

# Towards new heights: The Impact of High-Rise Developments on Tirana's Urban Transformation

DOI: 10.37199/o41011113

Erjon ÇOBANI, PhD IDAUP / Polis University

**Abstract** - *The construction of tall buildings has recently become a defining feature of Tirana's urban development, marking a clear departure from its traditionally low-rise character. Once characterized by compact neighborhoods and modest housing blocks, the Albanian capital has, in the last five years, experienced an unprecedented wave of high-rise projects. This rapid vertical expansion reflects not only the city's response to growing demographic pressures and urban density, but also ambition to position itself within the broader network of European capitals. Unlike cities such as London, Paris, or Frankfurt, where vertical growth has been gradual and log established, Tirana's transformation is occurring within a short timeframe, making its impact on the urban fabric particularly pronounced. This trend is enabled by the adoption of advanced construction technologies and innovative materials. High-strength concrete, prefabricated structural elements, modular systems, and energy-efficient façades have significantly accelerated the pace of construction while ensuring higher safety standards and sustainability. The integration of digital tools such as BIM further enhances project efficiency, coordination, and performance monitoring. Collectively, these innovations allow Tirana to realize taller, more complex structures than previously possible, while aligning with global shifts toward environmentally conscious architecture. Rapid vertical growth also raises critical questions about urban density, environmental impact, and the preservation of Tirana's historical character. Balancing innovation with cultural heritage remains a pressing challenge for planners and policymakers. This paper examines the implications of high-rise developments in Tirana, focusing on their cultural, economic, and educational transformations. It explores how these towers are reshaping the cityscape and urban experience, while critically analyzing the balance between progress and preservation in the Albanian capital.*

**Keywords** - High-rise developments, Vertical urbanization, Sustainable design, Skyline evolution, Urban growth

## Introduction

The Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat (CTBUH) has extensively documented the evolution of tall buildings worldwide, highlighting a significant shift towards sustainable vertical urbanism. While Europe may not lead globally in the sheer height of its skyscrapers, it has seen a remarkable increase in the number of tall buildings, particularly those over 100 meters. As of August 2024, CTBUH has cataloged over 15000 buildings worldwide exceeding 100 meters in height, with Europe contributing a substantial portion to this figure. Notably, over half of Europe's 1217 buildings (100 m+) have been completed since 2010, indicating a rapid acceleration in vertical construction. This surge aligns with Europe's efforts to address urban challenges such as housing shortages, land scarcity, and the need for sustainable city planning. Among the European capital cities, Tirana is

taking the stage and grabbing the attention of the world, with its recent tall buildings and distinctive architecture. Already, CTBUH has cataloged a list of 7 tall buildings in Tirana, with height more than 50m, with Downtown One (140 m) considered to be the tallest building.

Tirana's current urban development trajectory, especially its emerging skyline and high-rise construction, aligns more closely with the polycentric cluster model seen in Rotterdam and Milan, rather than the centralized skyscraper hubs of Paris La Défense or Frankfurt. To support this statement, Tirana has a dispersed high-rise development, it doesn't have a single centralized high-rise district like La Défense or Frankfurt's Bankenviertel. In fact, the new tall buildings in Tirana, are emerging in multiple nodes across the city, such as Downtown One, Tirana InterContinental, Eyes of Tirana, Alban

tower (4-Ever Green), Vertical Forest Tirana, Lake View Residences and several other towers under construction or planned to be implemented in various strategic locations.

Similar to Milan, Tirana's towers are integrated within the existing urban fabric, not standalone financial or business zones. The objects are often mixed-use, blending residential, office and commercial spaces, which is typical of polycentric clusters focused on human-scale livability and green integration. Both Tirana and Milan place a strong emphasis on green building strategies (vertical forests, LEED-certified towers, urban parks etc.), that reflect a planning ideology that prioritizes environmental sustainability, landscape integration and diversified growth centers. According to Tirana's 2030 General Local Plan (TRO30), decentralized urban density will be achieved through "poly-nodes" and "urban corridors" rather than a vertical core.

