

# Urban Form as a Panacea: Formal Reconceptualization of the City to Solve the Traffic Problem in the Case of Tirana.

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## Introduction

This research is funded by the National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation (NASRI) in Albania within the framework of the National Research and Development Projects (PKKZH) for 2024-2025 and POLIS University (U\_POLIS). Our sincere gratitude to the generous support of National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation in Albania, which enabled us to carry out this study. The financial support received for our project "Lehtësimi i trafikut në Tiranë nëpërmjet rikonceptimit formal të qytetit " (Eng. "Traffic alleviation in Tirana through the formal reconfiguration of the city"), based on Decision No. 10, date 21.07.2023, "On the approval of the financing of winning projects of the National Research and Development Program for the Period 2023-2024", is responsible for the significant success of the study. As part of this research project, the editors of this Volume have organised an workshop with PhD students within the International Doctorate in Architecture and Urban Planning (IDAUP) on the first two weeks of December 2024 where they developed the same topic. The results of this workshop are showed in this volume.

Traffic in contemporary cities no longer represents a local problem of transport systems, but a complex manifestation of the mismatch between urban form and population density. In this context, Tirana, as the most important metropolitan center of Albania, faces a critical situation that requires not only infrastructural or managerial interventions of traffic, but a fundamental reconceptualization of the spatial structure of the city. The present volume of the Scientific Journal of the Observatory of Mediterranean Basin (SJOMB) focuses on this fundamental challenge and presents a collection of scientific research articles produced by an interdisciplinary group of researchers, which stem from the initial research initiative developed through a scientific workshop held in Tirana in the first 2 weeks of

December 2024. This workshop was attended by students of the Joint PhD program that POLIS University organizes with the University of Ferrara in Italy, where the topic "Eliminating traffic in Tirana through formal city reconceptualization" was addressed.

The traffic problem in Tirana cannot be underestimated. The speed of urbanization, the increase in economic capacity, and the introduction of new inhabitants in the city have brought great pressure on the existing infrastructure. The city's road infrastructure, designed and built for a much smaller population, is now unable to cope with the huge volume of vehicles, especially during critical hours. This phenomenon not only brings about a waste of time, but also economic losses, especially due to fuel consumption. The loss of time and economic losses affect the psychological fatigue of residents and further worsens the indicators of quality of life and environmental protection in the city.

However, international experiences in solving this problem demonstrate that simple infrastructural solutions such as expanding the road network, strengthening public transport, or installing traffic control systems are not sufficient. Indeed, historical and contemporary cases show that the most successful interventions have been those that have reconfigured or reconceptualized the urban form in its entirety. Urban form plays a critical role in the way traffic is distributed and developed in the city.

In this context, the research work represented in this volume addresses the fundamental question: How should the city of Tirana be formally configured to avoid or alleviate chronic traffic? And more broadly, what are the formal urban principles and strategies that, when applied in similar contexts, manage to eliminate or significantly reduce traffic congestion? These initial questions represented the starting points of an ambitious research initiative that

combines theory with concrete case study of Tirana. This research combines also the engagement of students and doctoral candidates in practical research, and dialogue between different disciplines in the IDAUP workshop of Tirana mentioned before. This volume, which presents the publication of the research findings of this workshop, is structured around the fundamental themes that emerged during the research work. The main themes include: the historical and morphological analysis of Tirana's urban form; the relationship between transport infrastructure and spatial configuration; the identification of future innovative formal strategies; and the examination of international models of other cities that have managed to solve similar problems through the reconceptualization of urban form. The volume brings together a series of research that challenges the traditional logic of road expansion referring to the Mogridge Conjecture, proposing instead a reconceptualization of urban form through decentralization and technology. In conclusion, these researches converge on a common vision: easing traffic in a developing metropolis like Tirana cannot be achieved with isolated interventions, but requires an organic combination of history, ecology and digital intelligence to guarantee the transition from a monocentric city vision to a multicentric city vision. The use of the word multicentric is intentional. The suggestion of the following materials goes directly towards this vision. The multicentric model presupposes that new city centers have an independence from the existing center. If these new centers were to depend on the existing center, then we would have a polycentric model. The difference between the multicentric and the polycentric model lies precisely in the dependence of the new poles on the existing center: if they depend on the center, then the model is polycentric, and if they are independent and function as independent cities with

their center that structures their morphology, then we are dealing with a multicentric model.

The academic and practical relevance of this volume extends beyond the borders of Tirana. While the city has a unique importance as the Albanian capital, the urban processes it is experiencing such as rapid urbanization, migratory pressures towards it, lack of adequate infrastructure, and conflicts on the public space, are common problems for many cities in the Balkan region and in other developing urban areas in the world. Therefore, the research methods and proposals developed here have the potential to be applicable and appropriate in other similar contexts. The volume includes contributions from more than 20 researchers and academics, including professors, doctors and doctoral candidates. This composition reflects the interdisciplinary nature of this research. The contributors come from diverse fields such as architecture, urban planning, engineering, urban geography, sociology and history. They offer in their writings new perspectives to address the complex issue of traffic in cities. It should be emphasized that this volume does not claim to be a definitive solution to the traffic problem in Tirana. On the contrary, it represents a first morphological step to address this multifaceted challenge. The works presented here provide a solid basis for further debates, for deeper research and for pragmatic experiments. They demonstrate the commitment of POLIS University as an academic and research institution to study real problems and to offer innovative and serious solutions.

Finally, we hope that this volume will serve not only as a scientific document for the academic community, but also as an information and dialectical instrument for those involved in urban policies, architects, engineers, and all those interested in building more livable and just cities. The main message conveyed throughout these pages is that urban form is

important for solving problems, as a Panacea, and especially that of traffic. Urban form affects not only traffic avoidance, but also the quality of life, the dignity of society and the creation of healthy and sustainable communities. The research presented

here is, in this way, a contribution to a larger project of reconceptualizing and rebuilding Balkan cities as good and suitable spaces for all those who live in them.

