



Dipartimento
Architettura
Ferrara

BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

2nd INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HOUSING, PLANNING, AND RESILIENT DEVELOPMENT OF THE TERRITORY

TOWARDS EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PERSPECTIVES

OCTOBER 16th-17th, 2025

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2nd International Conference on Housing, Planning, and Resilient Development of the Territory

Towards Euro-Mediterranean Perspectives

Conference Theme and Rationale

This conference returned for the second time within the Albanian and Mediterranean academic context, aiming to build a tradition of collaboration centered on scientific research and academia. Following the success of the first edition held on October 13th-14th, 2023, where proceedings were published in the Book of Proceedings, Albanica journal, and various international academic platforms, POLIS University and the Academy of Sciences of Albania relaunched this important event. The 2025 edition focused on housing, urban planning, and resilient territorial development, offering a platform for researchers, policymakers, and experts from the region and beyond.

Albania and the Western Balkans have faced major transformations in urbanization, spatial planning, and environmental management. Demographic changes, economic pressures, and environmental challenges created a need for new strategies in architecture, planning, and governance. This conference brought together diverse voices to explore these themes and promote resilient and sustainable development.

Key topics included architecture and the city, with emphasis on urban form, housing typologies, and the role of cultural heritage in modern urban design; urban mobility, addressing traffic challenges, public transport, and the use of technologies like GIS and AI in planning; and new housing models, focusing on affordability, energy efficiency, and innovative materials.

Discussions also covered demography and economy, exploring territorial governance, smart cities, social enterprises, and digital technologies such as AI, VR, and the Metaverse in urban management. Finally, the urban and natural environment was addressed through topics like pollution, adaptive planning, and nature-based solutions for climate resilience.

Through this conference, POLIS University and the Academy of Sciences of Albania aimed to foster a broad interdisciplinary debate on these pressing issues, combining academic and practical perspectives to offer concrete recommendations for future urban and territorial development policies and projects.

Organizers' Announcement

The International Scientific Conference on Housing, Urban Planning, and Resilient Territorial Development: Toward Euro-Mediterranean Approaches was held on October 16th-17th, 2025, in Tirana, Albania. Organized by POLIS University in collaboration with the Academy of Sciences of Albania and supported by national and international partners, including the University of Ferrara and Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development, the event brought together researchers, academics, policymakers, and professionals to address key challenges in urban development, with a focus on resilience and sustainability in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The first day of the conference took place at the Academy of Sciences, while the second day was hosted at POLIS University.

The conference explored five main themes:

- I. Architecture and the City, which investigated the typological and morphological dimensions of urban form, the evolution of collective and individual housing types, the relationship between architectural design and urban identity, and the role of historical and cultural heritage in shaping contemporary cities;
- II. Urban Mobility and Resilient Cities, which addressed traffic congestion, infrastructure challenges, and public transportation, while also promoting the redesign of public spaces – such as streets, squares, and pedestrian zones – to improve accessibility and mobility; it also explored the integration of digital technologies like GIS, AI, and simulation tools to enhance planning, automation, and infrastructure management;
- III. New Housing Models, which examined innovative approaches to affordable and social housing in response to demographic shifts and technological change, along with energy efficiency strategies, passive energy systems, and the application of new sustainable materials and construction technologies;
- IV. Demography and Economy, which focused on macro-regional and national dynamics impacting territorial development, including urban governance, disaster risk reduction, and the rise of smart and inclusive cities; it also explored how emerging technologies – such as AI, VR, and the Metaverse – along with social enterprises and circular economy practices, could foster more equitable and adaptive urban systems; and
- V. Urban and Natural Environment, which analyzed environmental degradation in urban settings, including air, water, and soil pollution, and promoted nature-based solutions, ecosystem-based planning, and adaptive strategies to enhance environmental sustainability and climate resilience.

