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1st International Conference on Built Environment

ICBE 2026

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

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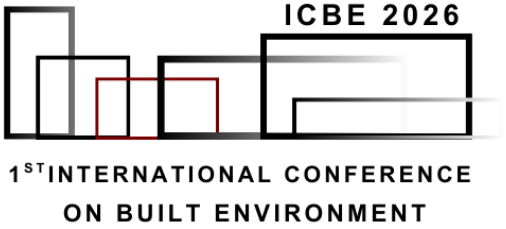
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1st International Conference on Built Environment

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

Art, architecture and interdisciplinary design: Art–architecture relationships / Cross-disciplinary practice / Experimental design / Research-based creative processes.

Human and non-human environments: Interspecies design / Ecological relationships / Human–environment interaction / Alternative spatial narratives.

Critical and speculative approaches: Critical design / Speculative design / Spatial perception / Relational art and architecture.

H Adaptive and post-industrial environments: Adaptive reuse / post-industrial landscapes / Urban regeneration / Transformation of existing spaces.

Representation, heritage and material experimentation: Urban photography / Digital heritage interpretation / Textile upcycling / Material reuse / New cultural narratives.

Heritage as Narrative:
Building City Image Through Adaptive Reuse in Durrës

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Abstract

Adaptive reuse is a powerful approach to breathe new life into our cultural heritage. It helps giving a fresh meaning to the past, manage historical sites more effectively, and boost tourism. This study examines how a modern urban narrative can be constructed using the cultural heritage of the city of Durrës, Albania. It also explores how historical spaces can be transformed into vivid spaces for cultural events and analyses adaptive reuse strategies. Durrës, as one of the oldest cities in Albania, is characterized by a complex historical identity where ancient, medieval, and modern eras coexist amid urban expansion and the demands of seasonal tourism. This paper aims to change this perspective by considering heritage as an active space that merge social interaction and cultural experiences rather than being just a static object to be preserved. Through some case studies, the project investigates the possibility of converting historical buildings and spaces in Durrës for short-long-term cultural applications. This may include performances, art exhibitions, multimedia installations, and cultural events inspired by the local history and identity. Artist *Ibrahim Kodra* is cited as an example of how regional art can be connected to broader global narratives. Using a methodology that includes historical and spatial analysis, case studies, and assessment of potential, the research argues that an adaptive reuse strategy oriented towards cultural narrative and visitor experience can contribute to sustainable urban regeneration. This approach can help redefine the image of Durrës as a city with a vibrant cultural identity, moving beyond its current stereotype as a primarily seasonal tourist destination.

Keywords: *Cultural Tourism, Urban Regeneration, Cultural Heritage, Historical Buildings, Identity*

1. INTRODUCTION

Durrës, as one of the most ancient cities in the history of Albania, represents a complex urban palimpsest where several historical layers are intertwined, from Illyrian, Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, Italian, Socialist and Post-Socialist. These historical stratifications create a rich, but fragmented historical identity that is incompatible within the contemporary life of the city. (MANAHASA EDMOND, 2023) Being a city oriented towards archaeological and maritime tourism, its development aligned with this orientation has created an imbalance between urban space, culture and economy.

This has resulted in many iconic historical buildings and structures being left in neglect or not being given the appropriate level of attention. It is worth mentioning the *"Royal Villa of King Zog,"* a 1930s building that served as the summer residence of King Zog at the time, located on the hill of Durrës in a strategically advantageous position, offering panoramic views of the entire city from all angles. (Semini, Çapeli, & Nepravishta, 2014) (Figure 1)



Figure 1. The "Royal Villa of King Zog," *in 1941 and 2024*. Source: Author

Another equally important building is the former *"Hotel Vollga,"* also built in the 1930s, which has gone through many transformations throughout its history, changing its name several times, from the Italian occupation until 1940 as *"Hotel dei Dogi,"* then during the German occupation as *"Majestic,"* and later during the communist period when it took the name *"Vollga."* (Channel, Top Channel, 2016). (Figure 2)



Figure 2. Former *"Hotel Vollga" in 1938 and 2025*. Source: Author

Another important archeological site worth mentioning is the *Byzantine Forum*, which dates back to the Byzantine period from which it takes its name. (Figure 3)



Figure 3. Byzantine Forum in 2015 and in 2026. Source: Author

The forum is a public space and was built during the reign of the Roman Emperor Anastas in the late 6th century and served as the administrative, commercial, and social center of the city. (Hoti, 2003) These three sites are collectively characterized by the tension between heritage conservation and urban functionality.

