areas, higher living standards, and the development of infrastructure. Modern residential complexes, high-rise buildings, shopping malls, and other facilities are being built in the suburbs, which has affected the city. Urban regeneration initiatives have sought to improve both the quality of life for locals and visitors. Examples include the revival of city centers and the establishment of green areas.

Today, Tirana is a modern day urban center that is expanding to an unspecified extent. Because of their mutual dependence, the city core and the suburbs cannot be thought of as two separate entities. The peripheral districts are still an integral part of Tirana's urban layout and are involved in the growth and development of the city.

Tools and methodology

The major goal of this research is to identify Tirana's peripheral locations and comprehend what makes them distinctive, as was indicated in the chapters above. Some indicators have been developed based on the theoretical framework, in order to provide a more accurate database. The three main types of these indicators are physical, social-economic, and service/access-related indicators. The indicators that will be used for the analysis, their reference ranges, and the grouping for each reference are displayed in the following table.

The mapping of these areas in the GIS geographic system will allow for the identification of the peripheral regions in the city of Tirana for each chosen indicator. A map overlay based on indication categories was carried out after assessing each indicator separately. This overlaying was created to show which areas fall under which categories.

Analysis and interpretation of results

The findings of overlaying the maps of the physical indicators show that Kashar, Kombinat, Selita, Sauk, Shkoza, Allias, and Dajti are the most prominent peripheral areas. Low building intensity, the existence of largely brand-new single objects, and low altimetry are characteristics of these areas. According to the local plans of the municipality of Tirana, no increases in intensity are anticipated for these areas either.

It is discovered that the areas of Kashari, Kombinati, Selita, Sauk, and Dajti are significant according to the overlay of socioeconomic indicators. These neighborhoods are distinguished by a predominant residential land use, a low resident density per square meter, lower land values and

| Categories | Indicators | Reference ranges | Classification |
|------------------|--|---|-------------------|
| Physical | Existing intensity | 0-0.5 | Peripheral area |
| | | 0.5-3.0 | Intermediate zone |
| | | 3.0-5.4 | Central area |
| | The difference between the proposed intensity and the existing one | 0-0.5 | Peripheral area |
| | | 0.5-3.0 | Intermediate zone |
| | | 3.0-5.4 | Central area |
| | Construction typologies | Individual structures | Peripheral area |
| | | Individual linked/linear/tower structures | Intermediate zone |
| | | Non-individual structures | Central area |
| | Altimetry | 0-2 floors | Peripheral area |
| | | 3-5 floors | Intermediate zone |
| | | | 7+ floors |
| | Construction quality | Mainly new constructions | Peripheral area |
| | | Mix of new and historical constructions | Central area |
| Socio – economic | The population | Less than 30,000 inhabitants | Peripheral area |
| | | More than 30,000 inhabitants | Central area |
| | Population density | 0-200 inhabitants/m ² | Peripheral area |

| | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|---|-------------------|
| | | 201-1000 inhabitants/m ² | Intermediate zone |
| | | 1001-2000 inhabitants/m ² | Central area |
| Land use | | Main residential use/industrial-economic area | Peripheral area |
| | | Mixed Land Use | Central area |
| Unemployment rate | | Over 0.5 | Peripheral area |
| | | 0.3-0.5 | Intermediate zone |
| | | 0.2-0.3 | Central area |
| Land value | | 20,000 - 25,000 ALL/m ² | Peripheral area |
| | | 25,001 - 35,000 ALL/m ² | Intermediate zone |
| | | More than 35,000 ALL/m ² | Central area |
| Service/access related | Healthcare centers | Less access to health care coverage | Peripheral area |
| | | More access to health care coverage | Central area |
| Educational institutions | | Less access to educational institutions | Peripheral area |
| | | More access to educational institutions | Central area |
| Urban transport stations | | Less access to urban transportation | Peripheral area |
| | | More access to urban transportation | Central area |

Table 1. Indicators for the identification of peripheral areas.

