

les ateliers

maîtrise d'œuvre urbaine



International Urban Planning Workshop in Tirana
23 January 2021 - 02 February 2021

#Tirana100: Rebound
Repairing and preparing Tirana for a resilient future

Context document

Les Ateliers de Cergy is a non-profit association created in 1982 at the behest of the urban planners involved in the creation of the New Town of Cergy-Pontoise. Today, it is an international network of professionals, academics and decision-makers tied to the field of urban planning. Focused on the practice of urban development, the association organizes workshops envisaged as spaces for collective design and creativity. In France and elsewhere, these workshops provide project managers with an international perspective and illustrated proposals highlighting territorial strategies and urban development projects. By bringing together different professions and cultures, they also offer the opportunity to exchange at the highest levels.

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Since 2019, the Municipality of Tirana in partnership with the non-profit organization Les Ateliers Internationaux de Maîtrise d'Oeuvre Urbaine and the support of the French Embassy in Tirana, the French Development Agency (AFD), and AVITEM (Agency for Sustainable Mediterranean Cities and Territories), has started a collective reflection leading to the organization of the international urban planning workshop, which will take place in Tirana from Saturday 23 January, 2021 until Tuesday 02 February, 2021.

This document aims at introducing the territory of Tirana and the current evolutions of the city, and explores the issues identified in the topic-document of the workshop.

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Part 1

Tirana: Past Present Future

Historical perspectives on Tirana's urban space

Introduction

Albania in Europe and in the Balkans

Geography

Albania is located in southeastern Europe, on the shores of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, sharing land borders with Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Greece. With 28,748 km², it possesses a variety of landscapes and climates, ranging from high mountain ranges in the north and east to coastal plains in the west. There is a remarkable presence of water systems – several lakes, wetlands and rivers – among which is the River Vjosë, Europe’s last wild river. With 15 national parks, 4 Ramsar sites and 1 biosphere reserve, it is also home to a wide variety of animals and plants.

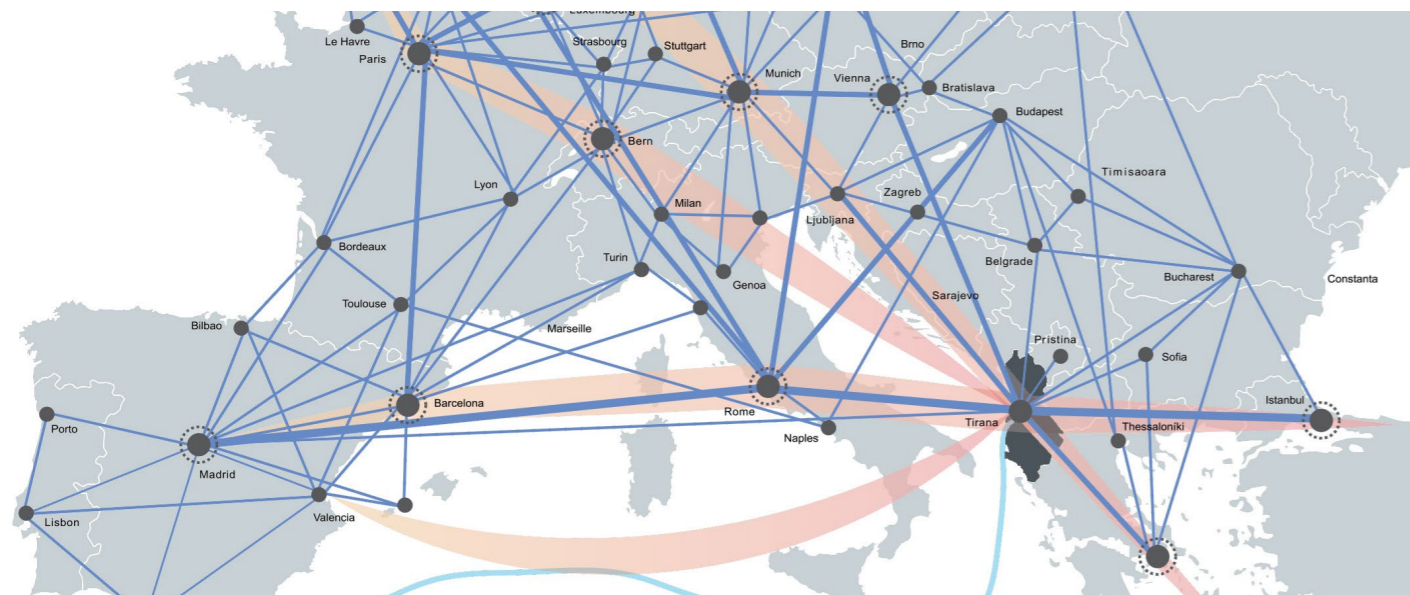
Economy

The country has a developing mixed economy classified by the World Bank as upper middle-income. According to recently issued data concerning the impact of different sectors on the country’s GDP in 2018, the leading economic sector is agriculture at 21.1%, followed by trade and services (18.8%), industry (14.1%) and construction (10.3%). The agricultural sector accounts for more than 40% of employment but less than one quarter of the GDP. This is due to the fact that it is mostly limited to small family operations with a lack of modern equipment and inefficient plots of land.

The long period of isolation under the communist regime has excluded the country from benefiting from its favourable location. The main economic corridors crossing through the region, which link Europe with Asia and North Africa, were created without consideration for the possible shortcuts that could pass through the country. Albania, therefore, continues to face the challenge of placing itself within the network of European and worldwide trade.

Tirana, the capital of the country, is the administrative and economic centre. It is the country’s only city which presents as predominantly urban, according to NUTS 3 standards. During the last decades, it has been subject to massive migration. This has unfortunately triggered social and economic inequality, since the lack of proper services has hindered these new populations from fully integrating into the city. Such a concentration of population and energy has inherently lowered the quality of life in both urban and rural areas.

Two significant shocks – the devastating 2019 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic – dominate the stage of recent economic developments. As the country started its reconstruction phase, the global pandemic forced it to put key economic sectors in lockdown. The tourism sector, a key driver of growth, was hit especially hard due to containment measures and travel restrictions.



Tirana: Between mountains and the sea

Tirana in Albania

The county of Tirana is situated in the centre of Albania and comprises an area of 1,288 km². It is located along a flat plain, surrounded by mountain ranges in the east, the hills of Sauk and Selita in the south and the hills of Bërzhitë, Kashar and Prezë in the northwest. The city (urban centre) extends across 41.8 km², which accounts for nearly 3.4% of the county’s surface area. It has a population of 811,649 inhabitants or 30% of Albania’s total population.