Meanwhile, La Défense and Frankfurt are clear examples of centralized skyscraper zones, which are often isolated from residential and cultural zones, primarily driven by financial institutions; in Tirana, there is no such enclave, which is dominated by businesses. Its vertical growth is weaved into the urban tissue, not segregated. Frankfurt and La Défense are fueled by global finance and corporate headquarters. Tirana's towers are more about mixed-use development, real estate investment, and urban renewal – a different typology and motivation.

The list of European cities building to new heights continues to grow exponentially, embracing vertical urbanism as a means to achieve carbon neutrality and sustainable growth (ctbhub.org, April 2025). The CTBUH's 2025 Europe Conference, themed "Different Densities: The Quest for Carbon-Neutral Cities in Europe", underscored this commitment. The conference highlighted how European cities are adopting various models of vertical development, from skyscraper clusters in Paris La Défense and Frankfurt to polycentric clusters in Rotterdam and Milan. These developments prioritize low-carbon

materials, energy efficiency, and integration with existing urban fabrics.

## Literature Review

The recent emergence of high-rise developments in Tirana signifies a pivotal shift in the city's urban morphology. Scholars examining vertical growth in European cities such as Frankfurt, Rotterdam, Paris La Défense and Milan provide valuable comparative frameworks for understanding Tirana's trajectory. This literature review discusses how researchers evaluate such urban interventions, while also proposing a methodology tailored to Tirana's context.

Urban scholars argue that tall buildings in Europe are less about sheer height and more about sustainable vertical density, as outlined by CTBUH. In cities like Frankfurt, high-rise clusters concentrate around financial centers, while polycentric models like in Rotterdam or Milan demonstrate a more distributed impact on surrounding neighborhoods. Tirana's case straddles both logics: it lacks a singular central business district, yet its towers influence distinct urban zones.

Methodologically, evaluating the impact of such developments often involves spatial analysis, social surveys, economic impact assessment and cultural mapping. Scholars like Gehl (2010) emphasize the need to assess how new architecture fosters public life, accessibility and human-scaled interventions. In Tirana, this methodology can be adapted through a multi-scalar framework that incorporates:

- spatial buffers (ex. 250-1000m radius around each tower),
- sectoral impact zones (economic, cultural, social and educational),
- temporal analysis (before vs after development),
- visual mapping techniques (influence diagrams, heat maps etc.).

Recent research in post-socialist cities (Stanilov, 2007; Tsenkova, 2012) emphasizes how towers are often symbols of new capital flows, signaling globalization, yet may lead to uneven development

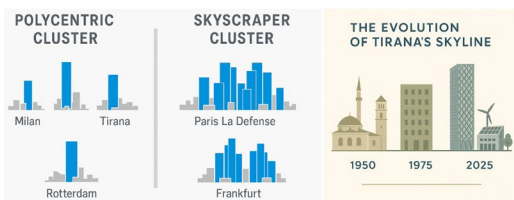


Fig 1 / : Tirana's polycentric cluster (left) and the evolution of Tirana's skyline (right). source/ author (2025)

and displacement. The 4-ever green tower, for example, promotes ecological branding, aligning with green architecture discourse (Beatley, 2011), while Downtown One presents itself as a mixed-use landmark contributing to both residential density and business prestige. Such towers function not only as buildings but also as urban actors, reshaping investment patterns and cultural narratives. However, Tirana-specific literature remains limited, which underlines the relevance of this study. While some planning documents and local architecture

reviews acknowledge the aesthetic and economic ambitions of these towers, systematic evaluations of their social, educational and cultural influence are lacking. By applying a zone-of-influence methodology, which considers not only proximity but qualitative impact, this research aims to bridge that gap.

In sum, the literature supports a multi-dimensional approach to evaluating high-rise impacts. Tirana's towers, though young, offer a fertile ground for urban analysis – blending aspirations of global identity with local socio-cultural transformations. A robust methodological framework will allow a more nuanced understanding of their true contribution to the city's evolution.

