



# BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
13<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> 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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# **Exploring the dialectic between permanence and change The case of Epidamn Boulevard in Durrës**

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## **Abstract**

Durrës has always been considered an important city both in the region and beyond, with a strategic position, as a transit or exchange gate, but also an interesting place to stay and live. The strategic position, natural but also historical, cultural and archaeological values have always given Durrës the potential to develop in the above-mentioned aspects, but also the potential to influence the development of other countries, which create relations with this city, so and the relationship with Italy has undoubtedly been mutual throughout history.

Today's "Epidamn" boulevard is a result of the interventions in the urban area of Durrës during the period of the Italian occupation at the beginning of the 20th century. However, the axis where Epidamn Boulevard is located today is also present in the earliest maps, or even in pictures from the beginning of the 20th century.

This paper investigates the organizational ability of the Boulevard element to influence the morphology of the city of Durrës. This ability will be analyzed through a philological reading of the space of this axis, emphasizing the transformations over time and the permanence and change of architectural elements in different periods. This dialectic of permanence and growth as explored by Rossi, implies a city which not only possesses a before and an after, but which is defined by their interrelationship. The expected results are a series of diagrams that read the stability and transformations of this morphological axis in relation to the urban form of the city of Durrës. These diagrams will serve to raise the awareness on the form-creating abilities that the compositional element of the axis has in relation to the urban form.

## Keywords

permanence, growth, urban transformation, 20th century architecture, Durrës



## Introduction

“In the disciplines that we call the history of ideas, the history of science, the history of philosophy, the history of thought, and the history of literature (we can ignore their specificity for the moment)...attention has been turned, away from the vast unities like “periods” or “centuries” to the phenomenon of rupture, of discontinuity.” (Foucault, 1972, f. p.4)

The topic of discontinuity is explored thoroughly by Foucault. He opposed an idea of history understood as a progressive and linear accumulation of moments that tend to be summarized in a final telos of meaning, rather, describe as traversed by jumps that make any causal or continuous explanation of events impossible. (Choque Aliaga, 2018). While (Rossi, 1982) explored on a dialectic of permanence and growth, which implies that a city does not only possess a before and an after, but which is defined by their interrelationship. Durrës, is for sure a city which has been characterized by major discontinuities in the course of its history. Still it has been continuously considered an important city both in the region and beyond, with a rich archaeological heritage and strong ancient identity, a strategic position as a transit or exchange gate, but also an interesting place to stay and live.

This article explores on the dialectic between permanence and change through investigating the organizational ability of the Boulevard element to influence the morphology of an urban settlement, taking as case study Boulevard Epidamn in the city of Durrës. The boulevard has indeed a strategic position in the city, remaining geographically and thematically unchanged since its construction.

## Literature Review

Many published but also online sources have been consulted to either understand the historic development of the case study area and to develop the necessary graphical tools for an analysis.

Regarding the influence of the relationships between Durrës and Italy, towards the flourishing of the city in the early 20th century, (Beja, 2012) notes that before the '30s, the urban settlement was within the castle walls and the agreements with the Italian government during this period, acted as an important driver to the city-s socio-economic revitalization, which consequently brought a flourishing of the sea routes. These agreements enabled also the construction of the new port during 1928-1934.

The considerable damage caused by the 1926 earthquake in Durrës is documented with pictures and testimonies from people who experienced it, such as the late doctor Ali Sula, who recalls in his memories “The window glasses trembled together with the houses for 2-3 days in a row and this is my first childhood memory” . Qendro 1927 , recalls “Since that day the shaking of the soil did not stop, not in Durrës, not in Kavaja there’s no healthy house left. The population had to leave their homes and head out into squats, in rapidly built timber structures, in 1 storey adobe houses: the cracked walls of the houses and the stones no longer inspired faith...”.

