BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

1st International Conference on Built Environment

ICBE 2026

MAY 08th-09th, 2026
POLIS University, Tiranë

ISBN: 9789928347282

DOI: 10.37199/c4100031

CIP Katalogimi në botim BK Tiranë

Universiteti Polis

1st international conference on built environment (icbe) :

may 08th-09th, 2026 : book of proceedings / POLIS University,

Tirane. - Tiranë : Universiteti Polis, 2026. 1 burim në linjë (... f.)

ISBN 9789928347282

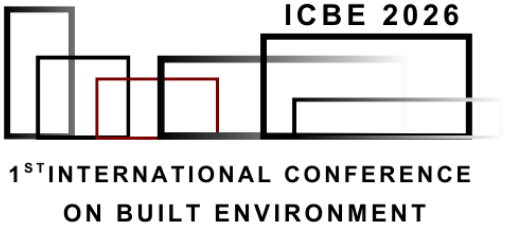
1.Arkitektura 2.Konferenca

72 (062)

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1st International Conference on Built Environment

ICBE 2026

Conference Theme and Rationale

The 1st International Conference on Built Environment (ICBE 2026) was conceived as an international and interdisciplinary forum for advancing knowledge, critical discussion, and innovation across architecture, urban planning, engineering, construction, materials, design, and the wider built environment. Organized by POLIS University in collaboration with the National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation in Albania (AKKSHI), the Academy of Sciences of Albania and the University of Ferrara in Italy, the conference brought together academics, researchers, practitioners, students, and industry representatives to exchange research findings, professional experience, and emerging perspectives on the transformation of contemporary cities and territories.

The conference theme reflected the increasingly complex challenges shaping the built environment, with particular attention to sustainability, resilience, technological innovation, heritage preservation, and socially responsive design. Contributions addressed sustainable architecture and green building, innovative construction technologies and materials, climate-responsive and energy-efficient design, disaster risk reduction, circular approaches to construction, and the integration of renewable energy. Equal emphasis was placed on digital transformation through Building Information Modeling, Geographic Information Systems, artificial intelligence, data analytics, automated solutions, digital fabrication, and advanced manufacturing.

ICBE 2026 also recognized that the future of the built environment cannot be approached through technological innovation alone. Urban transformation, cultural heritage, adaptive reuse, inclusive design, ecological thinking, art, and interdisciplinary research were therefore integral to the conference rationale. The scientific sessions examined topics ranging from seismic resilience, geotechnical engineering, and structural safety to urban fragmentation, public space, heritage conservation, adaptive environments, and new relationships between human and non-human systems.

Through keynote lectures, scientific presentations, case studies, and interdisciplinary debate, the conference encouraged connections between research and practice while promoting approaches capable of responding to environmental, social, cultural, and technological change. The breadth of contributions demonstrated the value of bringing engineering, architecture, urbanism, design, heritage, and emerging technologies into a shared academic framework for more resilient, sustainable, adaptive, and human-centered environments.

Held on 8-9 May 2026 at POLIS University in Tirana, with in-person and online participation, ICBE 2026 welcomed guest speakers and participants from Albanian and international universities, research institutions, professional organizations, and industry. Its sessions established a platform for presenting current research, exchanging expertise, strengthening meaningful collaboration, and identifying future directions for the built environment.

The event

The **1st International Conference on Built Environment (ICBE 2026)** is an interdisciplinary academic and professional forum dedicated to exploring contemporary challenges, emerging research, and innovative approaches shaping the future of the built environment. Bringing together researchers, academics, architects, engineers, urban planners, designers, practitioners, and industry professionals, the conference promotes the exchange of knowledge and encourages collaboration across traditionally interconnected disciplines. Its thematic scope encompasses sustainable and resilient construction, technological innovation, advanced building materials, urban transformation, cultural heritage, and interdisciplinary design approaches. Particular attention is given to the growing role of digital technologies, data-driven methodologies, intelligent design processes, and advanced analytical tools in supporting more informed and responsive approaches to architecture, engineering, and urban development. At the same time, ICBE 2026 recognizes the importance of environmental responsibility, cultural identity, social needs, and human-centered design in shaping contemporary cities and territories. Through keynote lectures, scientific sessions, case studies, and interdisciplinary exchange, the conference provides a platform for presenting current research, discussing professional experiences, and developing new perspectives capable of contributing to **safer, more sustainable, adaptive, inclusive, and resilient built environments**.

Objectives

- Promote interdisciplinary collaboration among researchers, academics, practitioners, and professionals in architecture, engineering, urban planning, construction, design, heritage, and related fields of the built environment.
- Advance the use of digital technologies and innovative methodologies, including BIM, GIS, artificial intelligence, data analytics, digital fabrication, and parametric approaches, in research and professional practice.
- Encourage sustainable, resilient, and climate-responsive approaches to architecture, construction, and urban development through innovative materials, energy-efficient strategies, and environmentally responsible design.
- Address contemporary challenges affecting cities, buildings, and infrastructure through scientific research, applied case studies, evidence-based approaches, and innovative design solutions.
- Promote the conservation, transformation, and adaptive reuse of cultural heritage, balancing cultural identity, contemporary needs, structural safety, and responsible urban development.
- Support human-centered and socially responsive urban transformation, considering public space, mobility, ecological systems, community needs, and the wider social and economic impacts of the built environment.
- Provide a platform for knowledge exchange and emerging research, enabling scholars, young researchers, professionals, and students to present innovative ideas, strengthen international collaboration, and contribute to future directions in the built environment.