### Tirana's Towers

In 2003, the city of Tirana, headed by then-mayor Edi Rama (currently prime minister), had commissioned a masterplan for the redevelopment of the city center. Drafted by Architecture-Studio, the plan

FACTS		BUILDINGS			
Population	3,195,000	Rank	Name	Status	Height
Area	28,748 km <sup>2</sup> - 11,100 mi <sup>2</sup>	1	Downtown One	Completed	140 m / 459 ft
Density	111.1 people per km <sup>2</sup> 287.8 people per mi <sup>2</sup>	2	Arena Center Tower	Completed	112 m / 367 ft
Tallest Building	Downtown One (140 m)	3	Ekspozita Building	Structurally Topped Out	93 m / 305 ft
Tallest City	Tirana	4	4-ever Green	Architecturally Topped Out	85 m / 279 ft
		5	TID Tower	Completed	85 m / 279 ft
		6	ABA Business Center	Completed	81 m / 266 ft
		7	Tirana Vertical Forest	Architecturally Topped Out	75 m / 246 ft

Fig 2 / : List of highest buildings in Tirana according to CTBUH. source/ re-concepted from skyscrapercenter.com by the author, (2025)

SUPERTALLS (H>300m)							
No.	Name	Location	Height	Floors	Architect	Developer	Year
1	Tirana Society Towers	Tirana 41.32894°N 19.82104°E	300 m (980 ft)	---	Alejandro Aravena	Delta sh.p.k / Techno Alb sh.p.k	ongoing
SKYSCRAPERS (H=200-300m)							
No.	Name	Location	Height	Floors	Architect	Developer	Year
1	Grand Park Skyline Tower 1	Tirana 41.32894°N 19.82104°E	266 m (873 ft)	71	Valerio Olgiati	X One sh.p.k.	approved
2	Mixed-use Tower	Tirana 41.34426°N 19.81453°E	---	65	Herzog & de Meuron	Klar sh.p.k.	approved
3	Mount Tirana	Tirana 41.32975°N 19.82054°E	206.4 m (677 ft)	58	CEBRA	Nova Construction sh.p.k	u/c
4	Papuli Tower	Tirana 41.32779°N 19.80768°E	205 m (673 ft)	58	Bofill Arquitectura	Classic S&J sh.p.k.	approved
5	ABA Tower	Tirana	---	58	---	Gener 2	ongoing
6	Lana Riverside Residences	Tirana 41.32210°N 19.80248°E	204.45 m (670.8 ft)	56	Marco Casamonti & Partners / X-Plan Studio	Forever Construction sh.p.k.	u/c
7	Barcelona Tower	Tirana 41.32689°N 19.81628°E	202 m (663 ft)	53	Bofill Arquitectura / UDV Architects	Bami Holding Sh.p.k	approved
8	Bond Tower	Tirana 41.33539°N 19.79661°E	199.5 m (655 ft)	55, 44	OODA	Nova Construction sh.p.k	approved

Fig 3 / : List of Supertalls and Skyscrapers in Tirana.

source/ re-concepted from wikipedia.org by the author, 2025.

envisioned the construction of ten towers, arranged in parallel order around Skanderbeg Square, with an intended maximum height of 85 meters set for each tower, so to maintain a cohesive skyline. However, this is not the case! Every tower that has already been built, or will be implemented exceeds the height limit of 85m. Some may say there is a hidden competition between investors to have the tallest tower in Albania, but often overtly visible. According to recent data (skyscrapercenter.com, 2025), the tallest building in Tirana nowadays is Downtown One (140m - 37 floors), followed by Arena Center Tower (112m - 25 floors), Ekspozita Building (93m - 25 floors), 4-Ever Green (Alban Tower, 85m - 25 floors) and others. Another list of tallest buildings in Albania is also provided, with almost 103 structures, some of which are shown in figure 3. These buildings have different statuses as: constructed, under construction, ongoing or approved to be implemented.