## Tools and Methodology

The Boulevard element will be analysed through a philological reading of the space of this axis, emphasizing the transformations over time and the permanence and change of architectural elements in different periods. The present research relies in an analysis composed of three main elements:

<sup>1</sup>Sula, 1998. Cited in Shqiptarja, 2018

<sup>2</sup>Qendro Th. magazine Diturija, February 1, 1927 (see consulted internet sources)

<sup>3</sup>Qendro, 1927. Cited in Durrës Lajm, 2019

(1) Historic research is one of the main pillars of the present research. The presence of today Epidamn boulevard is investigated through different historic periods.

(2) Spatial analysis including form and morphology is conducted mainly based on juxtaposition and comparison of maps of different periods as well as based on observations in field.

(3) Analysis of changes in building scale and architectural features are presented through a series of diagrams based on historic and today photos from the site.

The expected results are a series of diagrams that read the stability and transformations of this morphological axis in relation to the urban form of the city of Durrës. These diagrams will serve to raise the awareness on the form-creating abilities that the compositional element of the axis has in relation to the urban form.

## Case study area

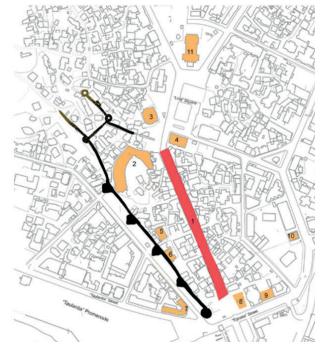
### General characteristics

Today-s “Epidamn boulevard” is a product of the close relationship between Durrës and Italy in the beginning of the 20th century. At that time, it was called “Rruga Tregtare” (Commercial Street) due to the financing for its construction and afterwards the presence of foreign merchants in addition to the local ones. The boulevard stretches along the archaeological zone A of the city (Fig.1). It is the main axis of what was once called “lagja Kala” (Castle district), due to its location within the area encircled by the castle walls. The earliest phase of the castle walls dates back to the 5th-6th century and is linked to the name of the Byzantine emperor, Anastas I (originally from Durrës) who made it one of the most fortified cities in the Adriatic.

The boulevard has an important position in the city where at one end it closes by “sheshi Liria” (Freedom square), also known as “sheshi i Bashkisë” (City Hall square), and at the other end links to the entrance of the port of Durrës. The ancient “Egnatia” route stretches perpendicular to the boulevard at the southern end. Along its axis and in proximity, various historic buildings of cultural importance, can be noted, the most important of which is the Amphitheater of Durrës.



Fig. 1, Archaeological zoning (zone A and zone B) of Durrës – DCM No.786, 26.12.2018



1. “Epidamn” Boulevard
2. Amphitheater of Durrës
3. The Great Mosque
4. Municipality 1929
5. Fatih Mosque 1502
6. Aleksandër Moisiu’s house 20<sup>th</sup> century
7. “Vollga” Hotel 1938
8. Turkish Hammam
9. Fan Noli’s house
10. Orthodox Church 94-02
11. Aleksandër Moisiu theatre

- 1. “Epidamn” Boulevard
- Historic Buildings
- Castle Walls

Fig. 2, Schematic map showing the presence of the historic buildings along the boulevard

<sup>4</sup>The historic research and analysis was undertaken by I.Buka, 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.

## Historic Research

Based on the historic research, the axis where “Epidamn” Boulevard is located today is evident in the earliest maps, or even in the photos from the beginning of the 20th century. The relatively small urban center of Durrës of the 19th century was located within the area enclosed by the castle walls (fig.3 and 4). There was little infrastructure outside the walls and the seashore came very close to them. During this period this axis had mainly an utilitarian character which is to practically connect the two fortification gates the north and the south one. (Miho, 2003, f. p.191) The Ottoman map of the 19th century (fig.3) shows rather schematically the zoning and buildings outside and inside the castle walls. The building plots are shown in pink and it can be concluded that the urban layout of Durrës and the social life takes place within this enclosure and the evident axis (which coincides with the Epidamn boulevard) can be considered its urban center. After the devastating earthquake of 1926, a large number of houses, mostly built in adobe, within the Castle district were damaged. It didn't take long for the city to recover. The potential of the city for development and the vital importance of the port, paved the way for the ambitious and modern project for the construction of the city's new boulevard. The need for the construction of a new, wider, straight axis that would respond to the many and multifaceted requests of the new portual structures and city centre, that would provide the necessary transportation functions and that would present the city to the visitors in a more dignified way were among the main reasons for the creation of the new boulevard. (Miho, 2003, f. p.191)