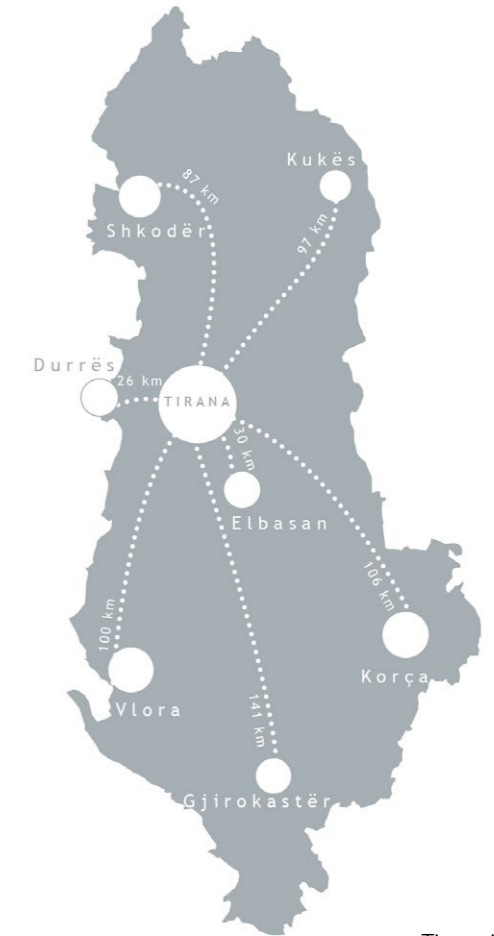
Tirana is the economic hub of the country, the most important node in the infrastructural system as it is only 18 km away from the Rinas International Airport and connected to the port of Durrës via the Tirana-Durrës highway..

Natural resources

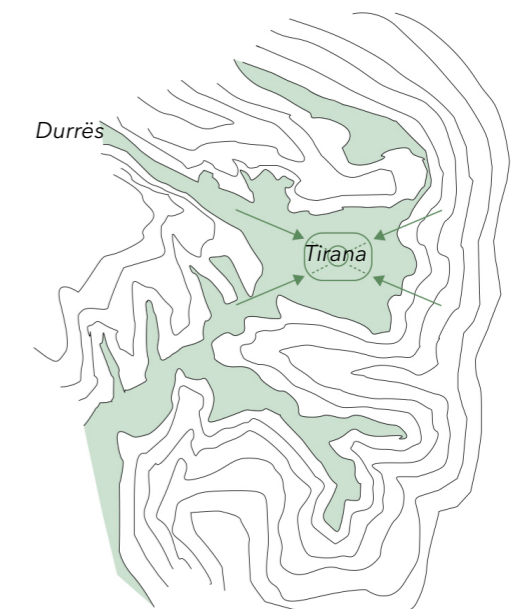
The region of Tirana is rich in natural resources. The Dajti National Park borders the city in the east, while the Park on the Artificial Lake (Grand Park of Tirana) lies in the south. Other important water resources are spread across the area, including nearly 100 lakes scattered between Tirana and Durrës, the most important being those of Tirana, Farkë, Kashar and Paskuqan. The Lana River in the south and the Tiranë River (which forms part of the Ishëm River) in the north are the most important ecological systems within the city.

Due to its geographical position and terrain, Tirana has a Mediterranean climate with hot, dry summers and humid, mild winters. Temperatures range from 6.9°C to 23.8°C, with averages around 15.1°C. Rainfall is relatively frequent, while snowfall is very rare.

Intensive agriculture is not practised in the rural areas. According to data issued in 2018, only 175.43 km² of land were used and mostly as forage. Other crops include tomatoes, corn, potatoes, onions, cucumbers and peppers. Because of the Mediterranean climate, the region is home to several orchards, 33% of which are vineyards, followed by olives and other types of fruit trees.



Tirana in Albania, distances to main cities



Tirana's landscape (General Local Plan)

Tirana's evolution through Albanian history

First settlements and the Ottoman period (-1920)

Pre-ottoman period

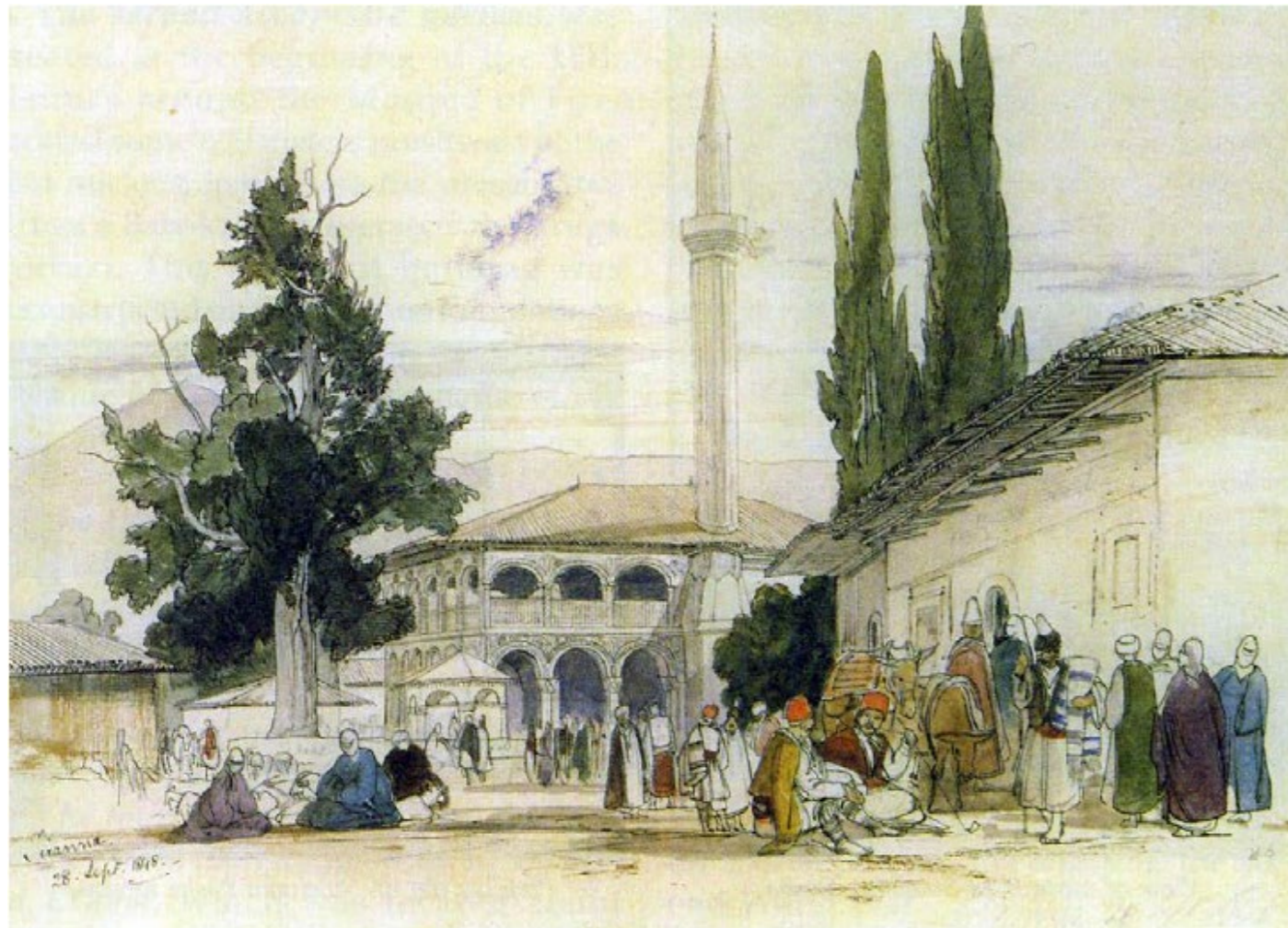
The region where Tirana is situated has been inhabited during various periods of time. Nevertheless, a continuity and coherence with the city of today can only be traced back to the 17th century. Archaeological findings from ancient caves in the area suggest prehistoric settlements dating before the Neolithic period. Other notable findings include various fortresses and castles located in strategic points along the hills – guarding over agricultural fields – beginning from the 3rd and 4th century AD.