In order to entitle a building "tall" the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat has developed the international standards for measuring and defining them, and is recognized as the arbiter for bestowing designations such as "World's Tallest Building". Although, according to CTBUH the number of floors is a poor indicator of defining a tall building due to the changing floor-to-floor height between different buildings and functions (e.g., office versus residential use), a building of 14 or more stories, or more than 50 meters (165 feet) in height, could typically be used as a threshold for a "tall" building. In the case of Albania, based upon the height and relateness to each other, "tall buildings" can be categorized as below:

1. Supertalls (H > 300m)
2. Skyscrapers (H = 200-300m)
3. Highrise (H = 100-199m)
4. General Urban Developments (H = 45-99m)

No.	Category of Towers	Height (m)	Quantity
1	Supertalls	>300	1
2	Skyscrapers	200-300	8
3	Highrises	100-199	48
4	General urban development	45-99	46

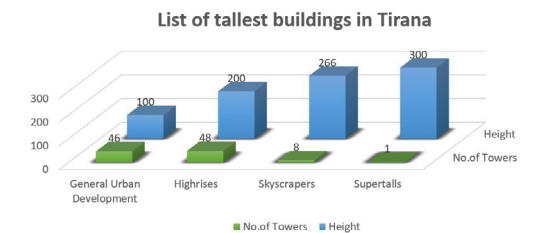


Fig 4 / : List of highest buildings in Tirana according to CTBUH. source/ re-concepted from skyscrapercenter.com by the author, (2025)



Fig 5 / : List of Supertalls and Skyscrapers in Tirana.

As it seems, from the data provided, Tirana's towers aim for the sky, or better say "sky is the limit"! If one would like to have a better perception of how many towers correspond to each category, the answer is given in the following table.

### Methodology and New Lands

In order to evaluate the influence of these towers on Tirana's economic, cultural, social and educational spheres, the following approach is proposed. Economic Impact. It could be assessed the economic impact through examining the capital invested in each project and subsequent economic activities generated. Another metric could be assessing job creation during construction time and also after, during operational phase of the building. Monitoring the emergence of new businesses and services in the vicinity could be also another important indicator.

Cultural Influence. Every new tower that is being added to Tirana has an architectural significance. Every architect that has designed such a tower has evaluated the contribution of their concepts to Tirana's architectural identity, which can be highlighted. Moreover, in the operational phase, it can be evaluated the community's engagement through different events that promote cultural activities. Analysing the integration of public art, plazas and cultural venues would also be a great input.

Social Dynamics. An important indicator would be the demographic shifts by studying changes in population density and diversity in surrounding areas. The quality of life also can be indicated through surveying residents on perceived changes in living standards and amenities. Meanwhile evidencing the social cohesion by investigating the impact of the tower on community interactions and inclusivity would be important.

Educational Contributions. This could be performed by identifying any educational institution or programs housed within or supported by the towers. Evaluating training programs or workshops initiated during or after construction. Exploring partnerships with universities or research centres for the technology used during construction and in operational phase could lead to interesting results. This methodology approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding how the implementation of these skyscrapers has reshaped Tirana's urban dynamics across multiple dimensions.

### Analysis and main findings

In order to test the methodology proposed, four towers have been selected. Respectively:

source/ re-concepted from wikipedia.org by the author, 2025.

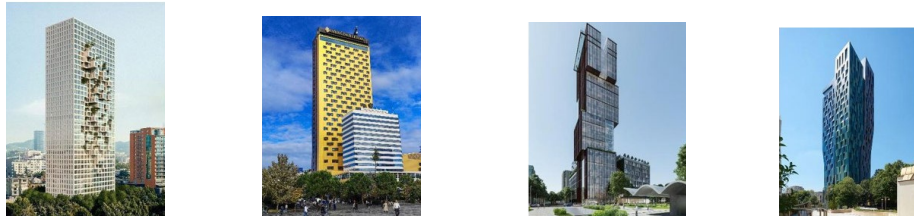


Fig 6/ : Photos of four analyzed towers (left to right as described).  
source/ Websites of each tower, 2025.