Main Conference Themes

- Sustainable architecture and green building practices.
- Innovations in construction technologies and materials.
- Heritage preservation and adaptive reuse in the built environment.
- Digital tools and smart technologies in architecture and construction (e.g., BIM, GIS).
- Climate-responsive and energy-efficient design.
- Disaster risk reduction and resilience in the built environment.
- Circular economy approaches in construction and material usage.
- Integration of AI and data analytics in building design.
- Acoustic and thermal performance in building design.
- Renewable energy integration in building systems.
- Advanced manufacturing techniques in construction, such as 3D printing.
- Innovations in construction technologies and materials.
- Heritage preservation and adaptive reuse in the built environment.
- Disaster risk reduction and resilience in the built environment.
- Digital tools and smart technologies in architecture and construction.
- Advanced manufacturing techniques in construction.
- Geotechnical Engineering for Sustainable Development.
- Cartography and Geographic Information System.
- Computer Automated Solutions for Built Environment.
- Reliability in Civil Engineering.
- Urban planning strategies for resilient cities.
- Climate-responsive and energy-efficient design.
- Regulatory frameworks and policies impacting construction and urban development.
- Design in the Era of Anthropocene (Rethinking the Relation between Human and Non-Human Species)
- Speculative Design (with Attention to “Discursive” and “Critical” Design)
- Design and Cross-Disciplinarity (with Emphasis on Processes rather than Design Outputs)
- Inclusive Design
- Art and Urban Regeneration (Focus on Participatory, Collaborative, and Research-Based Practice)
- Relational Art and Architecture
- Monuments and ‘Anti-Monuments’ (Particular Attention to the Process of Designing and Building the City)

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The conference is structured around six thematic sessions, each addressing a specific area of research and practice within the built environment.
Each session is coordinated by experts in the relevant disciplinary field and is open to professors, researchers, PhD candidates, and other scholars and professionals contributing to the conference themes.

SESSION I
Urban Planning and Societal Impact

Chair: Dr. Gent Avdija

This session examines the relationship between urban transformation, spatial development, and their social implications within contemporary cities. Contributions address rapid urbanization, urban fragmentation, the transformation and loss of public space, informal and spontaneous development, and the challenges associated with balancing growth and modernization with human-scale urban environments. Particular attention is given to the evolving conditions of Albanian cities and to planning approaches capable of supporting more inclusive, sustainable, socially responsive, and livable urban environments.

SESSION II
Sustainable Materials, Resilient Construction & Smart Design

Chair: Dr. Endri Duro

This session explores innovative approaches to sustainable construction, resilient structural systems, and environmentally responsive design. Particular attention is given to sustainable materials, energy-efficient and climate-responsive strategies, prefabricated and lightweight construction technologies, and human-centered approaches to structural and architectural design. The session investigates how material innovation, technological development, and responsible design practices can contribute to safer, more efficient, adaptable, and environmentally sustainable built environments.

SESSION III
Technological Advancements and Seismic Design for Resilient Places

Chairs: Dr. Seyyed Behrad Emadi & Dr. Ornela Şen

This session examines the role of technological innovation and advanced engineering methodologies in developing safer, more resilient, and adaptable built environments. Contributions address seismic hazard and risk assessment, digital fabrication, parametric and computational approaches, transformations of building envelopes and prefabricated housing systems, and emerging concepts for future urban mobility. The session highlights how the integration of engineering knowledge, digital technologies, and resilience-oriented design can strengthen the capacity of buildings, infrastructure, and urban environments to respond to contemporary and future challenges.

SESSION IV

Cultural Heritage

Chairs: Dr. Nikolla Vesho & Dr. Marsela Demaj

This session addresses the preservation, interpretation, and transformation of cultural heritage within contemporary architectural and urban contexts. Contributions explore conservation strategies for historic buildings and sacred architecture, seismic assessment and strengthening of heritage structures, adaptive reuse, and the social implications of urban regeneration and heritage loss. Particular emphasis is placed on achieving a responsible balance between conservation ethics, cultural identity, structural safety, and the evolving functional requirements of historic buildings and urban environments.

SESSION V

Spaces of Connection: Art and Design for an Interspecies and Interdisciplinary Environment

Chair: Dr. Francesco Scasciamacchia

This session explores the intersections of art, architecture, design, technology, and the built environment through interdisciplinary and experimental perspectives. It investigates changing relationships between human and non-human systems, spatial perception, adaptive reuse, post-industrial landscapes, urban representation, digital heritage, and environmentally and socially engaged design practices. Through critical, speculative, participatory, and research-based approaches, the session examines how art and design can generate new forms of connection, reinterpret existing environments, and contribute to emerging cultural and spatial narratives within contemporary cities.

SESSION VI

Next-Generation Pioneers of the Built Environment

Chair: Dr. Flogerta Krosi

This session provides a dedicated platform for emerging researchers and students to present innovative, experimental, and forward-looking approaches to the built environment. Contributions span architecture, engineering, urban planning, environmental resilience, design, and related creative disciplines, reflecting the interdisciplinary character of a new generation of researchers and practitioners. Through projects addressing topics such as bioclimatic design, flood-risk management, structural technologies, architecture-inspired design, and critical interpretations of objects and social space, the session encourages critical inquiry, experimentation, and new perspectives on the future of the built environment.

