



BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
13th - 14th October 2023

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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'Declustering' decision-makings on cultural heritage Tirana's historic centre during urban development

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Abstract

Tirana center was designed and used by all governments during most of its lifetime mainly as a political instrument. After decades of central controlled urbanism, the fall of the communist regime was accompanied with massive development mostly illegal and informal that spread all over the urban area. In 2000, when the aggressiveness of the constructions posed danger to the historic urban environment of the center of the city, the Ministry of Culture requested the designation of the Boulevard of Tirana and its surroundings as a 'Cultural Historical Architectural Ensemble'. Since then, the borders of the zone that defined the ensemble reshaped several times. Due to consecutive decisions the Ensemble lost 53% of its area. This paper uses a comparative analysis of the cartographic documents that accompany the governmental decisions on the ensemble while cataloging the cultural monuments which transformed, reshaped or demolished due to these decisions. The research concludes that the legal 'border' instrument used to protect the ensemble is easily transformable into a political instrument which in the case of Tirana, resulted beside the loss of heritage also in the transformation and shift of the urban common.

Keywords:

cultural heritage, historic centre, top-down decisions, destruction of heritage, legal instruments, urban common

Introduction

The article provides a case study report, of the transformation of the historic center of the city of Tirana, from an urban cultural common area, into an exclusive one, through the use of the 'decision-making cluster' instrument. The theoretical question was designed while observing the absurd created: the historic center zone is declared as a monumental area to be conserved and inherited, using a legal border that defines the urban space under state protection, and at the same time the urban cultural heritage is being demolished/ transformed using the same instrument created to protect and preserve it.

The article provides a historical preview of the creation and development of the city center while considering its use as a political instrument during the decades of this part of the city (Mëhilli, 2017). As the main focus of the research is the urban common inherited and declared Cultural Ensemble, the architectonic and urban realms that create the wholeness of this ensemble, their transformation and shifts were analyzed through the use of the plans and cartographic maps, while decision-making toward them used a legislative framework analysis. The transformation process began earlier in time, but it accelerated rapidly after 2018 when the protection border was reshaped by reducing its borders. Redesigned and rebuilt continuously, the center represents besides other aspects a cluster of decision-making and policies that transformed the urban common. While dealing with the complex issue of urban transformation, several instruments are used to collect data. The study uses spatial and ground-level assessment analysis by triangulating data collected from official and archival sources with those gathered through observation and field surveys. The triangulation method aims to describe urban development from three perspectives, 'declustering' them into three dimensions the urban, cultural, and legal dimensions. The observation in the field happened from that moment and it is still on as the redevelopment process is still ongoing. The research brings a map of the lost urban cultural commons due to the recent transformation processes, by trying to catalog some of them, in fact sheets. This work is ongoing, and information regarding the added knowledge recorded in the urban cultural common sheets is in continuous update.

The article uses two main concept that derived from the doctoral research of the author; the urban cultural common concept. Urban Cultural Common definition represents the inherited urban layer that contributes to cultural diversity via its social, cultural, and urban dimensions. Meanwhile clustering and declustering the urban commons, is generated from the use of the zone and the border instruments, while considering this grouping of the urban commons, beside a topographic related, also a reflects a common denominator of shared histories, memories, appurtenances, economic developments, and proximity of a heritage community, when used toward heritage.

Protecting, developing, and speculating with the public realms

Albania is well-known as being wealthy in cultural heritage, both in archaeological and historical sites, and architectural ones. The country stands out for the vitality of urban development, as its urban habitats are remarkable in terms of their unique identity, content, and lifestyle. Its four seasons of geographical territory offer diversity in folklore, ethnography, culinary, urban environment, materials, and landscape. After the country suffered its separation in 1913, losing half of the territory and half of its population, the initiative to conserve and administer its archeological and historical heritage began in 1922 (Meksi, 2004).