Downtown One, Tirana InterContinental Hotel, Eyes of Tirana and 4-Ever Green (Alban tower) (fig.6 left to right respectively). The reasons why these towers are taken into consideration, are as below:

- firstly, they are the highest built towers in Tirana up to now,
  - secondly, they are located around the city center, with some of them very near to each-other, which gives insight into Tirana's rapid vertical urbanization, each of these towers have significant architectural difference, but, even that they are mixed-use and offer same services, their amenities are different and attract the curious eye of residents and tourists, which make them worth to have a deeper look.
- Their varying heights, locations and developers reflect diverse urban strategies, architectural styles and socio-economic impacts. Analyzing them together helps understand how vertical development shapes the urban space, the social behavior and city branding in Tirana.

Figure 8 depicts the Economic Impact and Cultural

Influence maps derived from information gathered about the towers. According to the Economic Impact map, the main indicator for assessment was the total cost (capital invested) of the building. It also shows the employment rate created during construction, as well as more capital flowing into the economy. Other indicators of Economic Impact include the long-term revenue generated by the building, such as rental income and business profits. Additionally, the increase in property values in the surrounding area and the tourism attracted by the iconic structure contribute significantly to the local economy. These factors, combined with the initial construction costs, provide a comprehensive view of the building's economic influence.

On the Cultural Influence map, the architectural attractiveness of the towers has been taken into account, showcasing the towers' architectural identity. Moreover, it has been taken into consideration the integration of the building with its surrounding plazas and cultural monuments.

Cultural events held around the towers further enhance map's significance by highlighting the vibrancy and diversity of the area, creating a dynamic atmosphere that reflects the community's cultural richness.

The maps of Social Dynamics and Educational Contribution are illustrated in figure 9. Social Dynamics map was drafted using indicators of perceived changes in living standards and different amenities provided by the towers. Meanwhile, displaying the vibrancy of the social fabric around the towers. Living standards are measured by evaluating various factors such as income levels, access to education and healthcare, availability of clean water and sanitation, and quality of housing. Other indicators include employment opportunities, social security, and the overall cost of living in the area. These metrics collectively provide a comprehensive view of how well individuals and communities are able to meet their basic needs and achieve a good quality of life.

On the Educational Contributions map, the indicator of educational institutions or programs housed within or supported by the towers has been used. Educational contribution plays a crucial role in shaping the social dynamics of the community by providing individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary for personal and professional growth. Access to quality education can lead to better job opportunities, higher income levels, and improved living standards, which in turn foster economic development in the area. Furthermore,

education promotes social cohesion and empowers communities to address challenges collaboratively, enhancing overall well-being and resilience.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Efforts in Europe to develop tall buildings reflect their understanding of urban challenges and commitment to sustainable solutions. By focusing on vertical density, adaptive reuse, and environmentally conscious design, European cities are redefining their skylines while addressing critical issues such as climate change, housing shortages, and urban livability. Through its research and conferences, the CTBUH continues to shed light on these developments and foster a global dialogue on the future of urban habitats.

In the case of Tirana city, the emergence of Downtown One, Tirana InterContinental Hotel, Eyes of Tirana and 4-Ever Green Tower marks a transformative moment in Tirana's urban development, symbolizing the city's shift toward vertical expansion and international urban aesthetics. While these towers introduce modern design and economic investment, their impact extends beyond form, reshaping cultural identity, social interaction and educational infrastructure within their zones of influence.

This study has evidenced that a multi-scalar, sector-based methodology, using spatial buffers and thematic influence mapping, can effectively capture the complexity of their urban role, as shown in figure 10.