The conference was conducted in English and Albanian (with self-translated texts where applicable) and was free of charge, with all registration fees fully covered by POLIS University in support of open academic exchange. Key deadlines included abstract submission by June 15th, acceptance notification by June 30th, first draft of papers by September 15th, and final submissions by October 31st.

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Typologies of collective and individual housing / History of cities and architecture /
Architectural design: Morphology and form.

Urban regeneration and conservation / Cultural and historical heritage / Regenerative
approaches to design and adaptive reuse of spaces.

Public Space and Urban Identity

Tracing the Shifts of Epidamn Boulevard, Durrës

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Abstract

This research aims to investigate the transformation of one of the main axes of public, social, and cultural interactions in Durrës, the “Epidamn” Boulevard. Since its inception as a boulevard, it has undergone a series of functional and symbolic changes, influencing not only the urban shape but also the social life of its inhabitants. These changes were mainly dictated by political approaches, which were reflected directly in the public space. Through these morphological and comparative analyses of the boulevards across historical periods, this study identifies how public spaces are shaped and oriented by the relationships between built structures and public space. At the centre of this study is the evaluation of how urban and architectural interventions have influenced the shape and morphological aspects of public space.

The findings suggest that “Epidamn” Boulevard serves as a pure reflection of the dynamic urban development of Durres, while also serving as a case study to better understand the relation between the urban form, local identity, and influence from political jurisdictions. By looking at how both form and function have changed, this research underlines not only the sustainability but also the fragility of urban public spaces as they evolve. In addition to these contextual observations, the study draws on existing literature about public space and urban form – most notably Kevin Lynch’s ideas on the image of the city, along with other works that examine boulevards and similar urban environments. Building on these theoretical perspectives, the focus here is to situate Durrës within a wider debate on urban form and spatial change, while stressing the importance of keeping the identity of Mediterranean cities intact in the face of fast urban growth and fragmented planning. By analyzing changes in form and function, this research highlights the sustainability and vulnerability of urban public spaces through their transformations.

Besides these contextual analyses, this study also relies on literature about public spaces and urban form, including Kevin Lynch’s theories on the image of the city and other research that had in focus the same topic as boulevards and public spaces. While grounded in these theoretical frameworks, this study aims to place Durrës within a broader discussion on urban form and spatial transformation, focusing on maintaining the identity of Mediterranean cities facing rapid urban growth and fragmented interventions.

In conclusion, the research proposes a regenerative approach that balances the preservation of historical and cultural values with the improvement of public access and reorganization of public space as a vital key component in civic life.

Keywords

Epidamn Boulevard, historic transformation, public space, urban identity, urban morphology

1. Introduction

Urban identity and social interoperability are significantly shaped by public places. In addition to being places of travel and commerce, these also represent the history, culture, and collective memory of the local populace. Public areas, like as plazas and main boulevards, are crucial in determining the structure of the city and the form of urban identity in Mediterranean coastal communities like Durrës.

The major thoroughfare of Durrës, presently called "Epidamn," has a distinctive past. Its name comes from the name of the ancient city, Epidamnos, which the Romans adopted after Greek colonists used it in the seventh century.

This name, nowadays, serves as a link to the past, giving the modern city a greater sense of its ancient origins while highlighting that the boulevard has a sense of historical regeneration and importance.

The name has shifted from "Dyrrah Boulevard" to "Trading Road", in different times, due to its function as the main axis of commercial activities, as well as being the most frequented zone for social activities.

In this way, the morphological analysis is made while analysing the form of the Boulevard at three moments of its urban development: the maps from 1928, 1937, and 2015 (Figure 1). The 1928 map represents an organic structure, as a combination of some small plazas and spaces for commercial trading among inhabitants, as well as tourists visiting the city. These elements give the boulevard a richer and dynamic character.