Albania established the institutions and organizations for conserving and administrating its cultural, archaeological, historical, and architectural heritage assets only in 1965. The same year was established The Institute of Cultural Monuments. The first list of monuments in Albania, published

in Official Bulletin No. 95/1948 on October 16, 1948, includes 92 cultural monuments, (Annex 1) including archeological sites, fortifications, historic bridges, and urban and cult buildings according to Statute No. 568, issued March 17, 1948, “On the Conservation of Cultural Monuments and Rare Natural Objects.” Four monuments are identified in Tirana from this list: the Clock Tower, the Mausoleum of Sulejman Pasha, the Mosque of Et’hem Beu, and Tabaku Bridge - Annex 1. A new legislation titled “On the Preservation of Cultural and Historical Monuments and unique natural assets” was passed in 1971, repealing the 1948 law (Kuvendi, 1948). During this period, some historic city centers, including Elbasan, Shkodër, and Gjirokaštër, were designated museum zones, surrounded by conservation and protection zones.

In the period immediately following the 2-nd World War, it was requested to declare as cultural monuments the houses or places where members of the communist party met and conducted secret operations during the National Liberation War. In addition to these non-culturally significant objects, thousands of tombstones, obelisks, statues, and façade slogans were erected from the cities and street facades after the regime fell, while the “historic monuments” remained under state protection during the decades, some of them still are. According to Jerliu studies, an Albanian Kosovar urban cultural studies researcher and architect, the use of the cultural heritage as a political instrument, seems to be neither new nor applied only to Albania. Selective identification, as the case of Kosova and the Balkans countries shows, heritage can be used and certainly will be used for political purposes and incitement of nationalist sentiments (Jerliu, 2017, p. 8).

Cultural heritage directed by the communist party/ the centralized state	1948-1989	46
Cultural heritage after the change of the political system	1990-2007	115
Cultural heritage after the reform of the Heritage legislative framework	2008-2018	169

Table 1: Protected cultural heritage in Tirana according to periods of administration and year of protection. Source: Author

After the fall of the communist regime and the subsequent rebuilding phase of the state apparatus, there was a decline in official care for cultural assets. In 1994, a new legislation was established to protect cultural assets; “On the protection of moveable and immovable cultural assets” (Kuvendi, 1994) became the main document for heritage material management and protection for approximately ten years until replaced by Law No. 9048, issued July 4, 2003 (Kuvendi, 2003). In the first years following the 1990s, there were minor operations to “clean” the inventory of monuments declared to serve the communist propaganda, such as the removal of the “House where the Communist Party established” at Road Qemal Stafa in Tirana, but several other monuments of culture declared under the regime are still on the protection lists of the institutions.

The urban development of the 2000

The 2000 brought a new development phase for the city. Due to the migration phenomena of the 90s, the housing demand increased and new buildings were being constructed, presenting a new architectural typology, with new living spaces. While developing under communism, the city claimed a five-story silhouette, meanwhile, the new capitalist city doubled the stores, more non-standardized apartment stores, and presented ‘individualistic’ urbanism (Aliaj et al., 2003). The economic crises of 2008, froze the real estate market, time which was used wisely by the Tirana municipality in 2011, to develop the general plan for the city which had been missing since

1989. So, the second decade of 2000, found Tirana with a general plan, and a new vision, both of which were changed in less than 5 years, due to the political shifts of the parties in power, both in the central and local governments (Maks Velo, 2013). A renewal and rebuilding process of the center of almost all cities in Albania began in 2013, as a political campaign led by Edi Rama, in power of central government since then.

These shifts in the central and local governance left their footprints in the territory. Several interventions were made in the cities of Tirana, Durrës, Vlora, Saranda, Shkodra, Korça, and even small towns like Përmet, Këlcyrë, Vau i Dejës, Belsh, Cërrik, Bulqizë etc. Interventions aimed to reframe, reshape, and transform these historic centers into modern and touristic destinations. These projects transformed these urban centers, by demolishing important landmarks while erasing historic and even archeological footprints (Emiri, 2019; Gusmari, 2017; Kabashi, 2017). Romeo Kodra, an Albanian visual artist and cultural researcher, describes Albania as an ongoing process “of return to the roots: of violence, erasure, corruption, financial speculation, and political secularization through monumental architectonic constructions which characterized the beginnings of fascism” (Kodra, 2020).