With the Ottoman conquest of Albania in the 14th century, the area received specific attention due to its favourable location between the rest of Europe and oriental Turkey. Being a transitory point, the

urban development of the settlement was limited. In 1614, Sulejman Pasha began to construct a mosque, a hammam, a bread bakery and a memorial grave, of which only the latter still exists today. This date is seen historically and architecturally as the birth of the city of Tirana.

Ottoman period

Under Ottoman rule, Tirana became a typical oriental town, with the bazaar – the heart of the settlement – located at the intersection of the roads leading to Albania's main cities such as Durrës, Shkodër, Dibër and Elbasan. These roads and the River Lana in the south were the main elements that formed the city and continue to be unchanged even today. Mosques became the most defining and common public objects in the city – edifices linked



Painting of Tirana in 1848 by Edward Lear (National Library of Albania)



Sarajet e toptanasve, one of the finest examples of an Ottoman house (Municipality of Tirana)

to the Ottoman's intent to convert the population from Christian to Muslim. In Tirana, records of 9 of these old mosques exist; only one of them, the Haxhi Et'hem Bey Mosque, is still standing.

From the 18th century until the beginning of the 20th century, Tirana continued to consolidate its structural organization, resulting in an organic and irregular web of narrow streets feeding residential areas, divided by four main radial streets that led to the city's economic hub – the bazaar and the two most distinguished mosques. This economic hub was situated in the area of today's Skanderbeg Square. Due to the contributions of rich merchants and noble families, the design of the public buildings in the centre received special attention. The Clock Tower, constructed in 1830, continues to be the symbol of the city.

Although Tirana was subject to a rather spontaneous expansion, it is possible to identify different zones:

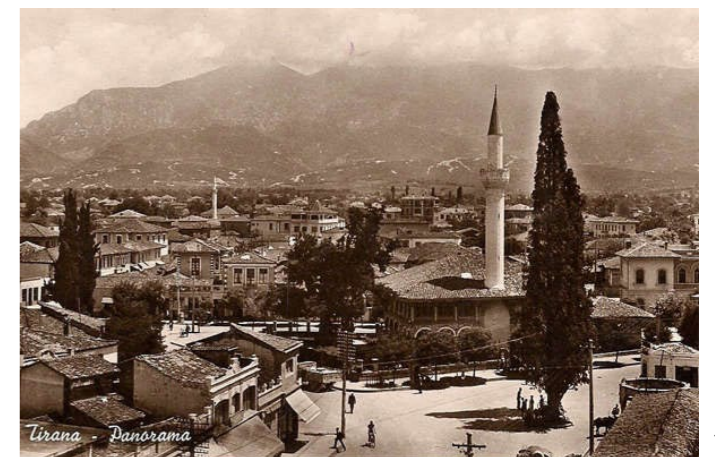
The residential area developed spontaneously and are scattered across all corners of the town. A typical dwelling of the time was a one- or two-story adobe house, situated amid a green garden and separated from neighbouring homes by relatively low walls. Only the households of the town's dominant feudal aristocracy were located in the centre, at first behind the high walls of the castle and, after some time, even outside them.

The commercial and economic area represented by the bazaar was reconstructed in 1905, only to be demolished in 1960 to make space for the Palace of Culture.

Public squares were originally small irregular plots created as partial expansions of streets. The most notable include the main square in front of the old mosque, the square for morning prayers next to the current Parliament, the square for military parades near today's Parku Rinia, and the Square of Albanians at the top of Kavaja Street.



Tirana during the Ottoman period (visit-tirana.com)



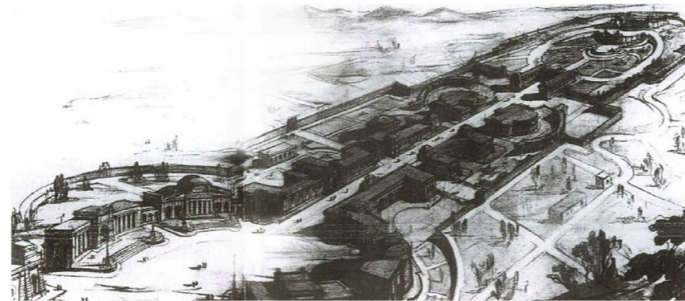
Tirana - Panorama

Independence and Italian Occupation (1920–1944)

Modernization and megalomania

On 20 January 1920, Tirana was declared the capital of Albania. At the time, Tirana was not the most important nor the most developed city in Albania, but it enjoyed a favourable location in the middle of the country, fertile lands, an agreeable climate and good prospects for economic development – factors that excluded other notable Albanian cities. This decision was made when Tirana had only 15,000 inhabitants scattered across a territory of 305 ha, which equated roughly to 50 inhabitants per ha. The city therefore had to prepare itself to be able to become the political and administrative centre of the country.