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Table of Contents

SESSION I 14

Urban Planning and Societal Impact 14

The Fading Public Realm: 5

From Expansive Open Spaces to Morphological Compression in Durres' Rapid Urban Growth

Arjola SAVA 5

Spontaneous Architecture as Adaptive Metabolism in Post-Socialist Cities Renis Batalli 18

The ground floor as an urban interface: the human-building relationship and the Loss of Urban Contact Avrili MESHI 35

Urban Blueprint and Compatible Growth: 45

A Multi-Scalar Morphological Method for Sustainable Transformation in 45

Erseke, Albania **Mario DINE** 45

Examining the Internal Anatomy of Socialist-Era Hotels in Albania: 58

Spatial organisation, Geometry, Structure, Circulation, and Function**Malvina Istrefaj(KOLIÇI)** 58

Urban Construction Through Destruction Sotir DHAMO 73

SESSION II 87

Sustainable Materials, Resilient Construction & Smart Design 87

Human Centered Design in Civil Engineering Ilda RUSI, Albi ALLIAJ 88

The courtyard as a climate-responsive and resilient spatial strategy: the case of Novi Pazar Elma MAHMUTOVIĆ, Dragana KONSTANTINOVIĆ 103

Numerical assessment of the thermal performance of a heated and cooled floor containing upgraded phase change materials Oumayma BABAHARRA, Khadija CHOUKAIRY 121

Eco-Friendly Building Envelopes: 132

Thermal, Energy, Cost, and Time Performance of Prefabricated Lightweight MRC Panels in Residential Construction **Erjon ÇOBANI, Flogerta KROSI, Ornela ŞEN** 132

SESSION III 156

Technological Advancements and Seismic Design for Resilient Places 156

Identification and assessment of resident-driven façade interventions in prefabricated large panel buildings: 157

the case of Tirana Flogerta KROSI, Alma GJONAJ, Merita GURI, Ornela ŞEN, Endri DURO 157

Tirana_ toward a (non) resilient city of the future 173

Re-shaping mobility and bring back "La raison d'être of the city" **Ina MUSAI** 173

A Seismic Hazard Model of Albania 187

Case study: Kukes, Berat and Himarë **Anila XHAHYSA, Neki KUKA** 187

Phenomeno-Parametrism: 203

Translating Place Experience into Parametric **Markeljan LLESHI** 203

SESSION IV 217

Cultural Heritage 217

Preserving and Adapting Sacred Architecture: 218

A Case Study of the Jazak Monastery **Una RADIVOJEVIĆ**.....218

Monumentality Reconsidered: Heritage Preservation and Adaptive Reuse through the Theories of Robert Venturi and Aldo Rossi **Harika SHEHABI** 233

Seismic Performance Assessment of Historic Stone Masonry Buildings: 245

The Case of the Angonate Residence, Gjirokastër **Alma GJONAJ, Merita GURI, Endri DURO**... 245

Future Heritage by Design: 258

New Design Approaches to Heritage Reuse **Gregor ANDONI, Kristiana MEÇO** 258

SESSION V.....267

Spaces of Connection: Art and Design for an Interspecies and Interdisciplinary Environment 267

Heritage as Narrative:.....268

Building City Image Through Adaptive Reuse in Durrës **Vjola ZIU, Remijon PRONJA** 268

The Extraordinary Everyday Children's Spatial Agency as Anti Monumental Practice **Xhoi MUSLIAKA** 281

'Liminal Architectural Bodies' in Post-Industrial Kuçova:.....298

From an Ecological Perspective to an Aesthetic realm **Dorina XHERIMEJA, Aishe BITRI**.....298

IN Illyria, Episode I: Apollonia 311

A Pixel-Art Game Framework for Archaeological Interpretation and Cultural Heritage Learning **David KRYEMADHI, Nikolla VESHO, Skervi BAUSHI, Remijon PRONJA, Kujtim HALILI**.....311

In the Age of Material Transformation: Textile Design and Upcycling **Armela LAMAJ**.....326

AI as a Designer:.....336

The Future of Taste and Creativity in Automotive Design **Gregor ANDONI** 336

The Secondary Archive: 342

Collective Memory, Mental Images and AI-Assisted Representations in a Transforming Tirana **Dejvi DAUTI** 342

SESSION VI.....352

Next-Generation Pioneers of the Built Environment 352

Performance-Based Bioclimatic Design of a Kindergarten in Tirana: Integration of Passive Systems and Dynamic Simulation **Erald MEÇE, Afërdita MUHAMEDI, Verona HYSI, Klodjan XHEXHI**.....353

Integrated Flood Risk Management in Albania: 363

Human drivers, Basin dynamics and Policy gaps **Zejd BUSHATI, Esad MALAJ, Erjon ÇOBANI, Merita GURI** 363

Steel frame technology for residential buildings:.....383

A comparative thesis-antithesis study versus reinforced concrete systems **Elton AHMETAJ, Erjon ÇOBANI, Merita GURI** 383

DOUBLE SKIN:.....394

How does the "Double Skin" concept interact with our body in the field of fashion design? **Desara LLESHI**.....394

Chairs as instruments in the construction of social roles and human bodies Aurora BALLA 401

Autonomy as a Value:.....409

Design and Branding in the Post-Fordist Era **Irena ALIAJ, Erson RAMAJ**.....409

SESSION I

Urban Planning and Societal Impact

Urban transformation and growth: Rapid urbanization / Urban expansion / Contemporary city transformation / Growth and modernization.