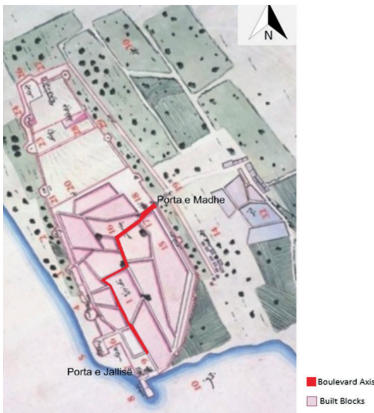


Fig. 3, (Axis within the Castle district) 19th cent. Ottoman map, ARŞIV 2016



Fig. 4, (Presence of the axis within the Castle district) Plan of the city of Durrës, source HEUZEY, DAUMET 1876. Represented by G. Naessens

Figures 5-6, show the process of the debris removal, along with the intervention for the opening of what would become the city's new boulevard. This intervention was an innovative response for the time, to one of the existing environmental problems, the bad smells coming from the swamp area. According to (Kaçani, 2023), the opening of the boulevard was also a solution for the ventilation of the city. The construction of the new boulevard started in 1927 and continued until 1929. Comparing the 1928 and 1937 plans it is visible that the direction of the axis was not random. It was based on the direction of the old road, on the reuse of the open spaces previously used as courtyards and of the spaces opened due to destruction of many buildings in the aftermath of the earthquake (figures 10-11). The initial name of the axis was the “Boulevard of the Castle” (Miho,

2003). The main factors for the opening of the boulevard, were initially the emergent need for infrastructure after the damages caused by the 1926 earthquake and the inevitable growth of the population, but certainly it was a reciprocal interest between Albania and Italy for the revival of the commercial connections that acted as a driver for these developments and the further revival of the city.

Referring to (Beja, 2012), the 1940s marked a turning point for Durrës. It was during the years of the WWII, that although trade had a profitable climate, social life was shaken. The war did not leave devastating consequences, but the city still could not resume the old prosperity, due to the policies of the communist regime. Perhaps during this period, the “Commercial Street” got its actual name as “Epidamn Boulevard”. Today, the “Epidamn” boulevard, is a strong attraction and very frequented urban space in the city.



Fig. 5, View of the destructions caused from the 1926 earthquake



Fig. 6, View of the destructions caused from the 1926 earthquake in the Castle district



Fig. 8, Aerial view of the castle district where the axis of the boulevard is clearly noted - years 1930-1940

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## Spatial Analysis

This section provides a spatial analysis of what has been evidenced by the historical research. The regulatory plan commissioned by King Zog (fig 7-8) noted the widening and better orienting of the boulevard, holding a central position in the city plan, from which it conserves still today (see fig.9)

The Regulatory Plan tried to conceive the city as a compact urban unit, divided in two main parts by the central road axis. The regulatory plan predicted a spread of the urban settlement, according to the Italian grid, with an accented urban mark that consisted of a Y-shaped route (see fig.7-8) which lead to the new central square and that would mark a new pole for new projects in the coming years. (Menghini, Pashako, & Stigliani, 2012) As foreseen, due to the increasing number of development projects designed by Italian architects in the new areas beyond the castle walls, new poles were created and eventually a shift of the urban center happened. Figures 10 - 13 graphically show the changes experienced in the urban layout comparing 1928s and 1940s. The intervention for the widening of the boulevard as result of the Regulatory plan, as well as the shifting of the city centre, and the extension of the urban settlement are clearly displayed in the analysis.