In 1923, the first regulatory town plan was developed, supported by Austrian architects and engineers. It dealt mainly with the street network – improving and adjusting the existing infrastructure and also trying to enforce a rectangular network in the western part of the city, which was mostly free. The implementation of the plan resulted in the widening of the main radial streets such as Rruga e Durrësit, Rruga e Kavajës and Rruga e Barrikadave. The second attempt to envision the urban transformation of Tirana was made by the Italian architect Brasini in 1925. This Italian influence came as a consequence of the political and economic orientation of the Albanian government, led by Ahmet Zogu, towards Italy. At the



Brasini's proposal (National Planning Archive)

time, Albania lacked financial resources, while Mussolini's Italy saw the country as an ideal opportunity for its expansion towards the Balkans. Brasini's proposal consisted in creating a central eclectic north-south boulevard which would house the ministries and other important administrative buildings. This isle-like intervention was framed by walls and cut off links with the rest of the oriental settlement.

In 1926, a second regulatory plan was developed. Based on its predecessor, it also adopted Brasini's idea of a north-south boulevard. The administrative centre was to be constructed southwest of the bazaar, forming a square which more or less presented the same shape as today's Skanderbeg Square. For the first time, the plan foresaw the adjustment of the Lana River basin, although no specific implementation was envisioned. Two other plans were adopted respectively in 1928 and 1929, at a time when the political system changed from a republic to a kingdom.



1917 Map of Tirana, (National Planning Archive)

The street network continued to be revised with the introduction of quadratic systems in the new areas of the city to the south of the River Lana. A further extension of the boulevard in the south was proposed, with work starting in 1930. The boulevard cut blindly through houses and gardens at a length of 2 km and a width of 35 m.

The main square began to take on its definitive form in 1931, when the Florentine architect Florestano De Fausto was asked to make a proposal for the design of the administrative centre. This proposal envisioned a small harmonious complex of 6 ministries as well as the Haxhi Et'hem Bey Mosque, whose proportions were adapted in the design. During this time, work began for other administrative buildings as well, such as the National Bank of Albania (designed by Italian architect Vittorio Morpurgo), the Municipality of Tirana (demolished during communism to build the National Museum) and the Catholic church on Kavaja Street. The city now counted 30,000 inhabitants, with a density of 2,500 inhabitants per km².

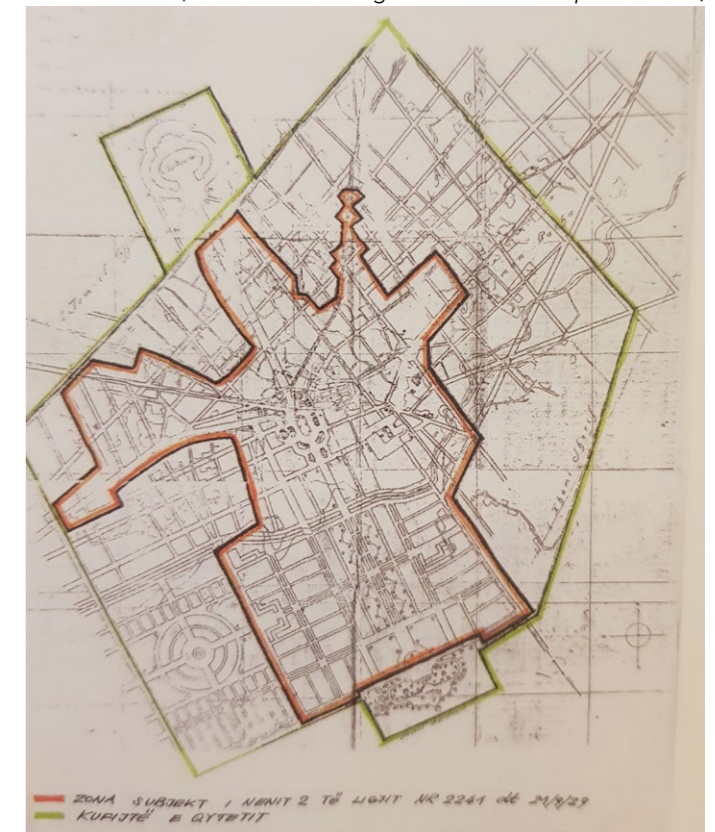
Italian occupation and World War 2

On 7 April 1939, Italy occupied Albania, declaring it part of the Italian Kingdom. It adopted a special policy in the field of urban development, drafting a new regulatory plan which was implemented during 1939–1942. In this plan, the city was predicted to grow increasingly, especially after the arrival of the many Italian administrators and citizens who would reside in Albania permanently.

This regulatory plan presented a very serious undertaking because it was the first to consider a much larger area, thus foreseeing and implementing the complex needs of a capital city. The master plan studied an area that stretched across 2,800 ha, including the airport, military and industrial areas. It defined the limits of Tirana as a municipality bordered by the communes around it. Accordingly, Tirana was designed as an overly landscaped city-park, with low buildings and an active core at its centre. The regulatory plan did its utmost to make as few expropriations as possible by preserving existing buildings and not eradicating the traces of the city's oriental past. The radial system of streets came to be complemented by ring roads, the outer one be-



Extension of the main Boulevard (Bunkart)



ing partially today's 3rd ring. The railway station was planned for the southwest of the city and was intended to link the city to Durrës and the eastern part of the country. The boulevard, at the time called Viale del Impero, was complemented by an architectonic complex in the south, which is now the Mother Teresa Square. This complex designed by Italian architect Gherardio Bossio functioned as a leisure centre for the fascist youth and was comprised of buildings that reflected distinctive ideas of fascist architecture.

During the period of 1939–1944, Tirana assumed the appearance of a modern city. With the implementation of the new regulatory plan and the opening of job opportunities, it was a time during which Tirana experienced significant economic prosperity and urban development. As the Second World War approached, Tirana became a centre of anti-fascist resistance with the establishment of the Communist Party of Albania in 1941. On the morning of 17 November 1944, Tirana was liberated, marking the end of its most defining period, in terms of urban planning.