	<b>Downtown One</b>	<b>Tirana InterContinental</b>	<b>Eyes of Tirana</b>	<b>4-ever Green (Alban tower)</b>
Height (m)	150m	133.5m	135m	107m
Floors (above/ underground)	(40 / -5)	(33)	(31)	(27 / -6)
Type	Mixed-use, Residential, Office, Conference, Commercial	Hotel	Mixed-use, Residential, Office	Mixed-use, Hotel, Residential, Office
Address	Bajram Curri Boulevard	Skanderbeg Square	Kavaja Street	Ibrahim Rugova Street
Coordinates	41.32412°N 19.82386°E	41.33009°N 19.81832°E	41.32851°N 19.81559°E	41.32610°N 19.81652°E
Construction Start / End	2019 – 2024	2021 – 2023	2017-2025	2008-2022
Structural system	Reinforced concrete	Reinforced concrete + Steel	Reinforced concrete	Reinforced concrete + Steel
Floor Area (m2)	78'800	36'500	63'500	15'600
Architect(s)	MVRDV	Peter Wilson + Atelier 4	Henning Larsen + X-Plan studio	Archea Associati
Structural engineer	Arup & LEAL	AEI Progetti	-	AEI Progetti
Investor	Kastrati Group	GECI Group	Ideal Construction	AI&Gi
Total Cost (Euro)	80 M	60 M	70M	32 M

Tab. 1. : Essential data of the evaluated towers

source/ author (2025)

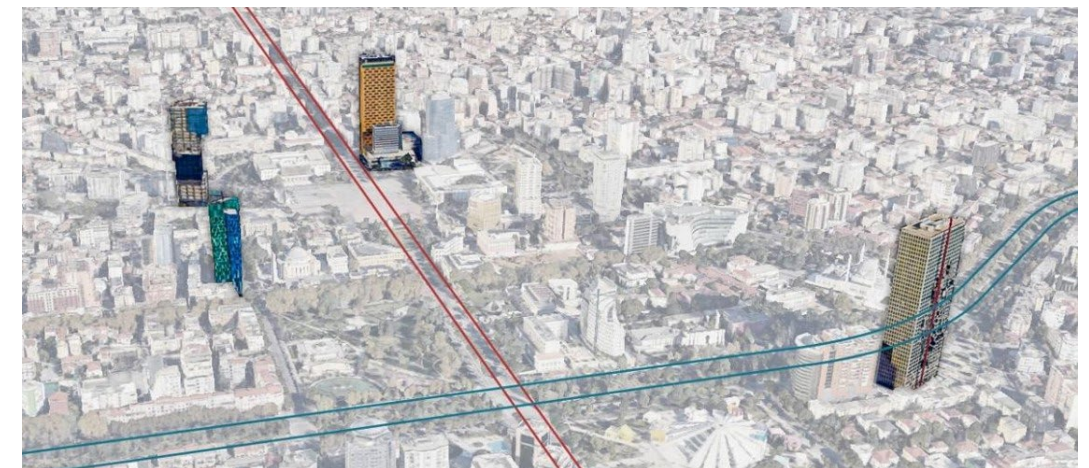


Fig 7/ : 3D view of the four assessed towers

source/ author, 2025.



Fig 8/ : Map of location and footprint of four towers (in red)

source/ author, 2025.

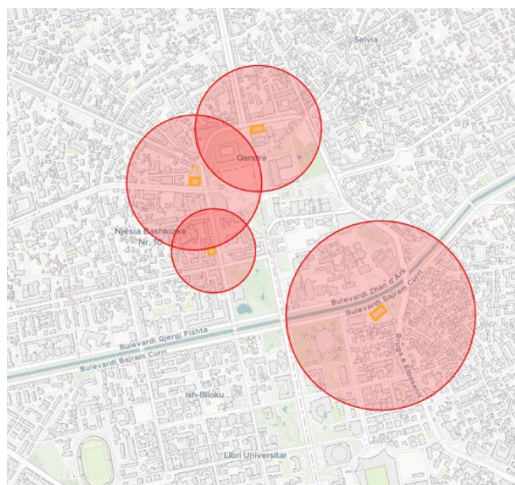
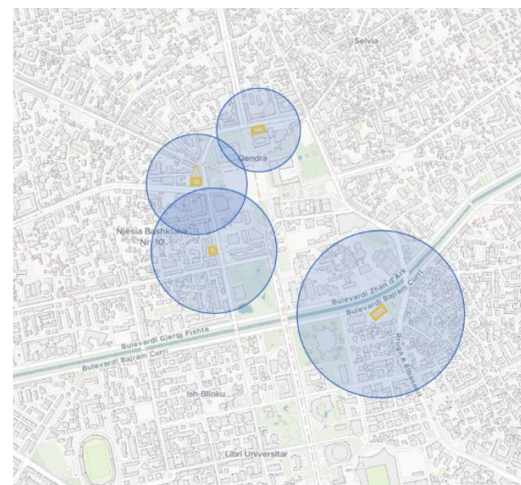