Urban form and spatial quality: Urban fragmentation / Human-scale development / Public-space transformation / Spatial continuity and connectivity.

Society and the city: Social impact of urban development / Community needs / Inclusive urban environments / Quality of urban life.

Planning challenges in changing cities: Spontaneous architecture / Informal development / Sustainable urban planning / Transformation of Albanian cities.

Urban Construction Through Destruction

DOI: 10.37199/c4100037

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Abstract

The metropolis possesses a powerful attractive force, enabling a nostalgic reflection on what it has become in relation to what it once was (Calvino, 2007). In this perspective, this paper addresses a fundamental issue of the built environment: the relationship between construction and destruction. Urban transformation does not occur solely through processes of building, but equally through acts of demolition. Cities never cease adapting to new forms of life; they grow or shrink responding to social, political, and economic forces.

This article argues that architects and urban planners tend to emphasize how cities are constructed, while devoting considerably less attention to what is erased in the process of urban development. The question lies in how and to what extent. The experience of urban evolution reveals extreme positions regarding the continuity or elimination of physical and social contexts, ranging from large-scale nineteenth-century transformations and modernist anti-city approaches to postmodern contextualism.

The paper examines the concept of "urbicide", used by various authors, as a framework for understanding violence against architecture and the urban fabric. It argues that the rhetoric of total erasure or absolute preservation is overly simplistic and risks isolating urban contexts from the broader city and its social life. Instead, the paper advocates a view of the city as a system in evolution, shaped by transformative processes grounded in an ontology of becoming. Tirana is analyzed as a representative case of development driven by demolition. The ongoing erasure of social and architectural contexts linked to the city's origins—such as the Old Bazaar, religious monuments, and other key architectural landmarks—demonstrates various active and passive forms of urbicide. While politically framed as a strategy of renewal or starting anew, this paper emphasizes the need to further explore more nuanced and complex approaches beyond such extremes.

Keywords: *transformation, erasure, context, urbicide, Tirana*

1. INTRODUCTION

Cities constitute inherently dynamic systems, continuously shaped by processes of adaptation and transformation, and never reaching a definitive form. The transformation of urban environments occurs through both construction and destruction, depending on complex socio-political and techno-economic conditions specific to particular historical and geographical contexts. This article examines a spectrum of theoretical and practical perspectives associated with these processes, with particular emphasis on the relationship between architecture, place, and context. Such perspectives range from violent interventions in the urban fabric to strategies of contextual reconstitution through abstraction and reinterpretation, rendering cities ideological texts as well.

As Berman (1996) observes, the annihilation of cities, presented in the article through the concept of *urbicide*, represents a persistent historical phenomenon — a cultural and political constant rather than a modern anomaly. References to urbicide can be identified in early historical and religious narratives, including the Old Testament, while events such as the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and Carthage illustrate the enduring interrelation between urban space, power, and conflict.

1.1 **Methodology**

In this regard, the article presents an inquiry into questions of transformability and the preservation of context, drawing on postmodern authors and on scholars addressing urbicide and related concepts from an international perspective, and illustrating them in the Albanian context through concrete examples. Methodologically, it relies on synchronic comparisons from the history of architecture, examining both emblematic cases of demolition and the preservation of context. It argues that neither of these extremes adequately captures the complexity of contemporary realities. Instead, it suggests that experiments and practices grounded in the philosophical concept of an ontology of becoming represent a relevant yet insufficiently explored direction.

Accordingly, the methodology distinguishes two complementary levels of analysis: (1) a historical description of transformative processes across different temporal sequences, capturing their nuances and framing urbicide as a broad concept related to violence in and through the city and architecture; and (2) a theoretical interpretation informed by the ontology of becoming, applied to the case of Tirana to examine the dynamics of transformation. This sequence keeps theoretical interpretation grounded in empirical observation, avoiding

premature generalization.

2. DIFFERENT APPROACHES

2.1 Percements, Urban Dissolution, and Continuity

One of the most emblematic examples of large-scale urban demolition, commonly described by the term *"percements,"* can be traced to the *"plan of the artists,"* which proposed the creation of straight thoroughfares in Paris in 1793 (Frampton, 1993). The painter Jacques-Louis David led a commission of revolutionary artists who formulated the boulevard strategy later employed in the reconstruction of Paris during the reign of Napoleon III. This strategy exerted a significant influence beyond Paris, shaping comparable urban transformations in other French and Central European cities throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1853, Haussmann, acting as Prefect of the Seine, implemented these operations in response to severe urban deficiencies, including contaminated drinking water, inadequate sewerage systems, deteriorated housing conditions and insufficient public spaces. The *"percements,"* which cut across the urban fabric to connect principal nodes and districts, constituted a radical response to this complex set of challenges. These interventions fundamentally reconfigured Parisian urban structure, transforming the city from an organization centred on traditional neighbourhoods into a spatially integrated metropolis, driven by the "fever of capitalism" (Choay in Frampton, 1993).