In the second map of 1937, the boulevard seems to be transformed toward a more linear axis due to the influence of Italian modernist visions. The organic plazas seem not to be evident anymore in this period. Also, the facades alongside the boulevard have been reorganized. The previous organic characteristic is replaced with narrow roads that represent well a geometrical order. If we observe the map of 2015, the elements previously mentioned have disappeared almost completely. In this period, the dominance is focused on the linearity of the boulevard, which seems to be dividing the two neighbourhoods completely geometrized from side to side. Even though from the second map to be analyzed (the one of the 1937 year) the facades seems to not have changed, it could be accepted that the whole identity that made this boulevard unique, now it is no more. All three phases chosen to be analyzed, apart from the ease of finding the maps, show dominant analytical elements from the historical period they belong to. In this way, wearable information is gathered for different historical

periods, becoming important in order to understand the relationship between urban form and historical memory.



Figure 1. Three maps serve as the basis for the analysis. In the first map, (a) shows the map of the year 1928 of the whole city of Durrës. The second map (b) shows the map of the city of Durrës in 1937. The third map (c), shows one part of the 2015 of the city of Durrës.

Source: AQTN.

Another important aspect that adds value to this boulevard is the position in the middle of a space rich with archaeological heritage, where the functionality of this boulevard would be different in historical periods, as well as for the space surrounding it and its urban form.

Epidamn Boulevard in Durrës represents one of the most evident cases of urban transformation within the city, spanning different historical periods that have led to changes in form, function, and the perception of its residents. Starting from the Ottoman era and continuing through the Italian invasion, socialism, and the post-1990 transition, the boulevard mirrors the various political, economic, and social changes that have influenced the city's public life and identity.

2. Literature review

The study of urban form provides a theoretical framework for understanding how cities evolve, integrating physical, social, and environmental determinants. Urban morphology, determined firstly by Conzen M. R. G. (1960) and later on explained by other contemporary researchers, is focused on the relationship between urban structures, such as roads, paths, parcels, and buildings, and the processes that affect their formation.

In this context, "Epidamn" boulevard might be a good case study on using urban morphology tools to better understand how the coastal cities embody history, culture, and economy through time changes. While these current transformations tend to fit modern development, they are also challenged by rapid urban growth and mass tourism.

Since from ancient times, Boulevards have served as places where politic, culture and economic activities coexist. Same as, Boulevards operate as axis (mainly linear ones) that link parts of the city with other parts further from the city centre.

An important researcher who focused on the Paris Boulevard Champs-Élysées is Allen S. Weiss. In his study “A hybrid space inaugurating modernity”, he nominates the Boulevard as a space that represented modernity in a city that previously was described as a city with a medieval identity. From this point of view, the intervention taken over Paris to create space for the Boulevard was seen not only as a need to solve the problems but as a symbolic solution, rich with linear perspectives that clearly indicate the urban vision of its time.

In the same way, the theme of the perception of the space from inhabitants and visitors of the city is treated, as well as the manner in which Boulevards shape the identity of a city. The same transition parallelism could be made over the city of Durrës. The transformation from a multi-plaza Boulevard, in a linear axis without dynamics, has influenced the functionality and the sense of the city.

Similarly, the idea of transformation in the city is supported by Dousard et al. (2004), while exploring new methods of thinking and living in the city, like the urban metabolism. In this way, the idea of the city as an entity always in transition, always on alterations, modifications, and adaptations is highlighted, rather than being a rigid, solid form. With analysis of this concept in the Champs-Élysées, the researchers confronted the politics of existing spaces, their modifications while planning new spaces, and how small interventions made in different times over public spaces affect the metabolism of the whole city. This concept could also be used in the city of Durrës; every intervention in different periods of time has resulted in changes in the aesthetic of the city as well as in the functional shifts.

Other researchers, as Carr, Francis, Rivlin, and Stone (1992) or Jan Gehl (1987), study the relationship between public spaces, the livability of the city, and how changes in form and structure induce worsening or improvement of this. In this context, Low and Smith (2006) in their book, “The Politics of Public Space,” discuss the importance and disappearance of public space as a democratic arena, where power and social interests clash. These perspectives are crucial in understanding that the Epidamn Boulevard transformations must not be viewed solely as physical transformations, but as a reflection of the social, political, and cultural movements that have shaped the city's history.