Fig 9/ : Map of Economic Impact (left) and Cultural Influence (right).



source/ author, 2025.

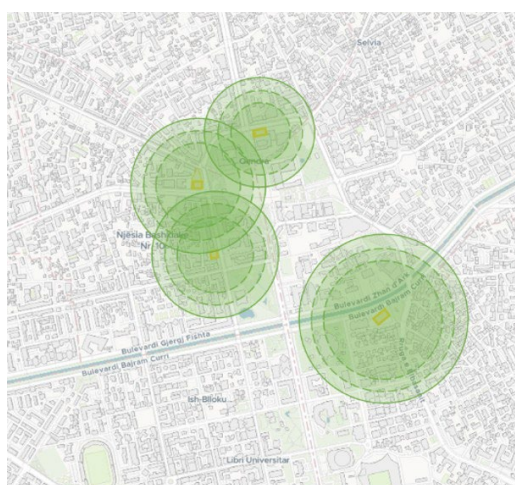
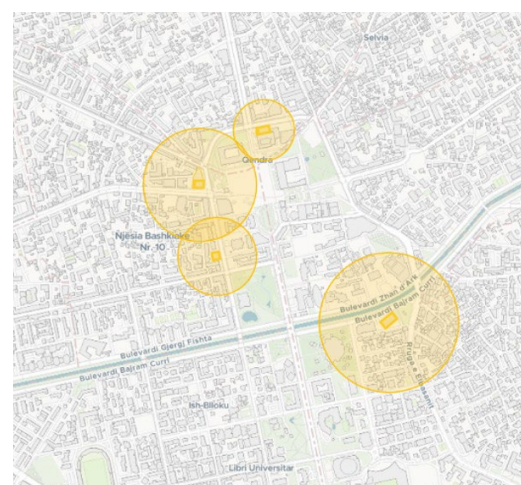


Fig 10/ : Map of Social Dynamics (left) and Educational Contribution (right).



source/ author, 2025.