With regard to transformations, it is worth mentioning the position of the first phase of the modern architectural movement, most typically represented by Le Corbusier. His urban proposals sought to respond to the *new spirit of the industrial age*, characterized by a radical reconfiguration of the relationships between people, dwellings, and the city, and by the ambition to "re-found" architecture on the basis of function. As Rowe and Koetter (1978) observe, the architects of this period appeared to believe they had discovered universal laws governing nature. Their determinism rested on a combination of firm faith in scientific truth and a humanistic myth. From this emerged an objective, absolute, mechanical, abstract, and functional tendency (Saggio, 2010), which imbued the modern architect with a quasi-"messianic" passion (Rowe & Koetter, 1978) to act in the service of a more just society. This orientation fostered a paradigm of urban intervention symbolized by the "Phoenix", wherein the "new world" rises upon the ruins of the old. A paradigmatic example is Le Corbusier's *Plan Voisin* for Paris (1925), where, extending beyond Haussmannian *percements*, the city is conceived as subject to total dissolution. One recalls, moreover, the early modernist motto, *il faut tuer la rue corridor*, reflecting the underlying impulse to negate the historical city that lay at the core of these manifest interventions (Rowe & Koetter, 1978).

In contrast to these ideas stands the effort to sustain social and urban continuity. The stark divergence between the two models becomes evident when comparing the *Plan Voisin* with the nearly contemporaneous Royal Chancellery project in Stockholm (1922) by Asplund. The former exemplifies a general, universal mode of intervention, while the latter reflects a specific, context-responsive approach. Rowe and Koetter (1978) interpret Asplund's case as the deployment of multiple design strategies, where the response to place integrates empirical sensitivity with an idealist stance articulated through normative conditions. Simultaneously, the project "responds", "adjusts," "translates," and "emphasizes," operating both as a passive recipient of context and as an active agent of reinforcement.

2.2 Years of Reflection

Not without reason, Rowe and Koetter, authors of Collage City, examined such cases in the late 1970s, when approaches advocating the city's reinvention from scratch were being critically reassessed. The postwar decades coincided with one of Europe's most extensive waves of urbanization, stimulating the construction of large-scale, mass housing districts often lacking identity, where the principles of the modern movement progressively deteriorated. The disheartening landscapes produced by this model prompted further reflection in the 1980s, as the crisis of the industrial paradigm of urban development became increasingly apparent. The city could not expand indefinitely by consuming new territories while erasing existing urban structures (Saggio, 2015). Consequently, two parallel trajectories emerged: new interpretative frameworks for architecture's relationship with the historical city, and growing criticism of the large housing complexes built in earlier decades.

This period of reflection on context—ranging from classical revival to more abstract interpretations—was accompanied by an unprecedented emphasis on integrating the specific site into the architectural project. Priority shifted toward uncovering the particular geometries from which architecture might emerge, as opposed to adopting homogenizing and universal solutions. Within this tendency, context became the central concept, understood as the specific morphology of the articulation of existing buildings in the project area; as the socio-historical-cultural framework of the site; and as the urban fabric formed through the interweaving of these dimensions, conceived as a generative network from which new architecture arises (Saggio, 2015). This reflection renewed attention to the historical city, promoting reparative interventions that relate the new to the existing rather than erase it—an approach far from the symbolism of the phoenix.

One of the most influential events through which this concern was articulated was *Roma*

Interrotta (1978), where twelve architects were invited to reinterpret Nolli's map of Rome (Saggio, 2015). Within this framework, Rowe gave concrete form to the principles of the *Collage City*, conceiving the city as a coexistence of fragments whose reciprocal relationships generate meaning and enable a unifying yet complementary recomposition. Processes such as reordering, mimetic continuity, and evocation emerged as key operative concepts within the collage methodology. Portoghesi, supported by Norberg-Schulz, introduced an approach that was exceptional for its time in the reading of history. He sought to explain aspects of Rome's urban morphology through a phenomenological interpretation of nature, linking urban form to processes of geological formation and to the latent structures of the tuffaceous hill landscapes of northern Lazio. This perspective not only clarified the formation of the Baroque urban fabric but also provided a conceptual basis for generating new urban textures. In contrast to functionalist doctrines, Portoghesi's position articulated a distinct methodological orientation, paralleling Rossi's typological investigations grounded in the rules of the nineteenth-century city. For Anselmi, Rome's stratification, superimposition, and reuse of inherited traces evolved from a historical condition into a mode of architectural thinking and a contemporary design paradigm (Saggio, 2015).

Key concepts of this period—most notably "aesthetic autonomy" (independence from function), "context," and "city"— generated two distinct approaches. On one side emerged the classical and neo-decorative interpretations associated with Johnson, Venturi, Graves, Stern, and Krier. Frequently regarded as lacking substantive innovation, this orientation instrumentalized "context" to produce nostalgic environments, reviving forms, styles, and modes of life derived from disparate historical and social conditions (Saggio, 2015).

Conversely, the concepts of history and memory, widely disseminated within international postmodern discourse, did not remain confined to nostalgia but became operative material for the architectural project (Saggio, 2015). During the 1980s, more complex interpretative frameworks appeared, extending beyond earlier experiments such as *Roma Interrotta*. Eisenman, for example, advanced a non-mimetic understanding of "place," rejecting classicism, symmetry, stylistic revivals, and the return to figurative language. His approach reengaged the history of sites through lost, latent, or even imagined geometries, encapsulated in the notion of "archaeological excavation" or tracing. This logic of layered networks led to the concept of the palimpsest, wherein superimposed mappings—analogous to overwritten parchment—revealed overlapping spatial orders and concealed geometries. From this abstract interaction with site conditions emerged both an interpretation of place and a reordering matrix from which the project could originate (Saggio 2015).

Alternative modes of contextual interpretation also developed. Gehry explored what may be termed a "*cheapscape*" context, foregrounding the landscapes of neglected peripheries in contrast to refined urban settings. Hadid, articulated a "*landscape-context*" approach, conceiving architecture as an extension of dynamic topographical and spatial systems. Across subsequent decades, these trajectories reaffirmed a central premise: architecture cannot be conceived independently of its relationship to site and context (Saggio 2015).