According to BIRN, the Regional Development Fund projects website 12 types of projects, 581 in total, have been implemented, or are still under development, which include: Boulevard, Facades, Schools, greening projects, recreation projects, urban requalifications, squares, streets, (BIRN Albania - Rilindja Urbane, n.d.), with an investment of 365.69 million euros. Tirana is the municipality that invested most of the other localities, 41.66 million euros, or 11.4% of the total fund. The most expensive project, with an investment of 9.46 million euros is the Skenderbeg square, requalified in 2018.

During this mass renewal and development phase, the measures for the protection of cultural heritage in the urban area improved. In 2018 a new law was enacted. Legislation no. 27/2018, “For cultural heritage and museums,” which is still in effect, reframed the administration and protection of cultural heritage sites, the role of institutions, and their management framework by redefining several notions and concepts (Kuvendi, 2018). The purpose of this law is “the preservation, protection, assessment, and administration of national cultural heritage... as a contributor to the preservation of national memory... as an expression of cultural values, as well as the promotion of cultural development in the country, ensuring and preventing illegal treatment of cultural objects.”(Kuvendi, 2018). The law is part of a separate analysis, as its wholeness presents several hundreds of pages and 279 articles. The case study selected, instead will present the consequences in the territory and the impact on the cultural heritage of the center of Tirana, declared Cultural, historic, and architectonic Monumental Ensemble in 2000, 2017, and 2018. The three decisions have the same objectives and focus, in protecting and preserving the center of the city, while differing from each other, besides in time also in the space put under protection.

Case study: The historic center of Tirana

A city center, a public space, and a political instrument

Baroque, classical, neoclassical, modern, brutalist, contemporary, traditional, and even futuristic architectural structures, which are part of the nation's heritage, define Tirana's center public space. During the century, each regime used the city's center as a political instrument of power by leaving its architectonic and urban footprints (Požani, 2010, 2015). The central boulevard of Tirana and its urban commons, notably the “Skënderbej” plaza, has been utilized (and continues to be used) as such (Mëhilli, 2016).

During the communist regime, the central square and the boulevard were used as a perfect facade

for the country, where all types of monumental façades from the fascist to the communist era, found it easy to be used as a political instrument for activities that served state-party propaganda.



Figure 1: Skënderbej Square project in 1930 Florestano Di Fausto; Tirana Center. Source: (Dhamo, Thomai, Aliaj, 2012 Tirana - Qyteti I Munguar)

The boulevard of Tirana, the main squares, the stadium, and every street and facade of the city at a certain point transformed into a representative space, for the propaganda of the communist state. The primary function of the Boulevard, was the use of political parades related to ceremonies connected, first to the fascist and later to the Communist party. During the afternoon, the boulevard transformed into a pedestrian itinerary, where people strolled up and down. Public life was quasi-programmed and little was left to creativity or spontaneity. The standardized rhythm of the communist society was followed later after the regime fell into a mass “arrhythmia” of the public space.

Carrying a historical and political load, it was not a surprise when the public space, reinvented itself in 1991, transforming into the hub of political demonstration of the citizens. Hoxha statue put on the west side of the Skënderbej square, after his death, became the symbol of the regime’s destruction and was smashed to the ground on 20 February 1991 by the citizens of Tirana during demonstrations (Figure 5). Soon the central plaza became the central public space of the city, where merchants and automobiles (which were being used by the general population only after the regime fell) occupied the urban space, giving it a sense of chaos but also creating a vivid and vibrant public space.