Following the collapse of the communist period and the indiscriminate, unregulated urban transformation throughout the city, the priority shifted toward the development of new contemporary architectural buildings. This led to a significant number of historic buildings remaining static, isolated, deterioating and economically inactive. This paper explains how adaptive reuse can help address this issue by putting these buildings as an active component of urban life. This research reconceptualizes heritage not simply as a matter of object preservation, but as a narrative medium which identity, memory, and cultural continuity are conducted through spatial experience. Heritage spaces can be more vibrant and interesting by using inclusive display strategies that engage users in multi-sensory and interactive ways.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Adaptive reuse is a detailed approach that connects heritage conservation with the needs of modern sustainable urban development. (Douglas, 2006) argues that adaptive reuse means giving old buildings a new purpose, while preserving their historical value and character. Also, (Bullen, 2011) mentions that this approach is profitable for the environment and the economy, especially because it minimizes the demands for new interventions. Research has shown that the historic buildings in city of Durrës, particularly those from the early 20th century that belong to Italian period, have a lot of architectural and cultural value. These buildings are not solely old, they are part of the city's identity and its path toward modernization. (Semini, Çapeli, & Nepravishta, 2014).

However, many buildings have been pushed to the margins of contemporary urban life overlooked, neglected, vandalised, or left underutilized because they no longer integrate easily into the way people live, work, and move though cities today. In response, (Manahasa & Dorel, 2021) suggest a considerate alternative that explains how adaptive reuse offers a sustainable solution to preserve these objects, while simultaneously introducing new functions that make their long-term maintenance applicable. This proposal for the *"Royal Villa of King Zog"* demonstrates how historic buildings can be revitalised through cultural programs and spatial transformations. It is worth mentioning that such proposal, aimed at preserving structures of such importance with distinguished architecture that reflects the history of their respective periods, has a meaningful impact on the image they forecast in the city. As Durrës has gone through several different periods of transition, these valuable buildings have long been victims of vandalism, negatively impacting not only the historical and cultural values they carry, but also the image reflected by their neglected condition. Beyond the revitalization of these buildings, recent literature highlights the role of experiences and narratives in heritage spaces.

This is because tourists and visitors need to seek interactive things and immersive environments, rather than just passive observations. It is worth mentioning that immersive exhibitions, such as the Van Gogh Immersive Experience, have redefined how art is presented and consumed. (Shiyang, 2022) (Figure 4)



Figure 4. Immersive Van Gogh Exhibit in 2021. Source: What's Up Fort Worth

A case like this exhibition was held for the first time in Albania, where, as part of the Dutch Cultural Week, the exhibition of some of Van Gogh's works was opened at the Digital Arts Gallery in Korçë, Albania. (Channel, Top Channel, 2024) This marked the beginning of many other exhibitions of this kind in the city of Korça, promoting art while also attracting both local and international visitors. (Figure 5)



Figure 5. Immersive Van Gogh Exhibit in 2024, Korçë. Source: Top Channel

This approach opens new possibilities also for cities like Durrës to reinterpret their heritage through art. One of the famous artists originally from Durres, is the painter Ibrahim Kodra, who could serve as a starting point for this immersive art initiative. The essential movements in his painting are Cubism and Abstractionism. He is the founder of a Neo-Cubism that was also recognized by Pablo Picasso, who studied, experimented with, and refined it, creating his own metaphysical-geometric aesthetic. His paintings consist of elegant geometric figures, understood both as a synthesis of reality and as a return to the primordial simplicity of human-created art, qualities that are echoed in the ancestral culture of Primitivism. In Ibrahim Kodra's artistic exploration, Pablo Picasso's Cubism had a profound influence, particularly following

their friendship in Rome in 1948. Indeed, several Spanish newspapers that wrote about Picasso referred to Kodra as "the last Post-Cubist in Europe," reflecting the impact of Picasso's legacy on his work. (Lleshi, 2018) The work of Ibrahim Kodra, as a local famous artist, provides a strong foundation for this strategy, as his artistic legacy connects local culture with international modernism.

