

Preface

Since 2006, POLIS University has been established to respond to the evolving planning and development needs in Albania and the wider Balkan region, particularly in the context of rapid and often unstructured urbanization. This transformation has been especially evident in the capital region of Tirana, where dynamic growth has generated both opportunities and complex urban challenges. From its inception, POLIS University has been closely linked to its mother organization, the Co-PLAN Institute for Habitat Development, which has played a fundamental role in shaping the university's applied and practice-oriented approach. By integrating Co-PLAN's extensive experience in bottom-up planning methodologies, community engagement, and on-the-ground implementation, the university has ensured that pragmatic, realistic, and context-sensitive planning practices are not only preserved but continuously advanced. Furthermore, insights and lessons learned through international cooperation at the local level have been systematically incorporated into both teaching and research activities. In this regard, POLIS University has assumed a leading role in capacity building within the fields of urban planning, urban management, and city sciences in Albania. A significant milestone in this trajectory has been the establishment of dedicated research units, alongside the development of an international joint PhD Program, which together have strengthened the university's research profile and contributed to advancing a comprehensive city-research agenda. Over the past two years, this academic and research framework has been further reinforced through the organization of a series of studios, workshops, and collaborative activities. These initiatives have actively engaged MSc students, PhD researchers, and academic staff from POLIS University (Albania) and University of Ferrara (UNIFE, Italy), fostering a dynamic environment of interdisciplinary exchange and co-creation. One of the most significant achievements of this process has been the successful integration of both local and international students, researchers, and professors, working collectively on real-life urban challenges and problematics directly relevant to Tirana and the Albanian context. The continuity and sustainability of such collaborations already represent a key strength and a notable success story. At the same time, the outputs generated through these processes are not only academically rigorous but also innovative and thought-provoking. They contribute to shaping the foundations of what

can be considered the first emerging planning research school in Albania, reflecting a new generation of planning practice in a post-transition society characterized by rapid socio-spatial transformations. Importantly, the work developed through these academic and research activities is strongly oriented toward addressing pressing issues of high relevance for local and regional authorities. Particular attention has been given to critical challenges such as urban mobility, traffic congestion, and the development of efficient and sustainable public transportation systems in Tirana. These themes are further explored within ongoing staff research projects supported by NASRI/AKKSHI, which aim to provide evidence-based insights and practical recommendations for policy and planning. Some of these findings have been consolidated and presented in this publication, a specialized issue of the OMB Scientific Journal, published by the Mediterranean Observatory (OMB) under Polis-Press, in the framework of the joint PhD Program. This publication reflects a collective effort to bridge academic research, applied knowledge, and policy-oriented outcomes, contributing to a deeper understanding of urban challenges and potential solutions in Albania. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all professors, researchers, and students who have contributed to this work through their dedication, expertise, and collaborative spirit. Special thanks are extended to NASRI/AKKSHI for their valuable assistance and financial support, which have been instrumental in enabling this research and publication. We strongly believe that the findings and recommendations presented in this volume will serve as a useful and practical resource for policymakers, practitioners, and local authorities in Tirana and across Albania, supporting more informed, sustainable, and resilient urban development pathways.

Prof. Dr. Besnik Aliaj
Rector of Polis University

Tirana has experienced rapid urbanization in recent years in terms of the concentration of people and activities, resulting in new issues that need to be resolved, which require new well-founded policies. At the level of spatial planning (in this case, urban/town planning), reality proves complex as a series of different factors interact in a non-linear manner and constantly create conditions of uncertainty. One of the many symptoms of this type of development is the city's enormous traffic problem. The present double volume, the product of the exhaustive work of many first-year PhD students from POLIS and Ferrara, examines how changing the shape of the city can help address the traffic problem. In fact, it is sought how new urban interventions can create ruptures in the monocentric and largely organic structure of the city, to overcome the informal development and the absence of a classic urban plan, creating new poles in specific peripheral points of the city that are at the limit of the current urban fabric, and have an important historical significance. Certainly, it is a design that escapes the trivial solution of endless traffic regulations and successive and often dead-end technical projects. Obviously, the interventions are also based on good knowledge of certain parameters of the city that are currently possible with the integration of digital technologies, such as Information Modeling, deep learning techniques, Genetic Adversarial Networks (GAN), and energy mapping based on GIS. In addition to the tools, and in conjunction with the selection of new poles, the urban heritage is utilized, which is industrial, as in the case of Kombinat, and Uzina/Shkoza, or ecological and cultural, such as the Erzen River Valley and Lake Paskuqan combined with the boulevard, and even a commuting area for industrial and service activities, Kasha. Of course, the discussion rightly extends to key structural issues such as the competition created by the skyscraper clusters, but also to energy issues and especially to traffic issues, as the proposals for the redesign of areas also include crucial interventions in traffic networks, and proposals for soft tourism. Overall, the works presented, especially when seen in combination, constitute a proposal for a new trajectory of urban development, sensitive to local heritage, with a rediscovery of landscapes and functions, yet grounded in modern tools and new, fruitful ideas. They foreshadow a more human-centered and sustainable city.

*Pantoleon Skayannis
Professor Emeritus, UTH, GR*

The speed of urbanization, the increase in economic capacity, and the migrations from rural areas to cities have produced great pressure on the existing transport infrastructure. Today, traffic in urban areas, especially in big cities are not only a local problem of transport systems, but a complex manifestation of the mismatch between urban form and population density. In this context, protecting the city's heritage while having acceptable traffic throughout all parts of the city represents a serious challenges for both urban planners and especially for traffic planners. The present volume of the Scientific Journal of the Observatory of Mediterranean Basin (SJOMB) focuses on those challenges for the city Tirana, as a capital of Albania, and has a collection of scientific research articles produced by an interdisciplinary group of researchers. They provide a basis for answering on fundamental question how should the city of Tirana be formally configured to avoid or alleviate chronic traffic. At the same time this volume extends beyond the borders of Tirana and help to have the potential to be applicable in other similar contexts for many cities in the Balkan region and in other developing urban areas in the world.

*Nataša Gospić
Professor Emeritus, Adriatic University Bar
Faculty for Traffic, Communication and Logistic, Budva*