Fig. 8, Regulatory plan of Durrës 1942. (AQTN). L. Carmignani, F. Poggi,



Fig. 9 – Regulatory plan of Durrës zoning, L.Carmignani, F. Poggi, 1942. (AQTN).

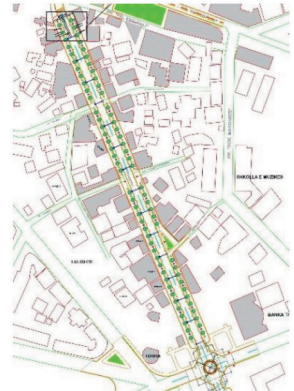


Fig. 10, Renovation project of the boulevard 2005, Municipality of Durrës

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Fig.11 Boulevard axis (above) and city centre in 1928, (I.Buka 2022)

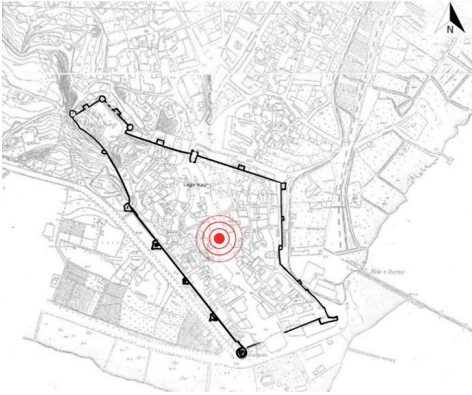


Fig.13 – Constructed areas 1928 (I.Buka 2022)

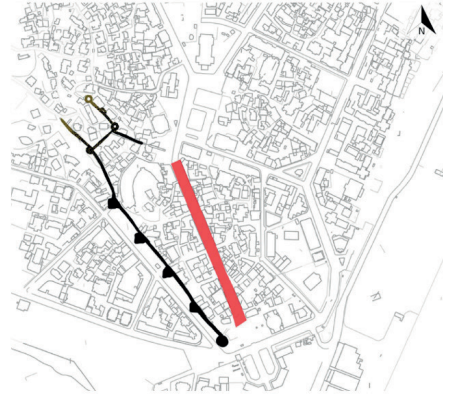


Fig.12 Boulevard axis (above) and city centre after 1930 – until today (I.Buka 2022)

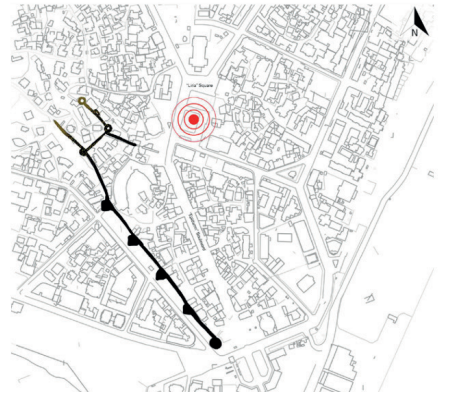


Fig.14 – Constructed Areas 1937 (I.Buka, 2022)



## Building scale and architectural features

During the 20th Century, the roads of the Castle district were narrow, in the form of cobbled alleys. The 1-2 floor buildings create a continuous façade, with distinguishable elements such as the rectangular windows which create an a-a rhythm on the façades (fig.14). However, this rhythm was often interrupted by occasional openings of doors or windows. This can be due to the fact that during this period, Durrës displayed a medieval character, and buildings were generally built by the owners and master builders, and not through specific project design process.