3. METHODOLOGY

The Methodology of this research focuses on qualitative and interdisciplinary framework. This integrates historical inquiry, spatial and urban analysis, and case study evaluation in order to investigate the potential of adaptive reuse as a tool for building a new image of contemporary urban narrative in the city of Durres. The study focuses primarily on the examination of archival documents and historical literature with the aim of understanding the development and significance of the selected buildings, particularly the *"Royal Villa of King Zog."* This because the villa is a remarkable iconic landmark positioned in the heart of the city. Particular emphasis is placed also on the former Hotel Vollga, which both with the villa represent significant moments in the modernization of the city during the early twentieth century. Also, the Byzantine Forum reflects a deeper archaeological stratification of the urban landscape. The relationship between heritage sites and the urban fabric is analysed with a focus on accessibility, visibility, and their integration into social life. By examining how accessible, visible and well-connected a heritage site is, and how well it integrates with the everyday functions of the city, this paper closely examines the movement patterns, infrastructure and spatial order of the city. The aim is to understand where these sites stand in relation to everyday urban life: whether they function as active, inhabited places, stand as overlooked or neglected

areas, or remain detached from the world around them. By mapping these relationships, the study reveals the extension to which heritage sites truly belong to, or remain excluded from the social and economic rhythms of the city. In parallel, the methodology includes a comparative case study approach of three selected cases: *"Royal Villa of King Zog"* and *"Hotel Vollga,"* that represent enclosed spaces, whereas the *"Byzantine Forum"* constitutes as an open public space. Each case study is evaluated based on its current condition, historical value, and its potential for adaptive reuse. Furthermore, the methodology takes an interpretive, design-focused approach. Instead of considering heritage as something rigid and subtle, it should be treated like a narrative tool that can create deep, immersive and expressive experiences. Ibrahim Kodra's work plays an important role here by acting as a bridge between the local identity of Durrës and the wider world of art. His influence shows how site-specific stories can be built through visual and spatial ideas that speak to both locals and international visitors. Also, this approach brings in a speculative, forward-looking side. Adaptive reuse isn't just about practical or technical adjustments anymore, it becomes a creative and cultural strategy, one that reshapes how we connect the past with the present. However, although the three sites can embrace this strategy, the methods in which adaptive reuse will be applied are

different. This is because the former *"Hotel Vollga"* and *"The Royal Villa"* are buildings that have deteriorated and have been vandalized over the years, one more than the other, therefore, the intervention techniques used for their revitalization are also different. This includes restoration, conservation, reinforcement and rehabilitation façades. It is worth mentioning that the Byzantine Forum is an archaeological site and the methodology of applying adaptive reuse can be possible through tools like AR/VR and digital projections to recreate the historical appearance of the forum without interfering in it.

In the end, the proposed ideas and scenarios are assessed using a qualitative framework. This helps keeping the research harmonious, balancing preservation with fresh thinking. By weaving together theory, analysis, art and design, the study builds a complete method. It shows that adaptive reuse can spark urban regeneration and become a powerful way to shape a vibrant, coherent identity for the city of Durrës.

4. RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

Adaptive reuse gives new life to old buildings and forgotten spaces, and for a city like Durrës with its rich and layered history, it's one of the most efficient and sustainable moves a place could make. Instead of letting historic structures sit empty or crumble into relics of the past, this approach turns them into lively, useful parts of the community, while still honouring their character and aesthetic. They stop being dusty memories and start becoming places where people can gather, work and create. This doesn't just only keep the damage away, but sparks real economic energy, drawing visitors, hosting local culture and making room for artist and small businesses. Eventually, these buildings aren't just rescued, they are brought back into the city's daily life, where history and present finally can merge.

One of the main things of adaptive reuse, is that it doesn't just bring old buildings back to life, it helps foster the 'urban activation'. More than simply attracting visitors, it is about creating opportunities for people to connect, share experiences, and strengthen the sense of community. When an old building or public space is given a new function, transforming into a museum, art gallery, cultural centre, or a venue for performances, it becomes a vibrant meeting point drawing in all kinds of people (tourists, local residents, artists, students, and creative entrepreneurs) In doing so, it becomes a real driver of social and economic power, bringing positive change to the whole neighbourhood about it.

In this context, art becomes an essential bridge between a space and the people who move through it. Immersive art, in particular, has taken on growing importance in recent years because it offers multisensory experiences that indeed draw visitors in. Using digital tools like 360-degree projections, virtual reality and interactive installations, historic spaces can turn into environments where visitors are no longer just watching from the sideliners, they become part of a living history. This method does not just deepen the experience, it also makes culture more appealing, especially to younger audience, who expect more dynamic and practical ways to connect with it.