1942 Urban master plan, (Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development 2003)

Communism (1945-1990)

A rational and monumental city

In 1945, Albania became a communist country, joining those of the Eastern Bloc in their ideology of a centralized authoritarian government and common ownership. Albania faced one of the harshest dictatorial regimes in Europe, resulting in a complete isolation from the rest of the world for a period of 45 years. In terms of urban planning, urban growth was strictly regulated, with the population and services being evenly distributed around the territory. This regime tried to forge a new identity for the city of Tirana, just like the others before it.

The first communist regulatory plan was approved in 1957. It dealt with issues related to the development of the existing as well as of the creation of peripheral zones. It adopted the street scheme introduced in the previous Italian plan, although it never managed to finish the full section of the outer road in the southeast. The challenge that the plan faced was the increase of the housing density in the existing fabric.

Residential buildings were constructed facing important streets. This was done so the government could present a first impression of a developed city. Nevertheless, behind those buildings, the situation remained unchanged. In several neighbourhoods, housing blocks were also constructed, but due to a lack of financial means, most of them were built on a voluntary basis and were of very modest quality. The National Planning and Architecture Institute worked to create a standardization for apartments and residential buildings and coupled with practical reasons, buildings constructed in different parts of the city – or even in different cities – where very similar. The use of prefabricated elements also enforced the repetition and dullness of residential neighbourhoods.

Another regulatory plan was adopted in 1985 due to the need to define new residential and industrial spaces. In order for the city to grow, the plan foresaw the extension of the boulevard to the Tiranë River in the north and the creation of a new outer ring road (the 5th ring road) that would serve as the limit of the city. Only parts of the western segment have been built for the latter. These two projects



The Statue of the Dictator Enver Hoxha (Martin Parr)



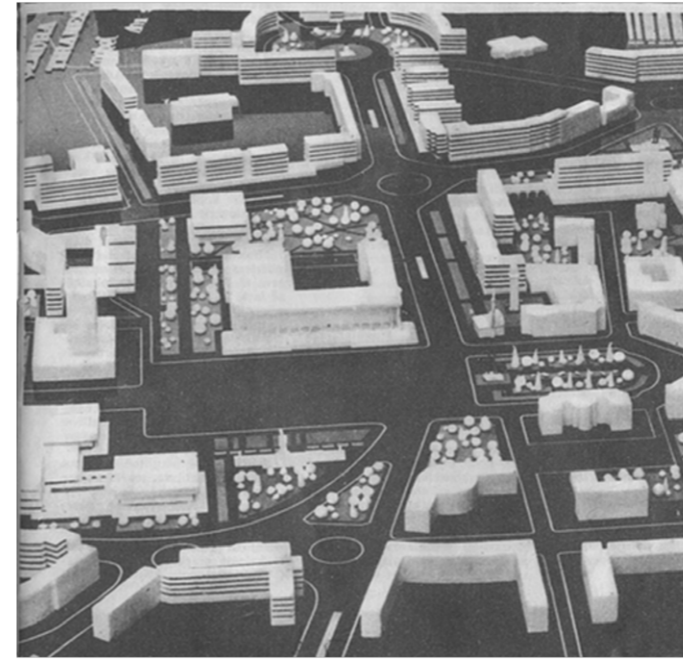
The National Historical Museum and the Palace of Culture



The Skanderbeg Square



Housing blocks from the communist era (Gazeta Tema)



Proposal for Skanderbeg Square, 1963

continue to hold the spotlight in the Tirana 2030 (TR030) General Local Plan.

In trying to organize a city according to socialist principles, the Skanderbeg Square, seen by the government as a very important space that reflected the identity of the country, could not be left aside. With the aim of denying the city's oriental and fascist past, several buildings were demolished, including the Old Bazaar, the Municipality and the Orthodox cathedral to make room for the Palace of Culture, the National Historical Museum and Hotel Tirana. These interventions imposed new proportions on the square, making it a very monu-



The Stalin textile plant (Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development 2003)

mental and inhuman one. Once a meeting point for its citizens, the centre became a political showroom and a crossroad for the regulation of daily pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

Satellite towns

The creation of industrial sites distanced from the city led to a demand for a localised labour force. This resulted in proposed residential neighbourhoods near the factories, which in time took the form of satellite towns. These include Kombinat (Stalin textile plant), Laprakë (Josif Pashko Kombinat), Kinostudio (porcelain factory) and Shkozë (tractor plant). Kinostudio (porcelain factory) and Shkoza (tractor plant).



Tirana Regulatory Plan showing the five planned ring roads, 1985 (Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development 2003)

After the fall of communism (1990-2019)

Unregulated development

The 1990s marked important political, social, and economic changes in Albania, which were manifested in the built environment as well. Most of the land was re-privatized, based on pre-communist ownership or the presence of local citizens. This process did not run smoothly and did not provide a fair distribution of properties, leading to legal disputes which remain unresolved.

From a situation of complete control and obedience, Albanians found themselves in a state of freedom. They decided to take advantage of this wherever they could, unfortunately taking care of only their immediate needs without thinking in the long term. Uncontrolled migration, from rural to urban settlements and from small cities to bigger ones, caused great demands in housing, which the citizens decided to solve on their own by building their houses in plots that sometimes they did not even own. This problematic transition period, accompanied by the civil unrests of 1997, caused a complete dysfunction of the State and rule of law.

In 1990, Tirana counted 280,000 inhabitants, doubling to 596,704 in 2001 and reaching 763,560 in 2011. This chaotic growth resulted in illegal constructions for business purposes mainly around the centre of the city and a frightening sprawl in former agricultural land, mostly in the first 10 years of transition.

This first period was characterized by developments of low density covering large areas of land that lacked the provision of basic services, thus making an integration of these areas in the city difficult. The second period saw a rise in participation by land developers. Faced with a large demand in housing, they constructed low-quality apartment buildings wherever they could find cheap land plots. While these developments are not informal, compared to constructions during the first phase of the transition, their impact was considerably more serious since they involved large concentrations of population lacking proper infrastructure and services.



Informal settlements along the new boulevard



Planned housing blocks near the artificial lake (Google Satellite 2020)



Coloured facades of Tirana (atlasobscura.com)

Edi Rama's era

Edi Rama is the man who changed a whole city. Now there is a new Tirana, coloured, happy, with a new and improved infrastructure and cultural life.

From *Commenting on Edi Rama (Tirana, Albania), elected world Mayor 2004.*

Edi Rama was appointed mayor of Tirana in 2000. He decided to give the city a vibrant makeover, taking care of neglected public spaces, removing illegal constructions and brightly painting dull communist housing blocks, the latter of which made him a worldwide sensation.