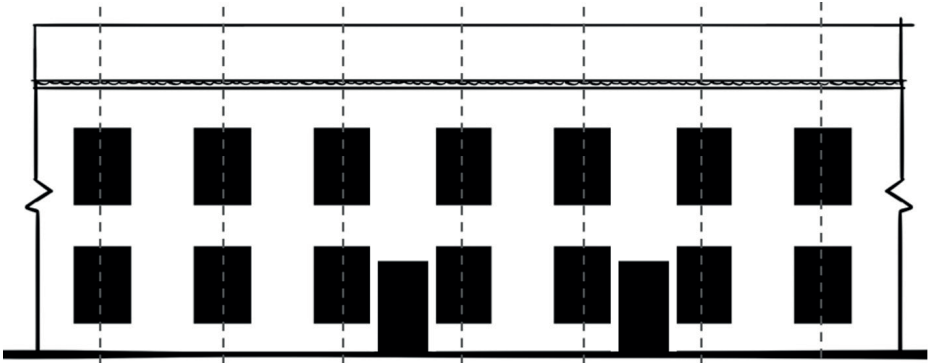


Fig. 15 – above - partial view of the façades along the boulevard axis (during 19th cent.), below -Sketch illustrating the rhythm a-a present in the façades (I.Buka, 2022)

The Italian influence in architecture and urban planning, aided to the flourishing of the city of Durrës, both in the field of architecture and the local economy. This influence today, is evident in “Epidamn” boulevard”, which generally carries the same architectural styles and values. The architectural elements of the 1930s, which can be noticed in many of the buildings along the boulevard, was clean and rational, with a moderate décor and 2-3 floor buildings. (Beja, 2012)

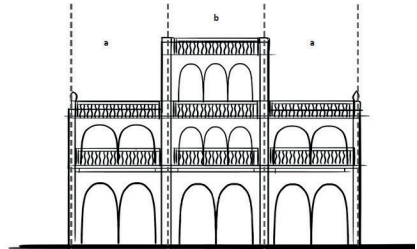
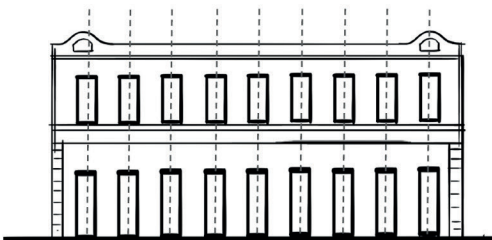


Fig. 16 – (above) partial view of the facades along the boulevard axis (years 1930-1940.) , (below) Sketch illustrating the rhythm a-a and a-b-a present in the facades (I.Buka, 2022)

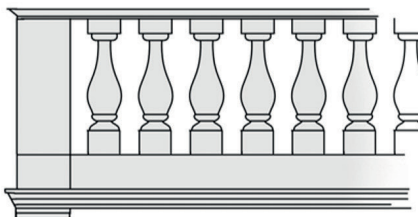
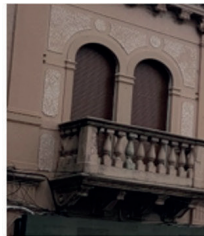
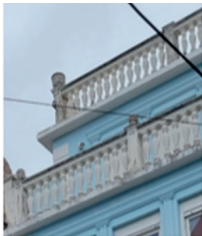


Fig. 17 – Balconies details (I.Buka, 2022)



The characteristic elements of the facades are the arched windows and doors, balconies, rhythmically composed in harmony with the sharp frame of the buildings. However, not all facades have arched elements, but they find common ground in rhythm, harmony and rational purity, which give the facades as a whole a uniformity and similar character.

Taking in consideration the above-mentioned aspects and as noted in the Figures 16-17 it can be affirmed that the boulevard has pretty much conserved its volumetry and main characteristics.