¹ThBIRN is an investigative Reporting Network, a network of non-governmental organisations promoting freedom of speech, human rights and democratic values in Southern and Eastern Europe <https://birn.eu.com/about-birn/>

²<http://rilindjaurbane.reporter.al/>



Figure 2: 'Skënderbej Square during redevelopment. South-East view.'
Source: Author, 2022

The center is transforming into an exclusive area

The 90s were accompanied by mass migration from the smaller urban centers toward the larger ones, the larger number of which were positioned in Tirana. New settlements were constructed around the city structure, occupying agricultural land on the outskirts of the urban area, developing the informality phenomenon. The city center transformed from a parade space to an area of exchange for new merchants and people, centralizing organically the services around it. This spontaneity and informality of the 90s stimulated a chaotic landscape and urban environment for Tirana, which led instead of an urban plan for Tirana, to an urban renovation project called Dammi I Colori in 2003 (Salaj, n.d.). The application of the project included the street façades renovations while coloring them, including all the reconstruction and expansions of the main roads of the city. In 2000, when the aggressiveness of the constructions of the period posed a danger to the historic urban environment and, therefore, the destiny of the buildings along the boulevard's axis, the Ministry of Culture requested the designation of the Boulevard of Tirana and its surroundings as a Cultural Historical Architectural Ensemble. With Decision no. 180 dated 13.04.2000, "On the announcement of the Cultural Monuments Ensemble of the main axis and the historical center of the city of Tirana"; (Annex 4), the center of Tirana was declared under state protection. The legal border aimed to control and 'freeze' the development of further buildings, intending to preserve the architectural and historic ensemble as a whole. This clusterization of the city center, created



Figure 3: Skënderbej Square under construction during the 30-s. Source: Polis University Archive



Figure 4: Manifestation of the Communist regime on the Boulevard of Tirana. Source: Panorama Accessed May 1, 2020



Figure 5: Skënderbej square on 11 February 1991- Hoxha statue torn down during the protest
Source: Bold News, Accessed on February 2022

the terrain for the municipality, to organize during the beginning of the 2000 some “cleaning” operation in the urban environment. First, the proposals to demolish some old cultural buildings and later to reshape their architecture through colors, created, according to Aliaj, the terrain for a new paradigm toward the city, “a superficial one” (Aliaj et al., 2012, p. 68).

After inviting several international artists, for the façade project, the municipality of Tirana opened another international competition, to design the new center of Tirana, focusing on the Boulevard of Tirana and its surroundings. Architecture Studio, from Paris, won the competition and brought a new fictitious vision for Tirana while according to the architect and urban planner Aliaj, “ignoring the capital’s urban context” (Aliaj et al., 2012, p. 69). This city center master plan promoted the individual unit while reshaping the landscape and cityscape of the center of Tirana and disregarding the city’s and public interests. An already established parcel-based paradigm of the 1990s was introduced also through this plan, which was approved later by the National Council for the Regulation of the Territory, chaired by the prime minister.

This approach to redesign the center of Tirana was in continuance of several interventions during the decades of fascism and later communism. The proposed intervention was designed to intervene along the entire axis of the boulevard, reorganize the infrastructural net, and redrew the three main plazas, ‘Sheshi Skënderbej’, ‘Sheshi Europa’, ‘Sheshi Nënë Tereza’ (Bulleri, 2011, p. 138). While the previous projects and interventions of the center somehow related to the urban context, the French project ignored the private property regime, repeating the same approach during the construction of the cultural palace, constructed by the communist regime in 1960 (Aliaj et al., 2012, p. 69). It draws a geometric line in the city center by separating its architectural and urban influence, while developing an urban island inside the city-Annex 3. The center is reconceptualized with the tabula rasa principle by designing new itineraries, nodes, and landmarks that sprawl

³Parcel based paradigm- describes the development of the city inside its existing core with the parcel-based principle, were each cadastral parcel can propose a partial urban plan, shifting from the urban dimension of the urban planning toward the individualist urbanism dimension.



Figure 6: Skënderbej square surroundings under construction, 2023; Author

vertically into towers of 25 floors in height. (Aliaj et al., 2012, p. 69). Less was done of this plan, until 2015, when the parties in power changed from the democratic party that led the country from 2005-2013 to the socialist one which is still in power since 2013.