An inspiring example of this approach is the model of immersive art exhibitions, which have achieved considerable success in various cities around the world. Based on this model, one can imagine the transformation of Durrës' urban spaces through the integration of the art of Ibrahim Kodra, one of the most important figures of Albanian modern art. His works, defined by abstract forms and bold colours, lend themselves beautifully to digital reimagining and the construction of immersive environments. By projecting images onto walls, floors, and ceilings, and interweaving them together with sounds and storytelling, a unique experience can be created that draws the visitor deep into Kodra's artistic universe. (Figure 6)



Figure 6. Immersive "Ibrahim Kodra Experience" in former "Hotel Vollga". Source: AI

A key element of this strategy is to adapt interventions to the nature of the space. Interior spaces, such as the *"Royal Villa"*, present very favourable conditions for the development of comprehensive permanent exhibitions. These spaces allow for better control of lighting, acoustics and technological infrastructure, enabling the creation of sustainable and functional experiences throughout the year. A museum of this type would serve not only as a tourist attraction, but also as an important tool for the cultural education of the community and for the promotion of Albanian art in a modern approach. (Figure 7)



Figure 7. Interiors of the "Royal Villa of King Zog". Source: Visit Albania

From another perspective, spaces such as the former *"Hotel Vollga"* present great opportunities for adaptability and transformation. Being less constrained by defined functions, these spaces can be used for a wide range of activities, such as temporary exhibitions, artistic performances, festivals and multimedia installations. This flexible nature helps to maintain the interest of the public, enabling the creation of a dynamic and constantly evolving cultural program. In addition, these spaces can function as an important platform for young artists, offering them a space to experiment and present their creativity. (Figure 8)



Figure 8. Interiors of the former “Hotel Vollga” in 2025. Source: durresalbania_

Open spaces, such as the Byzantine Forum, require careful treatment due to their archaeological importance. However, this does not exclude the possibility of their activation. On the contrary, through temporary and non-invasive interventions, such as projections on existing structures, outdoor performances or temporary installations, cultural activities can be organized that preserve the integrity of the site. Open spaces, such as the Byzantine Forum, require careful treatment due to their archaeological importance. However, this does not exclude the possibility of their activation. On the contrary, through temporary and non-invasive interventions, such as projections on existing structures, outdoor performances or temporary installations, cultural activities can be organized that preserve the integrity of the site. This has not only reinforced its role as a landmark for the city, but has also given it an additional function beyond its primary one as a tourist and cultural attraction. Considering this example, it could be possibble applying the same approach to other spaces that are equally important to the city's historical identity. From a broader perspective, when a city incorporates art into its adaptive restoration strategies, it helps create an integrated urban narrative. This narrative reveals how the city’s historical layers, from antiquity, through the medieval periods, and into the modern day, are unified through a shared contemporary language. As a result, visitors no longer perceive the city simply as merely a collection of historical fragments. Instead, they experience it as a dynamic, living organism that is constantly growing and changing. This perspective becomes especially important for cities like Durrës, which, despite having a rich and complex heritage, often struggle to communicate its history to visitors in a meaningful way. Through this perspective, visitors no longer feel like they are just looking at ruins; they feel connected to a place that is still very much alive.

Furthermore, this approach encourages a fundamental shift in the way a country thinks about tourism. Instead of relying almost exclusively on beaches and standard recreational activities, a city can begin to move towards offering richer cultural and emotional experiences. Visitors are no longer drawn to simply see monuments, but to truly experience them through stories, art, and technology. This not only increases the quality of what is offered to visitors, but also gives the city a distinct advantage in an increasingly crowded global marketplace. Finally, adaptive reuse supported by art plays an important role in strengthening local identity. By placing figures like Ibrahim Kodra at the heart of a city's narrative, a community deepens its connection to its cultural heritage and presents it in a fresh and engaging way. This not only strengthens the pride within the community, but also helps building a distinctive and sustainable image for the city on the international stage. In this context, art and heritage are no longer seen as relics of the past, but as powerful engines for development in the future.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to examine whether adaptive reuse could do more than simply save old buildings in Durrës. What has been proven is that heritage, when treated as an active narrative rather than a frozen object, carries real potential to reshape the way the city is perceived and experienced. The three case studies, the *"Royal Villa of King Zog",* the former *"Hotel Vollga"* and the Byzantine Forum, each showed different opportunities, but also a common problem: they have been neglected by the rapid and often unplanned growth of the city. None of them currently function as part of everyday urban life, and their isolation weakens both their preservation and the city's cultural image. What became clear during the research is that preservation alone is not enough. Keeping a building standing does not automatically make it meaningful to people. The more useful question is: what happens inside it and who is invited inside? This is where the idea of narrative becomes practical. By connecting adaptive reuse to a cultural story, a story that draws on local figures like Ibrahim Kodra and on inclusive, visitor-centred experiences, these spaces can move from being neglected remnants to active sites of memory, art, and social exchange. The comparison between the enclosed buildings and the open Byzantine Forum also showed that no single strategy works everywhere. Indoor spaces like the Villa and the Volga Hotel offer control over lighting, technology, and security, making them suitable for comprehensive permanent or semi-permanent exhibitions. The Forum, due to its archaeological sensitivity, requires lighter and more temporary interventions. But even there, projections or seasonal performances can activate the space without damaging it. The Durrës Amphitheatre already proves that archaeological sites can successfully host cultural events, so there is no reason why the same principle should not be applied more widely. Another important finding is that this approach changes the logic of tourism in Durrës. The city is currently known almost exclusively as a summer beach destination, which leaves it empty and economically fragile for most of the year. Cultural reuse based on inclusive art and local heritage narratives offers a way to extend the tourist season and attract a different type of visitor, one interested in history, art and experiences rather than just sun and sea. This