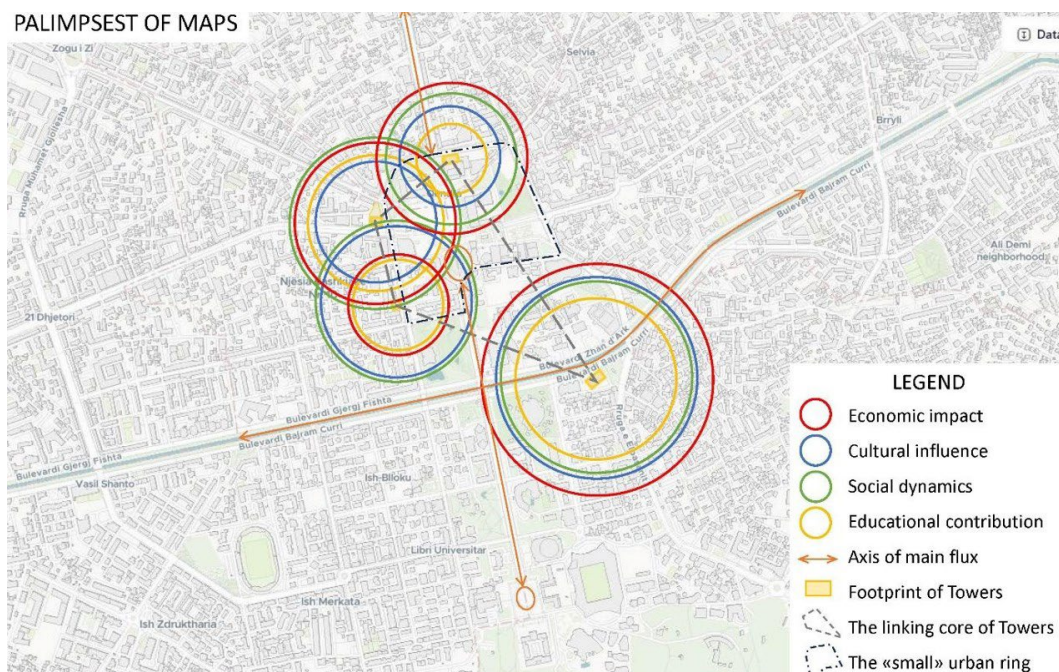


Fig 11/ : Palimpsest of maps showing the influence of the 4 selected towers in Tirana's urban fabric.

source/ author, 2025.

To ensure these high-rise developments contribute holistically to Tirana's growth, future planning should emphasize inclusive design, public accessibility and integration with local communities. Stronger interdisciplinary collaboration between architects, urban planners and sociologists is needed to assess long-term effects on neighborhood fabric and urban equity. Policymakers should implement tools like impact assessment frameworks and community engagement protocols to manage future vertical developments responsibly. Lastly, continued research – bot quantitative and qualitative – should monitor how these towers evolve over time, ensuring they remain assets, not isolated icons, within Tirana's urban narrative.

## Reference

- [1] Gehl, J. (2010). *Cities for People*. Island Press.
- [2] Beatley, T. (2011). *Biophilic Cities: Integrating Nature into Urban Design and Planning*. Island Press.
- [3] Stanilov, K. (2007). *The Post-Socialist City: Urban Form and Space Transformations in Central and Eastern Europe after Socialism*. Springer.
- [4] Tsenkova, S. (2012). *Urban Planning and Development in the Post-Socialist City*. University of Calgary Press.
- [5] Wood, A., & Collins, R. (2020). *Vertical Urbanism: The Role of tall Buildings in Sustaining Compact Cities*. *Journal of Urban Design*, 25(6), 789-806.
- [6] Salama, A. M. (2015). *Spatial design as a tool for community development in transitional societies: The case of post-war urbanism*. *International Journal of Architectural Research*, 9(2), 31-50.
- [7] Cobe, D., & Nielsen, L. (2015). *Sustainable Vertical Urbanism: Polycentric Patterns in European Cities*. Presented at the CTBUH 2015 International Conference, New York.
- [8] CTBUH (2023). *Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat in Europe: Typologies and Trends*. *Proceedings of the CTBUH Europe Conference*.
- [9] CTBUH (2024). *Europe's Growth Skyward: Vertical Urbanism in the 21st Century*. *CTBUH Annual Report*.
- [10] UN-Habitat (2020). *Urban Form and Sustainability in Emerging European Cities*. Nairobi: UN-Habitat Publications.
- [11] Municipality of Tirana (2022). *Urban Development and High-Rise Integration Survey*. Department of Urban Planning and Development.
- [12] CTBUH (2024). *Europe Rising: Tall Building Growth Since 2010*. <https://ctbuh.org/europe-rising>
- [13] [www.skyscrapercentre.com/country/albania](http://www.skyscrapercentre.com/country/albania)
- [14] [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_tallest\\_buildings\\_in\\_Albania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_tallest_buildings_in_Albania)
- [15] [www.aeioprogetti.com](http://www.aeioprogetti.com)
- [16] [www.dt1.al](http://www.dt1.al)
- [17] [www.ales.al](http://www.ales.al)
- [18] [www.idealconstruction.al](http://www.idealconstruction.al)
- [19] [www.attial.al](http://www.attial.al)