Source: PPV Tirana TR030, Open Data of Tirana's Municipality and author's calculations.

| | | |
|---------------|--|-------------------|
| Accessibility | More than 1500m from the outer ring road of the city | Peripheral area |
| | 501m-1500m from the outer ring road of the city | Intermediate zone |
| | 0-500m from the outer ring road of the city | Central area |
| | Low accessibility | Peripheral area |
| | Medium/high accessibility | Central area |

Table 1. Indicators for the identification of peripheral areas.
Source: PPV Tirana TR030, Open Data of Tirana's Municipality and author's calculations.

a higher unemployment rate than the rest of the city.

When it comes to quality of service and access indicators, Kashari, Sauku, and Dajti areas have been identified as the three primary peripheral locations. Additionally, it was noted that most suburban locations have reasonable access to amenities including hospitals, schools, and public transportation, disregarding the fact that the distance from the center causes the quality of these services to deteriorate.

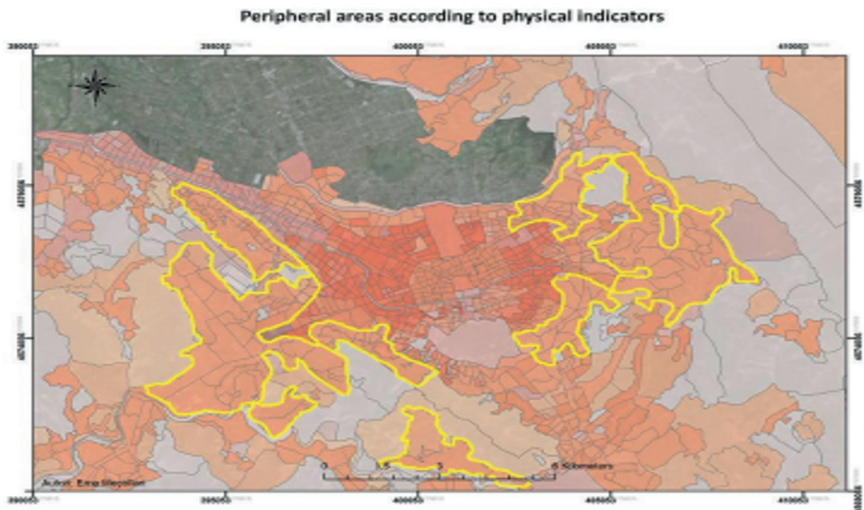


Figure 1. Peripheral areas according to physical indicators
Source: Author's calculations

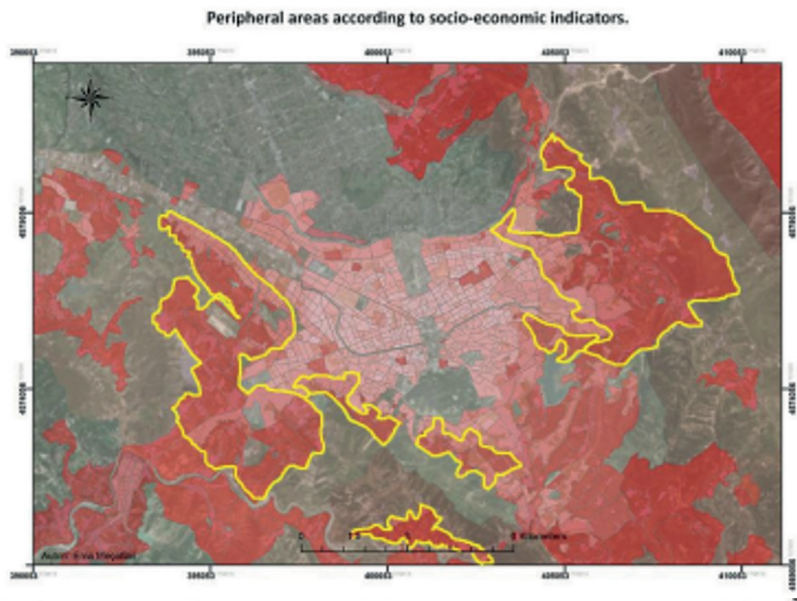


Figure 2. Peripheral areas according to socio-economic indicators.
Source: Author's calculations