Right after the local election in 2015, Erion Veliaj, the new mayor of Tirana, replaced the already in-power plan of the city of 2013, preparing a new vision for Tirana. In December 2016, the Tirana City Council approved the Tirana 2030 (TR030) General Local Plan designed by the Italian company Stefano Boeri Architetti. In collaboration with UNLAB and IND, Boeri aimed to “usher in a new era in the nation’s capital by merging sustainable development,” sophisticated infrastructure, green corridors, and preserving the city’s historical heritage (Boeri, 2016). Stefanoboeriararchitetti granted the exclusive right to design the future of the Albanian capital with a 15-year vision. His design proposed a dense city with multistore structures that would combine the development and fill the “vacant areas” or replace the present low buildings. In this new paradigm for Tirana, a new project was claimed by the municipality of Tirana on the redesigning of the central “Skënderbej” square, in 2017. Although the plan was presented as a new vision for the capital, it resembled the 2003 Architecture studio version, intending to interrupt the existing circularity and mobility of the center, by transforming the square from a central node into a plaza pedestrian-exclusive area in the shape of a flat piramide. According to the designer studio, MVRDV, the square aims to present itself as “a void in the chaos of the city, a flat pyramid lined by a densely planted periphery, formed by a collection of old and new public spaces and gardens.”(Chapter 1 Skanderbeg Square, 2017).

The new square was inaugurated in 2018, and right after the surroundings began to transform rapidly-Figure 6. Five years after its inauguration, the square seems today to have preceded the high-rise buildings, now part of the city’s realms (Luarasi, 2019). High-rise buildings are reshaping the city’s silhouette while the central plaza, “Skënderbe” square surroundings are developing into skyscrapers, magnifying the emptiness of the quadratic sloppy terrain. To make room for new buildings, the government proposes to demolish the old ones, even though the project pur-

pose intended to “combine the history with new democracy, freedom, welfare, consumption, and internationalization” while transforming the urban landscape and its urban commons. (“51N4E Reveals ‘French Plan’ for Skënderbeg Square – Exit Explains,” 2017).

Conclusions

Clustering the cultural heritage

The center is legally protected, including its monuments as part of the Ensemble in a geometric cluster, designed and approved by the governmental agencies (Figure 48). Its form and surface changed during the decades, excluding several monuments of culture and their urban surroundings landscapes. The shift of this cluster from one DCM to the other developed the destruction of some urban heritage and urban commons of the city. Others are transformed or in the process of transformation (Musaj, 2021).

After the cluster of protection was reshaped into another form, thirty-six monuments of culture were left of the legal-protected zone. At least three of them were demolished afterward: the Stadium of Tirana, the National Theater, the First National Bank, and one private villa, all built during the 30s . Two monuments of culture declared as First category monuments are left in decay. Those represent the urban layer built at the end of the 19th century and some of the last of this historical

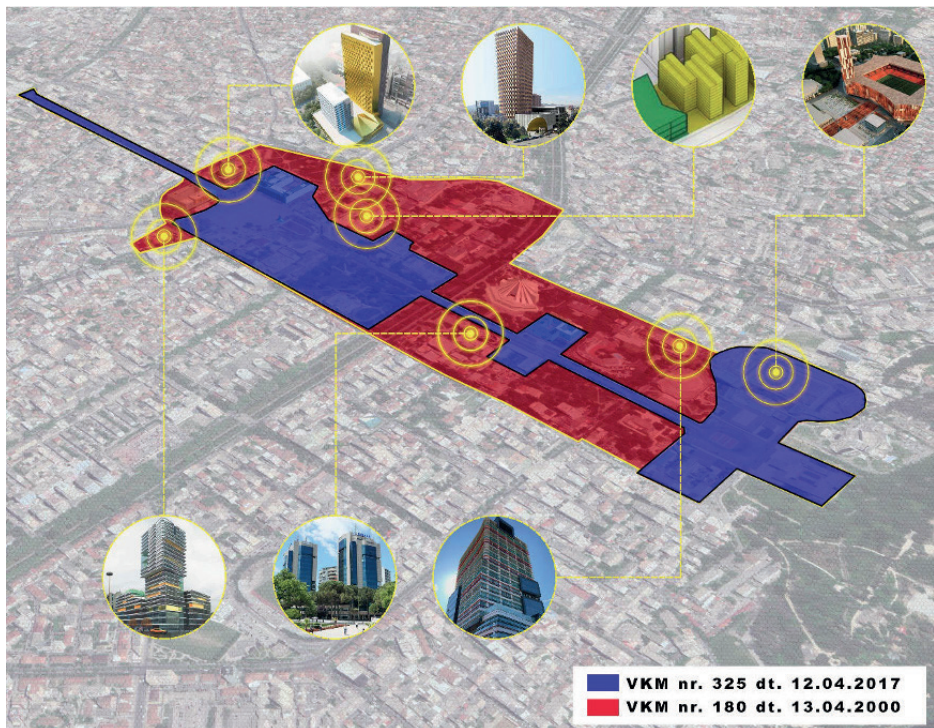
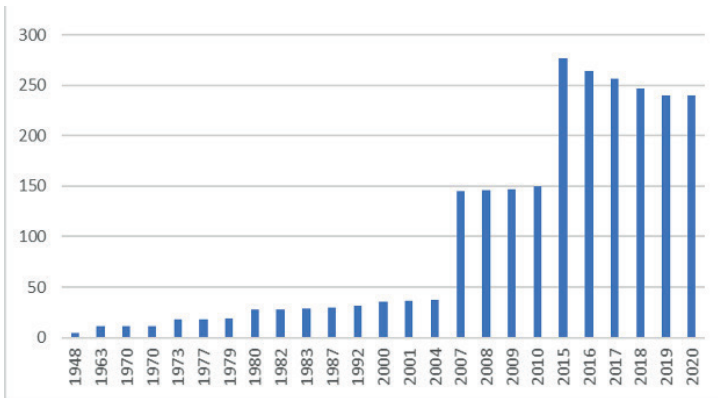