These years of reflection were also marked by the emergence of a radical stance toward the large housing estates hastily constructed after the Second World War according to the principles of the Modern Movement. The symbolic demolition of the Pruitt–Igoe complex in St. Louis, United States—completed in 1955 and entirely destroyed by 1976—was interpreted by Jencks as symbolically signaling the end of the modernist architectural era. In the Bijlmermeer housing complex in Amsterdam, comprising 13,000 apartments in "honeycomb"-type units built between 1963 and 1975, the project was initially promoted as the city of the future. However, due to mounting social and urban problems, approximately half of the apartments were demolished between 1990 and 2010, with renovation processes continuing until 2017. In both cases, demolitions were justified by the excessive costs of maintenance and by social segregation, which ultimately transformed these complexes into the opposite of the ideals for which they had been conceived. Large-scale, standardized building typologies were replaced by smaller and more varied housing forms intended to foster social diversity. In the latter case, several buildings were preserved as part of the historical narrative of Bijlmermeer.

In France, similar demolition policies were applied to the *grands ensembles* constructed between the 1950s and 1970s to address the housing shortage but which entered into social crisis during the 1980s. At *Le Haut-du-Lièvre* in Nancy, buildings were partially or fully demolished from the early 2000s within urban renewal programs. *La Muraille de Chine* in Saint-Étienne, built in 1965, rehabilitated in 1985, and completely demolished in 2000, constitutes another emblematic case. The northern districts of Marseille, including the demolition of *Tour B des Cyprès* in 2016 and interventions in *La Castellane*, offer further examples. This approach itself generated a model of intervention for situations considered urban anomalies.

2.3 Urbicide

The forms and purposes through which cities are dismantled or destroyed reveal the ways in which societies function. Decisions concerning the destruction of specific objects or urban sectors are frequently driven by political actions justified in the name of the public interest.

When such "cleansing" assumes the character of violence against organized space and urban memory, it corresponds to what Moorcock first termed *urbicide* (*urbs+occido*) in the novella *The Dead God's Homecoming* (1963), a science fiction allegory.

For Moorcock, urbicide signifies not merely the physical destruction of the city but the negation of urban life as a living system: the eradication of the city's symbolic and social role—historically grounded in collective purpose—and its reduction to an empty shell devoid of memory and meaning. His conception of urbicide, perpetrated not by external enemies but by absolute power and bureaucratic authority that erode public representation and suppress urban complexity, resonates strongly with subsequent architectural and urban theory and remains highly relevant today.

Huxtable (1970) and Berman (1987) employed this term to critique the urban restructurings of the 1960s in American cities, interventions that, by dismantling their internal structures, disrupted cultural continuity through planning policies and redevelopment schemes. Huxtable (1970) elaborated this argument in her collection of essays, where she condemned the destructive effects of technocratic planning and market-driven speculative redevelopment, as well as highway construction and zoning practices that displaced communities and eroded the historic fabric and architectural heritage understood as a complex organism. For Huxtable, such processes constituted not merely an aesthetic violation but, above all, an ethical crime. Berman (1987), in turn, employed the notion of urbicide as a critical reflection on modernist urbanism and violent renewal policies in which efficiency and abstraction prevailed over lived communal experience. In his view, the devastations in the Bronx amounted to the annihilation of vibrant urban life in the name of progress and rational planning.

Coward develops the concept of urbicide within a political–theoretical framework (2009). He argues that urbicide targets the conditions of urban plurality through the destruction of architecture and urban infrastructure, insofar as buildings materially instantiate coexistence and collective life (2009). Such destruction operates as an organized political strategy and may intersect with genocide (2009), as evidenced in cases including Mostar and Sarajevo during the Bosnian war, as well as in Chechnya and Israel/Palestine (2009), underscoring the continuing relevance of the issue. Similarly, Bogdanović (1993) reflects on the destruction of multicultural urban and architectural identities during the Yugoslav wars, interpreting it as an assault on memory, meaning, and cultural continuity.

Millard (2004) likewise documents attacks on cultural monuments and infrastructure from Lagos, where in 1956 state-led housing demolitions tied to land policies became a primary instrument of control, and from Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza Strip, where since the

1990s–2000s urbicide has unfolded—and continues to unfold—through cycles of construction and destruction.

Graham (2010) further elaborates the concept of urbicide within the framework of the militarization of urban space, siege warfare, and infrastructural conflict, emphasizing the strategic fragmentation and dismantling of cities. Rendering cities ungovernable except through coercive force becomes, in this account, a central instrument of political control. He references both earlier forms of urban annihilation and more recent cases, including Sarajevo, Gaza, Fallujah, and Baghdad. Weizman (2007), in the context of Israeli military operations, conceptualizes urbicide as a form of spatial governance enacted through selective destruction and spatial reconfiguration of roads, walls, and housing. His notion of the "politics of verticality" illustrates how a spatial regime is exercised above ground, on the surface, and below it. Finally, Rotbard (2015), referring to Palestine, argues that the physical and historiographic erasure of Arab cities enables the construction of a new political and spatial order, transforming urbicide into an instrument of nation-building.