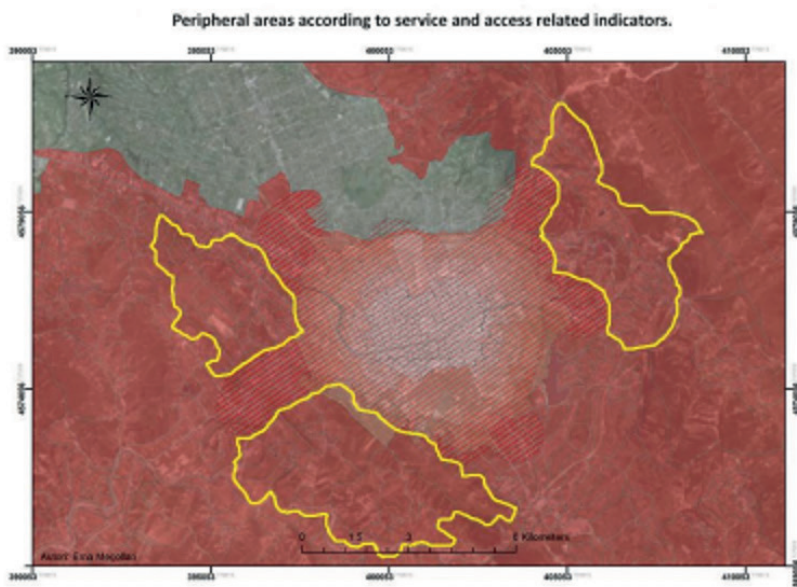


Figure 3. Peripheral areas according to service and access related indicators.
Source: Author's calculations

Conclusions and recommendations

In the end, the periphery is a complex concept that has diverse connotations depending on the author or literature. To begin with, suburban attributes can vary greatly based on location, history, population, and physical environment. While some suburbs are prosperous, low-density residential regions with easy access to city centers and urban services, some are less desirable locations with deteriorated infrastructure, limited public transportation alternatives, and socioeconomic challenges. In addition, cultural and political issues frequently impact how the periphery is perceived and valued, which shapes how it is defined.

However, we might claim that, in the face of these continual shifts in definitions, we have reached a point of definitional singularity. The concepts considered provide an overview of a number of peripheral characteristics from which we understand that suburbs are areas located outside of the city core, with distinct physical characteristics such as individual dwellings with detached plots, the presence of industrial areas, and low buildings primarily 1-2 stories. Furthermore, in the case of Tirana, the suburbs are distinguished by lower land values, resulting in greater affordability for purchasing or renting a residential construction.

The conducted research allowed for the identification of Tirana's peripheral regions based on the stated indicators, which depend mainly on theoretical research. These indicators are classified as physical, socio economic, and indicators related to services/access. Kashari, Sauku, Selita, Kombinati, and Dajti are the primary peripheral areas discovered by the mapping of these variables. At the end of the investigation, we can see that these areas are characterized by low population density, low development intensity, generally low-rise buildings, lower land value in comparison to the city's core, and so on.

Recommendations

Some of the recommendations that the Municipality of Tirana can provide for the management of peripheral areas are as follows:

- Creating a comprehensive urban planning framework that considers the features and demands of suburban communities. This entails doing a complete assessment of infrastructure needs, land use patterns, transportation networks, and environmental concerns.
- Policy and strategy implementation to promote equitable resource distribution between the center and the periphery.
- Develop efficient and inexpensive public transportation networks to prevent overloaded buses, encourage sustainable means of transportation, and boost accessibility within and between suburban communities.
- Encourage suburban economic growth to increase job possibilities and lessen travel needs. Promoting collaborations with private-sector organizations to attract investment and develop entrepreneurship in suburban neighborhoods.
- Conduct participatory planning by fostering active community engagement in decision-making processes connected to suburban development, so that the outcomes are as desired as feasible.

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