Figure 7: The map of the center of Tirana with the skyscrapers built or under construction. Source: (opinion. al, 2018)

heritage. Meanwhile, four other monuments 'de-clustered'-left out of the protection zone, lost their silhouette, landscape, and visuality. New skyscrapers are being built next to these urban commons reshaping their identity and relation to the public space Figure 7.

Even though the legal borders are presumed to conserve and protect the Urban and Architectonic Ensemble, declared as cultural heritage patrimony, the urban commons of the protected zone are being transformed and rebuilt. Interventions are made on the facades, structures, and even volumes. Several projects are under development along the boulevard of Tirana, such as The extension of the Hotel Tirana with a skyscraper next to it; the extension of the Gallery of Art, with a new building that will partially preserve the monument's facades; the Academy of Art, that will develop into a new architecture while preserving the façade partially; The Pyramide of Tirana, which restructured its silhouette while removing its pyramidal form of the object; The Bank of Albania, The Municipality, the Ministry of Interior, the corpus of Polytechnic University have already been extended with new structures. Meanwhile, the New Stadium developed has integrated a partial part of the main façade of Bosio's masterpiece, integrating it at the entrance.

Furthermore, with the digital map of Tirana of 2018, we can have a more territorial approach toward the "lists" of monuments mentioned in the previous section. This urban dimension is essential in Tirana's case as the city's development decades diffuse these monuments from the landscape, hiding them inside the districts. Thus, with the help of printed maps and sometimes mental



Graphic 1: The number of monuments of culture generated from the data collected by the decisions of the institutions. Source of data IKTK- elaborated in the graphic by the Author

maps, the observation method began from the previously recognized and identified monument of culture alongside the boulevard of Tirana and its surroundings. This identification process was implemented using Google map coordinates, and photographs were taken on-site for each object. In the district of Tirana, there are 261 cultural heritage with the status of "cultural monument" Declustering the urban commons

The "cluster" of the boulevard of Tirana, the legal border, topologically, consists of scattered dots, geometrically. Nonetheless, the cluster could consist of an object, a landscape, or a road, as they may all share a common characteristic. The case of the historic center of Tirana cluster assembles different types of buildings and urban commons that share a historical period, a particular material, an architectural style, narrative art, and affiliations to an urban layer. Despite the common

variables, it is unexplainable the shape of the zone, and its surface at why it excluded several objects. The National Theater Case, which was concluded in the Constitutional Court of Albania, demonstrates the lack of indicators, variables, or criteria that were missing for this object to be declared of cultural value.