Similarly traumatic operations involving the erasure of entire urban districts occurred in cities of the former communist bloc. One of the most emblematic cases was that of Romania under Ceaușescu. The construction of the Civic Centre and the House of the People required the demolition of approximately 380 hectares of historic urban fabric, while the broader zone affected by the intervention reached around 500 hectares within a short period (Danta, 1991; Iosa, 2013). The scale of destruction led to the term *Ceaushima* (*Ceaușescu+Hiroshima*), a sarcastic neologism linking the state-directed urban demolitions of the 1977–1989 "systematization" campaigns to devastation comparable to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. The term underscores the traumatic suddenness, totality, violence, irreversibility, and top-down imposition, highlighting how state power can annihilate a city through planning and ideology rather than bombs.

The popularization of the term is closely associated with the historian Giurescu (1989), who documented the demolition of historic neighborhoods, churches, and urban fabric in 29 cities—destroyed at a rate of 85–90 percent—and the severe mutilation of 37 additional cities, including Bucharest. Verdery (1996) situates this phenomenon within the logic of ideological spatial domination, arguing that urban planning was transformed into an instrument of political control aimed at socio-spatial reconfiguration. In this reading, the city became an ideological text designed to produce conformity and obedience. Ioan (1999) interprets the systematization of Bucharest as a sacrificial act in which the historic city was offered up to materialize an abstract and monumental authority, thereby linking architectural form, political ideology, and collective

trauma. Finally, Harhoiu (1997) underscores the long-term cultural and mnemonic consequences of demolition, arguing that cities, once structurally rendered amnesiac, persist only in fragments, photographs, and oral memory. This framework provides a lens through which to understand Tirana and other Albanian cities during the dictatorship and beyond.

3. TIRANA AND VIOLENCE AGAINST ARCHITECTURE

Present-day Tirana reveals, among other dimensions, its ongoing confrontations with violence in architecture and urban planning. During the communist period, urbicide functioned as a politico-ideological strategy targeting the social, symbolic, and spatial fabric of places deemed incompatible with the consolidation of total power. As noted by Vehbiu (2003), the bulldozing of old neighborhoods destroyed a communicative system, marking the onset of an offensive against the social stratum that had characterized Tirana since its foundation. As Goitia (1996) observes, the structure of the city is grounded in human nature, of which it is an expression; yet, once formed through lived processes, this structure in turn "works" upon and shapes its inhabitants.

The first signals of destruction in Tirana were the demolition of the old mosque that marked the city's foundation in 1614 (Frashëri, 2004), immediately after the Second World War, and the razing of the Old Bazaar at the end of the 1950s. The removal of structures that embodied the city's origins and the very rationale of its existence announced a campaign that would soon unfold nationwide. The ideological premise—that their architecture symbolized ties to a repudiated past and, in its name, had to be eradicated—drew legitimacy from the verses of the *Communist Internationale*: "We'll sweep away the old world from its foundations, We'll build a new world in its place; We who have been naught shall be all." (Pottier, 1871). Meanwhile, regulatory plans, as legal instruments, systematically designated areas to be transformed through demolition, to the extent that the expression "the plan struck/fell upon us" entered everyday language. These were typically neighborhoods composed of one- to two-story traditional dwellings, erased without any prior assessment of their historical and cultural values, and replaced by anonymous four- to five-story collective housing blocks.

"Barricades Street," an integral part of the Old Bazaar, was regarded as one of Tirana's earliest commercial arteries. It survived until the early 1980s, when it was demolished to make way for the "Barricades Street Towers." The underlying objective was the erasure of the former merchants' quarters extending behind the Old Bazaar—an organic morphological system in which labyrinthine streets sustained a lifestyle rooted in a commercial-capitalist past. Although aligned along the roadway, the new apartment blocks remained alien to the residual urban

backstage, generating an amoeboid vacuum that remains unresolved to this day. It was no longer "Barricades Street."

During the same period, another emblematic demolition occurred in Tirana's central square. Instead of completing the square designed in 1931 by Florestano Di Fausto with the buildings that had remained unrealized, one of the structures considered to disrupt its symmetry—the "Old Municipality of Tirana"—was demolished. Nowadays, the dynamiting of the Municipality, the "*Kafe Kursal*," and the cutting down of the old chestnut trees behind them, in order to construct the National Historical Museum, is widely regretted. The erasure of these urban memories enlarged the central void, depriving it of elements that had identified it as a concrete place (Schulz, 1992). Elevated on a pedestal, the Museum behaved as a "space occupier," yet failed to act as a space definer (Rowe and Koetter, 1978).

During the three decades following the 1990s, the aggression of destruction through construction persisted. Not coincidentally, anarchy in construction flourished within anonymous spaces, expressing a new moral imperative: rapid profit to recover lost years. The euphoria of freedom, experienced as a total absence of control, eroded the city internally and externally, consolidating its dominance. Unlike the immediate erasure of neighborhoods through regulatory zoning, this phase attacked the city through a construction-site urbicide, gradually clearing areas equivalent to one or several building plots. Infiltrating the city's cellular structure through buildings up to twelve stories high, choreographed within historic fabrics, it spread widely and insidiously, atrophying these fabrics to the point of complete disintegration. Typical examples include areas behind the *Pazari i Ri* and between *Myslym Shyri* and *Kavaja* streets. These small interventions were justified by normative rules that treated space solely in geometric terms, without analyzing the real quality of light, ventilation, and greenery, under the alibi of absent plans. The actual damage proved even greater, as Urbicide re-entered the legal instrument, increasing building intensity through the urban plan and eroding sports areas and existing parks.