The superficial action of painting facades resulted successfully in changing the image of the city without the spending of large resources. International artists were asked to repaint Tirana's buildings, introducing striking colours, patterns and messages.

This intervention was accompanied by public space projects, such as the redevelopment of the banks of the River Lana and the removal of illegal kiosks in former parks and squares. Noting the positive effect changes in the built environment have, the Rama government (Edi Rama was elected Prime Minister of Albania in 2013) decided to do the same even later by re-applying the process of beautification in Tirana and other cities of Albania, although it was clear now that the solution was not sufficient for dealing with the complex problems the country faces.



Coloured facades of Tirana (atlasobscura.com)

Administrative reform 'detailed in part II'

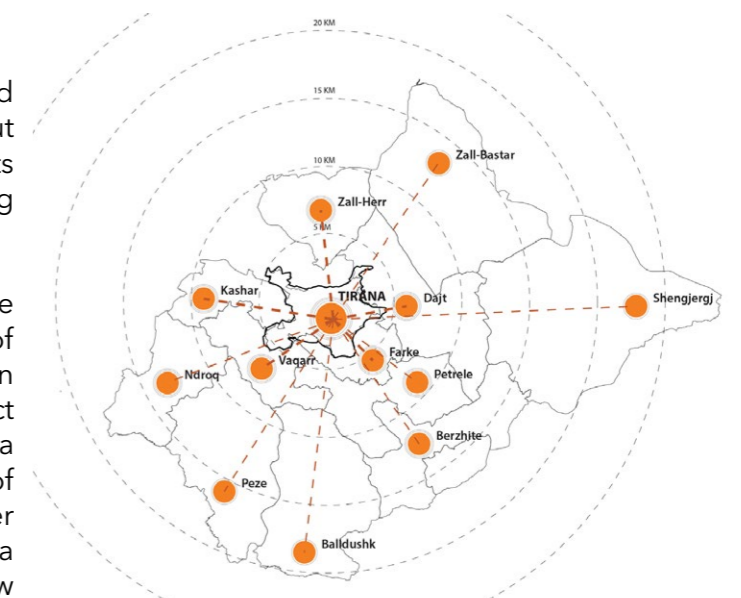
In 2014, an administrative reform was undertaken with the aim of revising the boundaries between administrative units in order to ensure an efficient distribution of public funds and services. Albania was thus reorganized into 12 counties with 61 municipalities.

The Municipality of Tirana now consists of 24 administrative units – including the 13 former communes surrounding it – and covers an area of 1,111 km², compared to 41.8 km² before 2014. Together with the municipalities of Kamëz, Vorë, Kavajë and Rrogozhinë, it forms Tirana County.

Tirana's new metropolitan territory can be better understood as three distinct geographical areas:

- agricultural areas in the north, west and south;
- the urban core, surrounded by four partly urbanized municipalities;
- the rugged mountainous area to the east.

This brings new challenges for the municipality in terms of managing urban and rural zones, and introducing the right policies for supporting development.



Transformation of Tirana's territory (General Local Plan)

The 2019 earthquake

An earthquake with a 6.4 magnitude hit Albania on 26 November 2019, resulting in a death toll of 51 people, nearly 1,000 injured and some 14,000 people temporarily displaced. The epicentre was around 20 miles west of Tirana, between Durrës and the city of Thumanë, both of which suffered severe damage. Tirana and Durrës were already vulnerable after a 5.6-magnitude earthquake in September, which damaged or destroyed 500 houses. In Tirana, severe damages were reported in housing blocks in the area of Kombinat as well as in low-rise housing areas in the outskirts of the city.

Identity and Heritage

What to do with what remains

Tirana's history of turbulent development is not yet over. Walking through the city, one cannot ignore construction sites, a lot of them located in the urban core. They include high-rise mixed-use buildings and large state-driven projects about public buildings and spaces.

This final stage of development has to find place for itself amid the remainings of the last century, and in doing so, it cannot avoid collisions. This conflictive relation towards the fragile fabric of low-rise buildings and the alteration of various buildings engraved in the collective memory, is responded by the general public with a certain hostility. The young capital continues to change and a discussion on what should be changed and what should remain, is more relevant than ever.



Visuals of forthcoming towers on Skanderbeg Square. These buildings will bring a change in the architectural scale of the main square. (skyscraperscity.com, exit.al)



Tirana, view from the Dajti mountain



Skanderbeg Square

Skanderbeg Square has changed quite drastically in the last 20 years. The two major political parties had two different visions for the centre, which led to two different interventions depending on when each party was in power. Starting in 2003 with an international design competition won by the architectural studio 51N4E, the actual construction that started afterwards was not supported by the then-in-power right-wing party. Instead, another version was implemented, only to be rebuilt according to the first version in 2017 by the Edi Rama government. In 2005, a master plan for a larger area of the centre was presented. Nicknamed the French Plan by Architecture Studio Paris, it proposed the introduction of 10 towers symmetrically placed east to west. One of these towers – Maritim Plaza Tirana – has been built, while two others are in the process of being constructed.



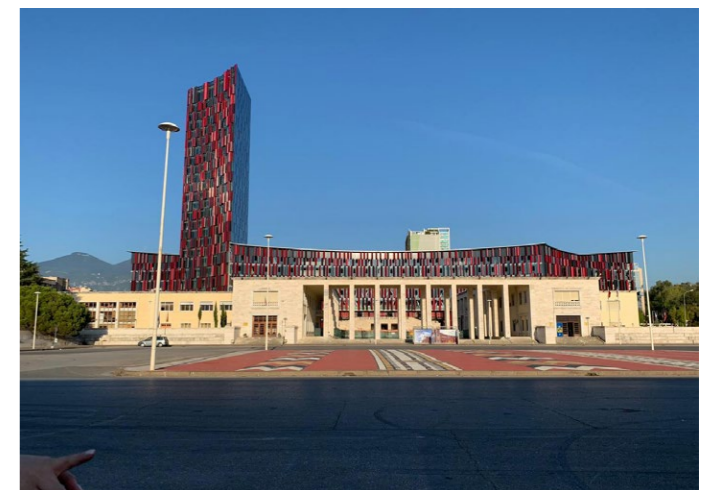
Now destroyed National Theatre (T. Mali)

The National Theatre, built in 1939 by Italian architect Giulio Berte, was destroyed on 17 May 2020. A new proposal for the theatre building has been designed by Dutch architect Bjarke Ingels.