Spiro Kostof (1991) has studied in his book “The City Shaped” the urban evolution seen from the morphological aspect. He argues that the elements that bear social and political importance in a city are the linear axis encountered in most of the towns, the plazas, and the boulevards. In this way, these elements are the ones that give the city its identity. Otherwise, Conzen M.R.G. (1960), brought the idea of showing that paths and buildings are the one that reflects the historical and cultural identity of the city.

Muratori (1959), parallel to Conzen, presented the concept of tissue and figure-ground analysis being used in urban morphology spatial research. Also, Caniggia and Maffei (1979) explored the typological evolution of the urban form and how it reflected on the shape of

parts of the city. The same analysis could be made in Durrës Boulevard, representing the typological sustainability as a factor influencing the shifts of the Boulevard.

International literature on boulevards as urban forms, such as Choay (1969) and Hazan (2002), examining Paris as a case study, illustrate how Haussmann's interventions reshaped both urban infrastructure and the city's perception. In this understanding, boulevards became the symbols of modernity, urban control, and the aspirations of contemporary societies. On the other hand, Rykwert (2000) situates the boulevards within a broader historical context, viewing them as a reflection of social and economic developments. In contrast, Kostof (1991) describes them as part of a morphological system that conveys political and cultural meanings. These analyses help to understand that, being used in different periods as an expression of modernity, the boulevard transformed itself as a symbol of political aspirations.

Calabi (2004), in his studies of European cities in different early modern periods, analyzes the link between public spaces and commerce. He highlights the fact that roads or spaces where the trading was held play a crucial role in the formation of urban identity. In this way, the economic and social functionality of the city was preserved, making this connection even stronger. The same thing could be said for Durrës Boulevard, while supporting this theory more with the denomination of this as "Rruga Tregtare" ("The Trading Road"), putting together these two notions: Road (Boulevard/ Public space) and Trading.

Meanwhile. In a more contemporary context, Amin and Thrift (2002) see the whole city as a communion of social, economic, and cultural relations. Meanwhile. In a more contemporary context, Amin and Thrift (2002) see the whole city as a communion of social, economic, and cultural relations. Said this, public spaces could be thought of as places generated from these relations, and the absence or the excessive presence of one of these elements could evoke deformation or shifts to be better assimilated in their location. The same logic is valuable in Durrës, supporting it with Buka, Demaj, and Kumaraku's (2023) study about the shift of the city center of Durrës, from the middle of the Boulevard toward the northern part, outside the city walls fortification.

In conclusion, the rich international literature, as well as some local studies, position the Boulevard as a complex urban morphological element that works in different orientations in order to adapt the form according to the function it has in different periods.

Meanwhile, morphological studies see the boulevard as shaped by historical layers and urban typologies. Conversely, research on trading and public spaces highlight their importance to the economic life of citizens. In the Albanian context, although the literature is limited, existing studies provide a framework for understanding the political and social factors behind public space changes. This study aims to address a gap by examining "Epidamn" Boulevard as a case, showing how it has evolved and been reinterpreted over different historical periods, always influenced by political, social, and cultural shifts in Durrës.

3. Methodology

This study employs a combined approach of morphological urban analysis and a critical review of the literature, focusing on boulevards and public spaces. The methodology integrates empirical observations with the analysis of cartographic sources and insights from scientific research.

The analysis in the empirical framework centers on comparing historical and current maps, highlighting three key moments: 1928, 1937, and 2015. These maps provide a straightforward basis for tracking the urban development of "Epidamm" boulevard in relation to the city's overall structure. The choice of these periods is deliberate: the 1928 map is the first accurate depiction of Durrës, along with other reasons discussed later; the 1937 map shows the impacts of the monarchy period and European planning influence; and the 2015 map captures recent growth amid post-socialist transition conditions. Through the comparison of these maps, it was possible to identify changes in the length, width, functions, and the presence or absence of small plazas along the boulevard, as well as relations with other parts of the city.