Another case occurs when neglect and deliberate non-intervention lead to the degradation of a building—whether a historic villa or a public structure—leaving demolition as the only path. One need only recall Tirana's cinemas: *Partizani*'s once-mondane foyer, *Republika*'s open-air cinema, and *17 Nëntori*'s ticket colonnade, now a simulacrum inside the shopping center that replaced it. No effort was made to integrate them into new urban life. On the contrary, their neglect was intended to facilitate their demolition.

In recent years, spectacular and unexpected demolitions have not been absent. One need only recall the failed attempts to demolish the *Pyramid of Tirana*, as well as the demolition of the

Stadium and the National Theatre, events accompanied by intense debate and opposition. In fact, they signaled the beginning of a new era for Tirana: a reorganization marked by high-rise projects promoted by internationally renowned studios and abruptly inserted into the urban fabric. This intensification is taking place in the total absence of public infrastructure. If what is presented as the new vision for Tirana proves to be the actual one, the question arises: for whom is this city being built? Whose reality counts? As Verdery (1996) suggests in a different context, might the use of towers function as an instrument of political control in socio-spatial reconfiguration? Are we deepening the "amnesiac trauma" described by Harhoiu (1997), transforming Tirana into a collection of "former" sites—former railway station, former theatre, former exhibition hall? To this series of demolitions, one may also add those accompanied by evictions for the construction of infrastructure, without providing the affected residents with access to social housing.

4. CONCLUSIONS: TOWARD AN ONTOLOGY OF BECOMING THROUGH TRANSFORMATIVE PROCESSES

The article examines the city as a system in continuous transformation, focusing on the relationship between architecture and context and the range of positions on this issue. It begins by addressing violence against the city, analyzing *urbicide* and *ceausim*a as strategies that extend beyond physical destruction to erase socio-cultural values, purpose, and meaning, producing long-term trauma. It also considers opposing approaches that interpret or reconstruct context—through evocation or more abstract strategies—opening possibilities for new relationships between architecture and context. Within this framework, the article proposes that cities can be understood as ideological texts, both in contexts of deliberate destruction and in practices of contextual preservation.

Williams (2000), interpreting the ontology of Deleuze, presents the concept of *becoming* as a fundamental ontological category of the nature of reality. In this reading, *being* is understood not as stability or fixed identity, but as a continuous process. Becoming is not merely the transformation of existing forms, but the essence of reality itself, always in flux. Within this framework, Williams emphasizes that creativity—including architectural creativity—should be understood as modulation and intervention within already active processes of transformation. The architect, in this sense, does not create ex nihilo, but operates upon a reality that is constantly in flux, combining the enduring passive component of variability with an active component. This perspective offers an alternative to the notion that forms maintain fixed relations, since the city is not simply an object to be designed, but a system in evolution.

These ideas of Deleuze differ not only from the modernist notion of *tabula rasa*, where the figure–ground contrast—according to functionalist and ahistorical principles—stood in a dichotomous relation to the city, but also from the figure–ground contextualism of postmodernists, which emphasizes uniform historical continuity. Postmodern contextualism is rarely informed by social and technological change and seldom achieves social cohesion, often suffering from the same problem of isolation as modernist spaces. The concept advanced by Deleuze, also explored by Eisenman, stresses the evolution and transformability of context, since the success of a space does not lie solely in fixing its scenography in time (Williams 2000). Its application is also linked to innovative complexity-based methodologies for analyzing urban patterns, capable of unpacking interactions—including aspects of self-organization—through which cities operate as processes in flux.

In this sense, we speak not only of continuity of form, but also of the transformation of a basic form, considered as one of the stratifications of the territory that enrich its meanings. This occurs not necessarily through erasure or preservation, but through the "welcoming" of transformative processes that give the object a new meaning in altered relations with the context. Eisenman avoids the discontinuity of the modernists without returning to the nostalgia of postmodern contextualism. He understands evolutionary development through the relationships between the old and the new. Thus, instead of the figure–ground contrast, he introduces the concept of "blurring." The "new" is not perceived as different from the old, but as if it were blurred. This softens sharp boundaries, and the richness of lines and perceptions arising from this condition of "defocusing" enables reconciliation with the whole and the continuity of form (Williams 2000).

In this article, we compare international architectural discourse on context with that developed in Albania, particularly in Tirana. We argue that, although forms of urbicide have been systematically employed in Albania, critical reflection on context has been largely absent from both academic debate and professional practice. This limited sensitivity is often justified through a simplistic normative–technicist logic that has inadvertently normalized urbicidal practices within the architectural mindset. Despite recent changes in architectural education, a stronger ethical awareness is still needed among younger architects to recognize that the city is not a neutral object but a complex assemblage of relationships. Severing human ties to place thus constitutes a form of violence.

Tirana, like other Albanian cities, exemplifies what Harhoiu terms a structurally amnesiac city, where the traumas of past urbanism persist as a long-term cultural condition. Many neighborhoods survive only as fragments—toponyms, written and oral accounts, and

photographic traces—signaling a sustained loss of identity. The prefix "ex-" applied to numerous sites evokes mutilation rather than transformation, fostering alienation and the abandonment of place within anonymous urban agglomerations. Meanwhile, global pressures and the pursuit of visibility continue to erode the urban context and its ties to place. As Calvino (2007) observes, the central challenge is whether cities can still shape human desires through successive transformations, or whether those desires instead erase the city—or are themselves erased by it.

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