The new project for the Pyramid, MVRDV

The Pyramid, initially built by the communist regime in 1988 as a mausoleum for the dictator Enver Hoxha, is expected to be turned into a youth IT centre designed by MVRDV.



Air Albania Stadium

The new Air Albania Stadium, built in 2019 by the Italian architecture studio Archea Associati, replaced the former structure designed by Italian architect Gherardo Bosio.

Tirana in Albania today: spaces in transition

Demographics: Internal migrations

A rural society?

With 38.77% of its inhabitants living in rural areas in 2019, Albania is characterized as having a high rural population in the European context. Greece's share is 20.61%, while Bulgaria counts 24.65%. Only a few former Yugoslavian states seem to have slightly higher rates than Albania.

As Western Europe was experiencing a continued rural exodus in the aftermath of the Second World War, the communist regime led by Enver Hoxha chose to mitigate urban growth in order to keep a certain balance within the country during the second

half of the 20th century.

At first, between 1945 and 1960, massive industrialization meant a rapid urbanization of Albania, especially in Tirana and the country's coastal plains (Vlorë, Elbasan, Durrës and Fier). But soon after, when Albania entered under the influence of Mao's China, the country set anti-urban policies. The government wanted to abolish the domination of cities over the countryside by maintaining a numerical balance between the two. Restrictions such as permissions to change domicile were implemented. New towns were created to accommodate industries and urban growth. As a result, Tirana stopped receiving any mi-



Haystacks, pastures are present in areas that were urbanized these last 30 years (here in Paskuqan, Kamëz)

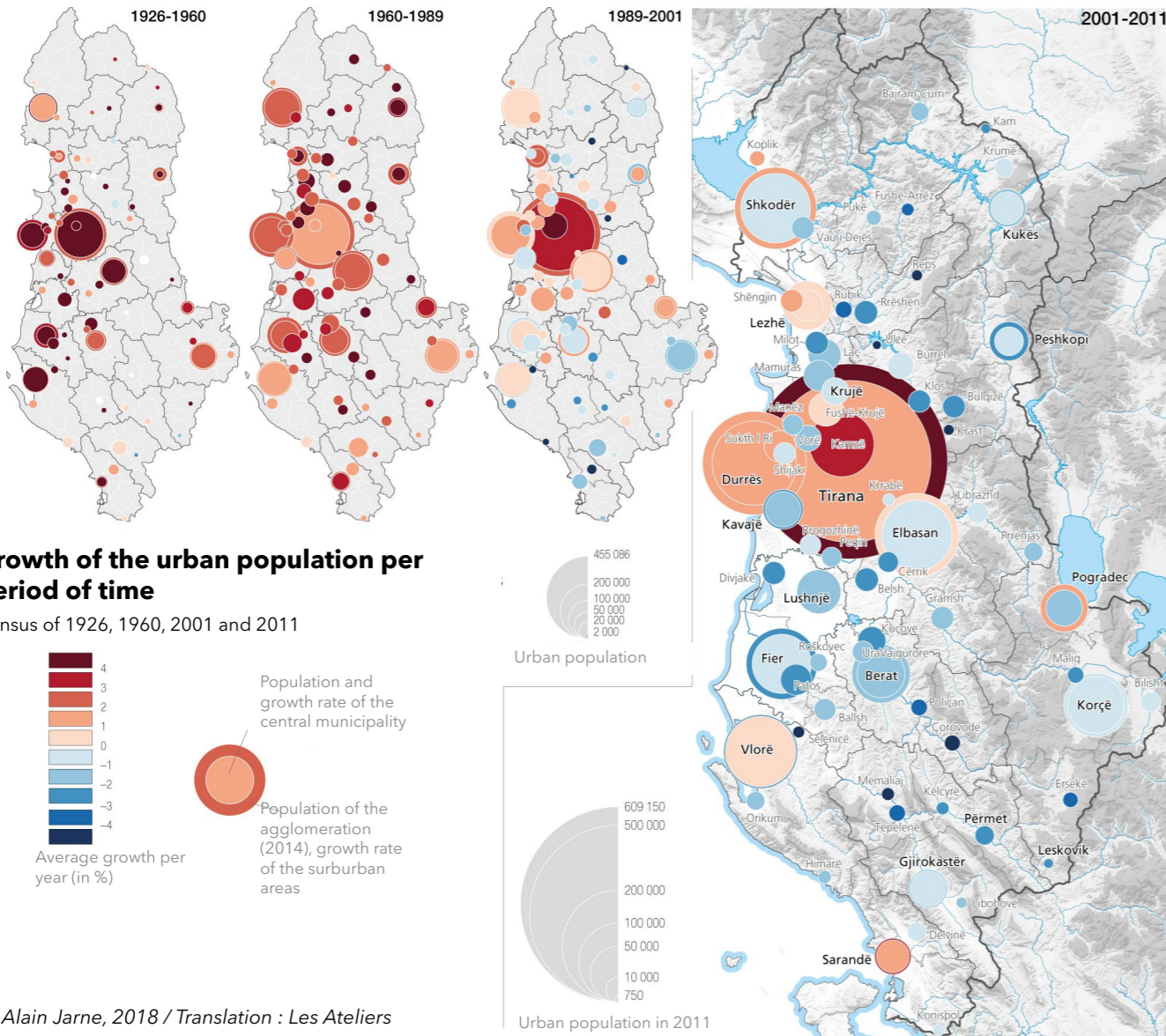
grants. But on the other hand, this decentralization materialized in rural areas through some modern elements: electrification and telecommunications, the establishment of schools, hospitals, cultural centres and new tools for agriculture. In the end, the proportion between urban and rural populations remained relatively stable for 30 years.

This period led to a certain delay in the urbanization of the country compared to Western countries. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that since the fall of communism, Albanian cities – and especially the Tirana metropolis – are catching up. The Tirana-Durrës urban area has become Albania's main area of demographic growth: from about 500,000 inhabitants in 1989, the metropolitan area grew to about 920,000 inhabitants in 2011 and is now home to more than a million inhabitants in 2020. It is in fact the only area currently demonstrating a level of demographic growth in Albania.

The delayed rural flight

Rural areas have seriously been depopulating over the last 30 years. Since after the fall of communism, these areas were neglected by the government and did not receive investments. The country's rural villages are marked by poverty compared to urban areas, with low access to public services and markets, and deficient public infrastructure. Economic reasons have been at the centre of these migrations: research shows that in almost three-quarters of the post-1990 internal movements, migration of households was attributed to factors such as starting a new job, looking for a better job or having insufficient land. These changes were also encouraged by the privatization process of nearly all previously public-held land in 1992: it gave everyone the chance to own their own dwelling by allowing them to purchase it at a symbolic price.