This study is built upon theoretical research made mainly for Boulevards, public spaces and urban morphologies, similar to analytical analysis from researchers like Choay, Kostof, Sitte, Conzen, and Muratori.

These comparisons or speculations for Durrës, offer a detailed information for the shifts of the Boulevard, becoming in this way a non-isolated case study but repetitive in cases with similar dynamics.

4. Results

Morphological analysis of Boulevard, shows the complexity of urban form and the slow passage from an organic structure to a top-down planned space. The first map taken into consideration (Figure 2) shows the organization and orientation of the structures on both sides of the boulevard. It is clearly observed that the positioning of the buildings does not follow a certain rule, but placed in this way, with irregular angles, allows the possibility of creating these small spaces between them that can be interpreted as small squares. The same logic applies to the buildings located along the boulevard, as well as inside the residential areas on the side of the Boulevard. These small squares function as independent entities from the Boulevard, but at the same time, they become part of the whole, being considered as extensions of it (figure 7). From examining the shape of the Boulevard itself, it can be noted that the overall shape is formed by these smaller geometric shapes of squares that, when combined, create the boulevard. From here arises the hypothesis that these small squares could function even when separated from each other, developing various trades in them.

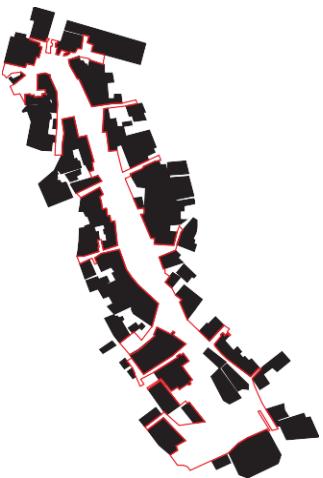


Figure 2. The map of 1928, where the "Epidamn" Boulevard is generated by an organic way of urban planning.

Source: Author.



Figure 3. The map of 1937, in which the Boulevard seems to be transformed into a linear axis.

Source: Author.

Another important element is the way in which the boulevard is "broken" by secondary itineraries, which link this main axis with the neighbourhoods around. These urban gaps create forms similar to "wedges", suggesting a natural orientation of movement and also enhancing the idea of the boulevard as a space integrated with the city's urban structure. In this way, the boulevard is represented not only as a transit road, but as an open network of spatial and social interactions.

The small spaces along the boulevard have diverse geometric shapes that add typological variety. For instance, the main plaza is shaped like an arc with roughly 10-15 degrees, while other areas feature plazas with triangular, rectangular, and trapezoidal layouts. These varieties of geometric shapes encountered within an axis, give a unique character to the Boulevard. Likewise, a very important element is the geometric and visual closure of the Boulevard at its two ends, in the north by the "Great Gate" and in the southern part, where the connection with the port was made at the "Sea Gate" and at the same time the "Prince Vid's Mansion". These end closures of the Boulevard gave it a monumental character. Likewise, the latter is emphasized by the location to the south of a public space, one of the largest that this Boulevard has. The way of placing and organizing the end objects clearly presents the principles of composition.

Meanwhile, in the other map from 1937 (figure 3), even though we are discussing a map of a situation 9 years after the first, the shift that the Boulevard underwent, both in urban form and in function, is clearly noticeable. Here, one can clearly see the first tendencies of creating a more look-like Cartesian grid starting from the boulevard axis. The main axis is deliberately positioned, involving the adjustment or removal of existing buildings to form two linear facades on either side of the boulevard. During this change, the plazas, previously key elements of urban design, are eliminated and replaced by broader routes that segment the main axis into multiple parts.