change would not replace coastal tourism, but would balance it, making the city more resilient.

Finally, the research confirmed that adaptive reuse works best when it is not treated as a purely technical or architectural problem. It is also a cultural and social problem. The most successful transformations examined were those where the new function respected the old structure but was not afraid to add something contemporary. Ibrahim Kodra's work is a good example of how local identity can be connected to international art movements without losing its specificity. His neo-cubist language, with its geometric clarity and strong colours, translates well to digital and immersive formats, and since he was from Durrës, his name carries authenticity.

Based on these conclusions, several recommendations emerge. First, local authorities and heritage institutions need to move away from a purely conservative mindset. Protecting a building is not the same as activating it. A change in policy is needed so that adaptive reuse proposals are assessed not only on their respect for the historic structure, but also on their ability to generate public use, cultural programming, and economic activity. Second, any reuse strategy must begin with a clear narrative framework. In the case of Durrës, the figure of Ibrahim Kodra provides a ready-made cultural anchor. A comprehensive permanent exhibition of his work in the *"Royal Villa"*, combined with rotating temporary installations in the former *"Vollga Hotel,"* would create a coherent cultural route. The Byzantine Forum could be connected to this route through summer evening projections or sound installations that refer to the visual language of Kodra without physical alterations.

Third, investments should go into lightweight and reversible technological infrastructure. Projection mapping, spatial audio, and interactive digital installations will not require drilling into ancient walls or permanent construction. This makes them suitable even for sensitive archaeological sites. The success of the comprehensive Van Gogh exhibition in Korça shows that the Albanian public responds positively to this format, and there is no reason why Durrës should not expect something similar.

Fourth, the city should develop a year-round cultural calendar that activates these spaces during all seasons, not just in summer. Winter and spring events, exhibitions, workshops, artist residencies, film screenings, would maintain visibility and foot traffic, supporting nearby businesses and reducing the seasonal decline that currently defines Durrës.

Fifth, collaboration with artists, curators, and technologists should be formalized through open calls or residency programs. Young Albanian artists, in particular, need platforms to experiment with digital and inclusive media. Linking their work to heritage sites would give them visibility, keeping cultural programming fresh and locally based. Sixth, a feasibility study should be conducted for each of the three sites, focusing on structural safety, accessibility, and the cost of installing digital equipment. *"The Royal Villa,"* for example, requires roof repairs and upgraded electrical systems before any public use. Without basic infrastructure, even the best cultural program will fail.

Seventh, community engagement should be part of the process. Local residents often feel

disconnected from heritage sites that are fenced off or left empty. Public consultations, school visits, and participatory design workshops would help build a sense of ownership and reduce the risk of vandalism, which has already damaged several historic buildings in Durrës.

Eighth, funding should be sought from multiple sources: national cultural funds, EU heritage programmes and private sponsors interested in corporate social responsibility. The inclusive arts model could also generate revenue through ticket sales, memberships and merchandise, which would help cover maintenance costs and reduce dependence on state budgets.

Lastly, Durrës needs a clear branding strategy that communicates its transition from a seasonal beach town to a year-round cultural destination. This is not about inventing a false identity. It is about telling a real story, one with layers of history, forgotten buildings given new life, and a local artist whose work speaks to the world. If done well, this narrative could set Durrës apart from other Adriatic coastal cities and give it a lasting cultural footprint.

Ultimately, adaptive reuse is not a quick fix. It requires patience, coordination, and a willingness to experiment. But the alternative, leaving these buildings to decay behind fences, is far more costly, both financially and culturally. This research has shown that Durrës has the raw materials for a meaningful transformation. What is missing is not the potential, but a deliberate strategy to unlock it.

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