The decision of the court delivered on 2nd of July 2021, states that *“The court assesses that from the documentation presented by the parties participating in the constitutional trial, it is not clear which criteria were missing for this object to be declared of cultural value, as well as why the need to preserve its cultural heritage did not prevail. Although the Assembly has approved a law with contemporary standards for cultural heritage, which also provides for the time criterion of more than 70 years of age, the verification of the public cultural interest for the National Theater*



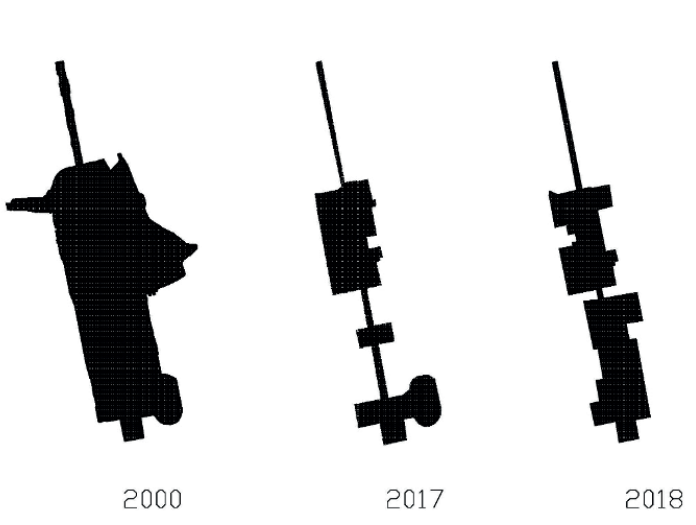
Figure 8: The ruins of the National Theatre, a few moments after the collapse, 17 May 2020. Courtesy of the author Artan Rama

has not been done, which is an indicator of the lack of coherence of the actions of state bodies (Gjykata kushtetuese, 2021, p. 46). From the total list of the urban commons identified as part of the ensemble, there are 60 of them, while only 59, excluding the theater, have gained the title Monument of Culture at a certain time.

The historical core of Tirana has inherited century-old decisions that have shaped cultural heritage alteration while decision-makers interpret the center area and utilize architecture to assert their influence. Architecture itself has been used as a tool by the government, to define what is now the center of Tirana throughout its history as a capital. In 2000, a monument protection zone was established to conserve the city's core urban area. The area covered Brassini Boulevard (Bulleri, 2011), and partially extended in the east part of the city, where some Ottoman footprints

stand and the archeological area of the fortress of Tirana lay. But, despite being preserved under a protection zone, some of the monuments lost their title, during the first decade of 2000. From 2000 to 2019, five monuments lost their title, due to Minister of Culture decisions, approximately 8% of the total urban commons. The list of 2023, includes 54 monuments of culture protected legally by the title “monument”.

After the KKT approved the Tirana Plan on April 17, 2017, the Council of Ministers Decision No. 582, dated October 3, 2018, reduced the territory of the Historical Center of Tirana, leaving several urban commons like the National Theatre, the National Historical Museum, Stadium, Clock Tower, etc. outside its boundaries (opinion. al, 2018). Thirty-six monuments were left out of the new border, or 60% of the total monuments found in the 2000 border (Ndrevataj, 2021). This lack of protection, created the ground to demolish seven of these buildings, all of which were left outside the new cluster Annex 6.



Cluster 9: The shape transformation and the reduction of the area of the city claimed “Cultural Monument Ensemble of the central axis and the historical center of Tirana, three decisions in a row. Source: Author

Decision-making about urban heritage is not based on the principles of restoration and heritage or the law but on economic interest. By replacing objects that were once on the list of cultural monuments with new structures, not only has transformed the object and surrounding landscape of the district, and the urban space but the urban commons of the city as a whole have been altered. It has been established that the replaced objects have been abandoned to oblivion and deterioration without any care or investment to recover them. No strategies for their protection or regeneration have been identified. It has not been demonstrated that the inventory of monuments is sufficient to sustain the economic pressure that these cultural assets face and the protection zone instrument for objects outside the historical zone has not been implemented. The majority of the objects within the historical area have been restored, reconstructed, or in some cases were added additional

extensions to provide more space for the functional purposes of the administrative buildings. Fifteen monuments underwent reconstruction and some of them even had additional structures added during the last three decades, even though being recognized as monuments of culture, and as such by law, should have been preserved in their original state.