Although one element that is preserved (we also find this feature in the later map of 2015) is the arch formed from the orientation of some buildings in the northwest of the boulevard, linked with the existence of antique amphitheatre as a strong element referenced by the concept of “landmarks” by Kevin Lynch, as well as an “urban Artefact” by Aldo Rossi. Big changes are noticed even in the extremities of the boulevard (figure 6). In the north, the collapse of the big gate releases the space and opens the boulevard through the other part of the city, whereas in the south, new interventions are linked with the buildings of the Italian period. Nevertheless, in the 1937 map, the southern closure is not yet finished or intentionally left open toward the west (the Volga region nowadays), as a space designated for further development. Additionally, the plazas that were once part of the boulevard are displaced within the surrounding neighborhood, thereby weakening its role as a direct extension of the main axis.

In the 2015 map (figure 4), another transformation phase is evident, in which the boulevard appears to have gradually lost its identity and its inherited morphological particularity. The plazas have vanished, and the boulevard is reduced in two main continuous facades that follow its line. Although the vertical interruptions that permeate the boulevard continue to exist and also the arch linked to the amphitheater is maintained as an orientation element, the southern part appears detached (figure 7). The structures of the Italian period are not organically connected to the boulevard, creating a strong interruption and giving the impression of a space without a clear identity, unlike previous periods, when this axis maintained a special and distinct character.

Finally, the analysis conducted for “Epidamn” Boulevard in these three different periods – 1928, 1937, and 2015 – shows clearly the phases in which the most evident changes were made. The placement of opposite positions shows the complex evolution of the urban form of this boulevard. These results highlight the fact that the boulevard must not be seen only as urban roads, but also as spaces that mirror the changes and challenges a city undergoes over time, from its first organic structure, full of interactive spaces for trading and social activities, to a more linear and rational axis.



Figure 4. The map of 2015 year, where the fragmented boulevard has now lost its historical identity.

Source: Author.

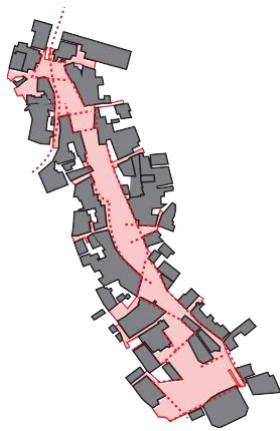


Figure 5. The analysis of the formation of the boulevard in 1928.

Source: Author.

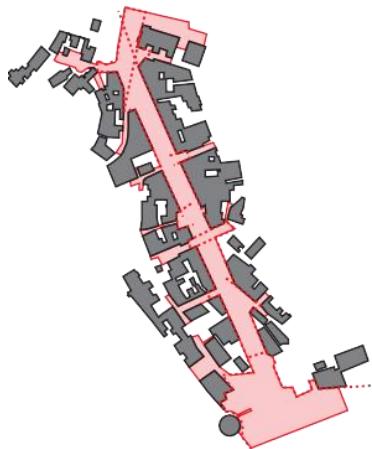


Figure 6. The Boulevard transformed into a straight line in the year 1937.

Source: Author.



Figure 7. The Boulevard analysis showing the main axis of the boulevard losing all the organic shapes.

Source: Author.

5. Discussion

The discussion on being a non-solid structure of the urban form, brings out the "Epidamn" Boulevard as a typical case from which this idea can be examined. Observing the transition from the first map (1928) of the organic structure (Figure 8) to a more rational form of 1937 (Figure 9) to the urban fragmentation of 2015 (Figure 10), the idea unfolds that in different periods, the regime proposes different versions of public space that adapted to the vision of the time. In this way, we can say that the Boulevards are a good laboratory to study the historical urban stratifications and the relationship with the architectural and urban forms as well.

From a perspective focusing on the public spaces (squares) that once served as gathering spaces and commercial activity, it seems as if they have disappeared over the years. This can be directly (or indirectly) related to the loss of the social dimension in the Boulevard, as the urban "pockets" with social and commercial activity functioned, were withdrawn. While today the Boulevard is seen more as a transit axis that connects 2 parts of the city and shortens mobility time.