Fig.18 – Boulevard "Epidamn", '80s

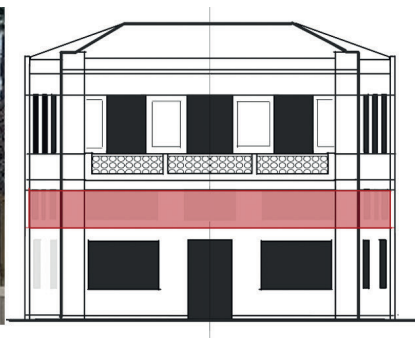


Fig. 19 – Boulevard "Epidamn", 2023

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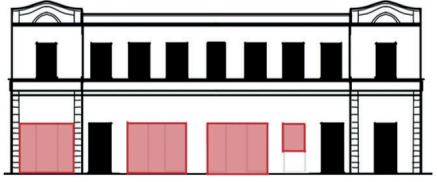
After a period of neglect from 1990 to 1999, renovations that consisted mainly in repainting of the facades in 1999, can be considered a turning point, and a beginning of the visual chaos that was evident during 2000 and still today. The figures below show some of the changes in the architectural character of five selected buildings. The aim is to evidence the permanent elements of the boulevard that are still present. The changes and additions are displayed through photos (historic and today) and graphically in red color.



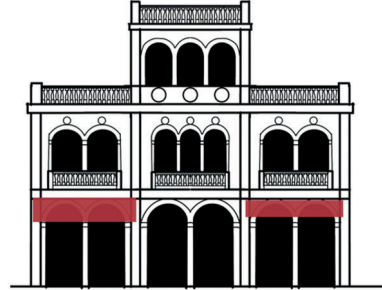
Building (3)



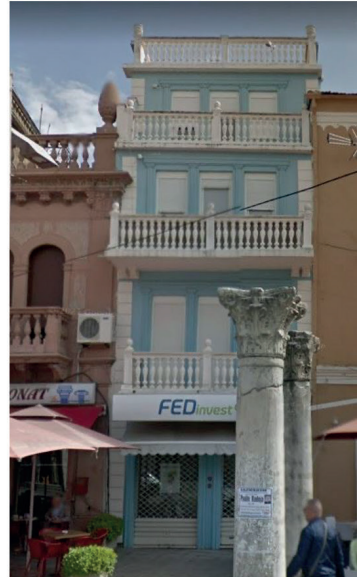
*Building (1)*

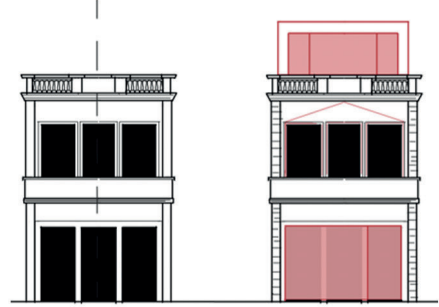


*Building (2)*



*Building (4)*





*Building (5)*

## Conclusions and Recommendations

At the core of this analysis is the investigation of the boulevard element as a permanent element in the morphology of the city of Durrës. The research showed that the transformations that this axis has undergone through time (and space) are undeniably reflections of a variety of periods during its lifespan and as mentioned several times in this article, the role of the boulevard in the development of the city of Durrës, is great. Several conclusions and recommendations can be drawn up as result of this research:

1. The Epidamn boulevard has been and still is an important arteria in the city formation.
2. The opening of the boulevard after the earthquake followed the real direction of the development of the city and clearly acknowledged the role of castle district and the boulevard axis in the city setting.
3. The presence of the boulevard axis has channelled, guided, and often accelerated the propulsive forces that act on, or are about to act in the city.
4. The strongest character of the boulevard was in pre-war period when planning mechanisms, architectural projects activity and the functional aspect acted together towards the forming of the "Commercial street" as an urban unit. It can be said that the current character of the boulevard derives from the atmosphere of the early 20th cent.
5. The vernacular, pre-modern and communist architecture somehow coexisted harmoniously together, somewhere blended somewhere separate but anyhow they succeeded to display their distinct character
6. The post 90s did not succeed to define a contemporary character and in some cases has failed to understand and recognize the character, significance and relationships of elements from different periods in the boulevard
7. The conservation, valorisation and emphasise of the elements that have demonstrated to be permanent in the boulevard is of outmost importance and should be taken in consideration by the local government authorities when evaluating new development proposals in this area.

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