Within the historical area, the buildings identified as private property have been in a degraded state or without restoration for decades. The total number of buildings that lack investments and restoration is identified to be nine (Annex 6). While facilities such as the Stadium and National Theater were neglected by the state in the decades following 1990, only a few maintenance interventions have been documented. The deterioration of these two objects was then used as an excuse for their destruction.

All decisions to remove monuments from protection lists are made concealed by government agencies. The law does not specify the process by which objects can be removed from the protection list or the protection zone, granting this right unreservedly to the proprietor in the case of private objects or the state in the case of public objects. Decisions to remove items from the protection list do not exhaust the procedure or the criteria that must be met for an item to be deemed devoid of cultural significance. This research does not conclude the reasons used to remove monuments from the list.

	Monuments on the list Until 2015	Monuments added to the list 2015-2021	Monuments removed from the list 2015-2021	Monuments on the List 2021
City	260	2	35	225
Periphery	39	0	2	37
Total monuments	299	2	37	264
Table 2 Monuments of the culture of Tirana district				
Cultural monument declared before 1990				4
Cultural Monument declared Order no. 122 dated 05.03.2007				4
Cultural Monument declared Order no. 276 dated 16.07.2015				27
Total of removed buildings from the protection list until 2023				35
Table 3: Monuments of culture in the city of Tirana removed from the list of monuments. Source: Author				

In 2018, DCM no. No. 582, dated 03.10.2018, approved. It aimed the define the historical center of the city of Tirana, its protective zone, and the approval of the plan for preservation, protection, and administration, which has been changed again, with the Decision of the KKR no. 423, dated 26.9.2018 of the National Council of Restorations. The proposal approved the declaration of the historical center of the city of Tirana, the definition of its protection zone, and the approval of the plan for preservation, protection, and administration. According to the audit agency report page 114, the Ministry justified the draft decision for the declaration of the historical center of the city of Tirana, as Law No. 27/2018 “On Cultural Heritage and Museums” approved on 17.5.2018

brought “a new approach to the preservation and protection of cultural heritage values, terminology new in the categorization and typologies of cultural assets, their classification, etc.” Thus, in light of the previous, VKM No. 325, dated 12.4.2017 and entitled “On the Proclamation of the Historical Center of the City of Tirana and the Approval of the Regulation for Its Administration and the Surrounding Protected Area,” was required to be revised following the new law. The review of this DCM focuses on: - the elucidation of terminology and concepts based on the new law; - a reflection of the diverse protection and preservation criteria of historical centers and their protection zones about the specific cultural values for which they have declared. The group of experts from this agency concludes that, in reality, this DMC has changed the boundaries of the historical center; that is, “the justification of the object of the change due to the terminology with the proposed changes have brought substantial changes to these boundaries where they are, including new objects such as the Pyramid, the Presidency, the Youth Park, the Park next to the Rogneri Hotel, the Palace of Congresses, from 50 to 80 years old” page 115. Following that regarding the report approved by KKR on 26 September 2018, “it is unclear which objects were removed from the historical center and why, and there is no mention of the Scientific Council of IMK or their position on these matters.” The Audit Agency concludes the report by stating that Thus, the approval process or the need to change or define the borders according to the coordinates “does not turn out to be complete with clear arguments from the institutions involved, such as the Scientific Council, the Technical Secretariat of the National Restoration Council, the Minister of Culture, who is also the Chairman of KKR, and KKR not fulfilling their institutional functions and professional specifications. “Their decisions have been used as a facade to excuse the activities of institutions that lack the capacity and ability to make choices that impact Albanian cultural heritage and historical memory, such as the Municipality of Tirana or Prime Minister office,” are their closing remarks. The reconstruction of the decision timeline concludes that institutions arbitrarily use the “protected zone” instrument without paying attention to the territory’s consequences.

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