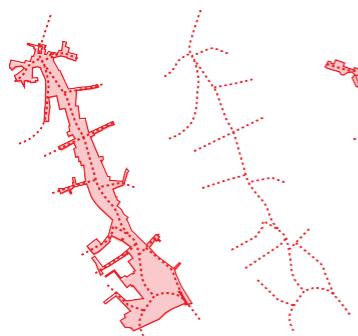


Figure 8. The organic structure analysis of the Boulevard in 1928.

Source: Author.

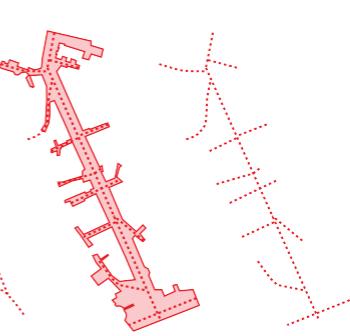


Figure 9. The rational linear analysis of the boulevard in 1937.

Source: Author.

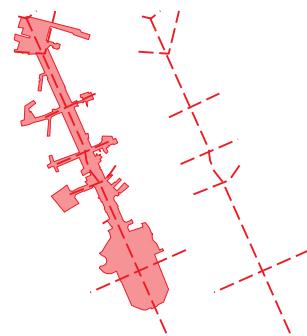


Figure 10. The strictly fragmented linear boulevard analysis in 2015.

Source: Author.

While in some fragments of this part of the city some objects have resisted time (the City Amphitheater), and are still read today as urban artifacts (Rossi, 1982), some others resisted change only as memory and not physically. These "landmarks" (Lynch, 1960) that are still seen today as the city's memory can serve as a basis for the reinterpretation and recovery of these public spaces.

Preserving sustainable features in an amphitheatre supports Aldo Rossi's idea of urban artifacts and their influence on the city's identity. Along with Kevin Lynch's concept of "landmarks," this shows that even amid fragmentation, the city maintains a memory and identity axis that can serve as a foundation for reclaiming public space. The debate over "Epidamn" Boulevard highlights the universal urban planning challenge: how to conserve historical memory without hindering modern growth, and how to strike a balance between practical use and aesthetic appeal.

6. Conclusion

Research on shifts and changes in "Epidamn" Boulevard clearly showed that the city, with the expansion of its borders, has shrunk its public spaces. This reflection of urban history and identity has undergone a radical transition, embracing modernist characteristics today.

The process described in this study focuses on the importance of morphological analysis (Figure 11) to explore changes in form and function.

Likewise, it is important to understand that the social approach to a city is what keeps it connected and makes it function better.

This study serves as a case study to understand how urban visions of different time periods may have worked better or not, and whether it is useful for these memories from the past to be returned to the city again, of course adapting to the needs of today.

This also encourages viewing these spaces as places where the collective memory and identity of the city are created.

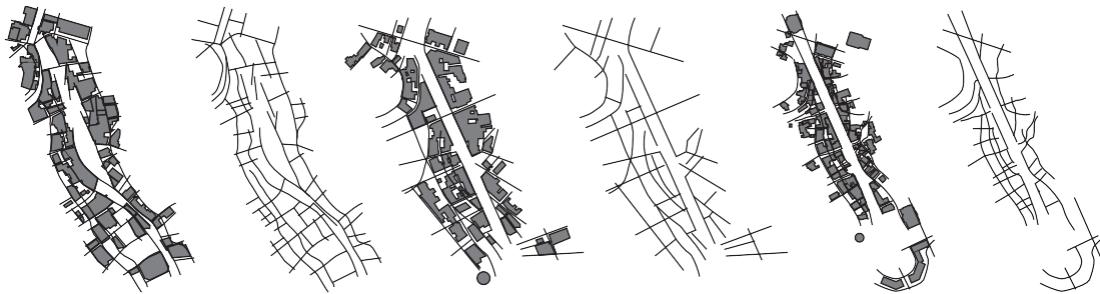


Figure 11. Morphological analysis of urban patterns, showing changes in form, shape, and urban pattern.

Source: Author.

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