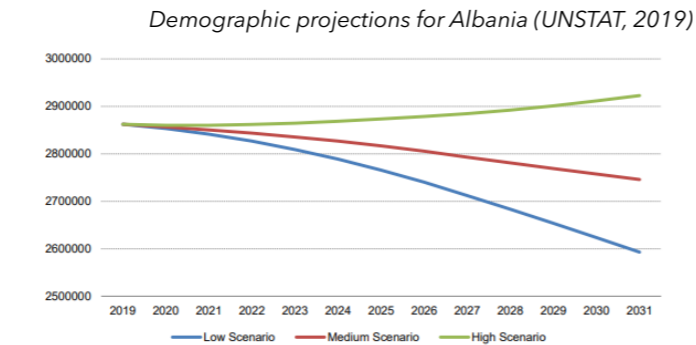
The massive influx of newcomers to the capital city also had the effect of what Erka Caro calls the "ruralization" of Albanian cities: the large informal and suburban districts of Kamëz or other areas were occupied by former villagers. This aspect was enforced by the fact that many long-time city dwellers were leaving the city to take their chance abroad.



Demographics: External migrations

Massive emigration

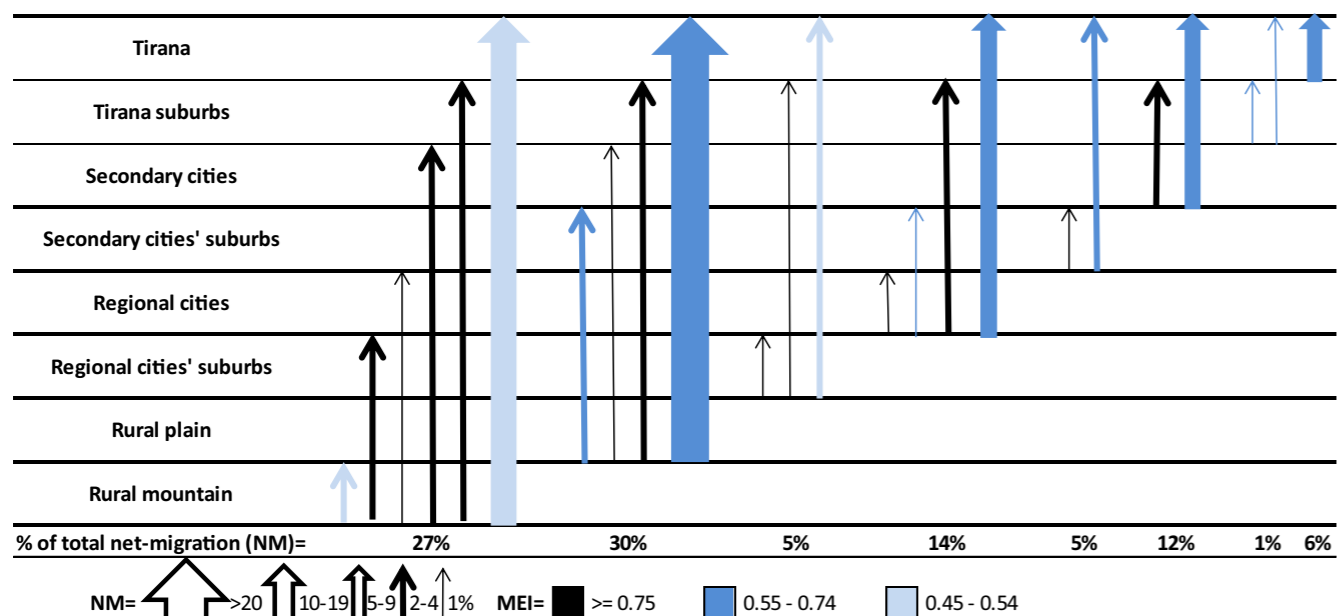
The number of Albanians leaving their country has been even higher than those of rural-to-city migrants. The abrupt opening of the country in the 90s has resulted in a massive emigration. Two big waves can be noted (one at the beginning of 1991 and a second in 1997), but in general there has been a steady flow since the fall of the dictatorship. Official data from the 2001 and 2011 censuses show that more than 600,000 Albanians emigrated between 1990 and 2001, while some 481,000 people migrated during the next intercensal decade of 2001-2011. In 2016, around 1.4 million Albanian citizens were living outside the territory of Albania, which represents 1/3 of the country's population (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tirana, 2017). Italy and Greece host most of the Albanian diaspora (with 467,687 and 354,456 Albanian citizens, respectively, in 2016), followed by the US and other European countries. The emigration rate has declined in the last decade but remains worrying as the country's fertility rate cannot compensate for the loss. The country is therefore experiencing a depopulation that is unlikely to end in the coming years, according to the UN and INSTAT, even if the national statistic institute is less pessimistic than international organizations.



Socio-economic factors explain most of these dynamics: unemployment and poverty are the first reasons mentioned in the existing literature. Nowadays, and with such a large diaspora, it is no surprise to note that remittances play an important role in the Albanian economy. Remittances represented 8 to 22 per cent of the GDP in the last 30 years, higher than exports or net foreign direct investment.

Return migration also started to be a growing trend in the 2000s. The stabilization of the Albanian economy and politics as well as the difficulty that some migrants faced abroad brought some locals back. For instance, during the period of 2007-2012, between 18% to 22% of the migrants in Greece (equivalent to approximately 180,000 individuals) returned to Albania.

Spatial patterns of net migration across the urban hierarchy and abroad, population aged 15-64, Albania 1990-2007 (LSMS 2008 - Mathias Lerch)



Keeping the young and the educated

Another dimension to this phenomenon is "brain drain". Brain drain means the migration of educated persons and professionals from one country to another. As the massive emigration from Albania is predominantly affecting the young working-age population, some of the country's skilled labour force has left for other countries: in 2010 and 2011, some 31.3 per cent of Albanian tertiary-educated people were thought to be emigrants. The UNDP identifies three main groups among these educated emigrants. Firstly, engineers, agronomists, teachers, doctors and artists, among others, who emigrated in the early years of the post-socialist transition. Secondly, university lecturers, researchers and other professionals, who emigrated legally. Finally, the last group is made up of students spending some part of their studies abroad. Some of them remain in their host countries after this experience.

perience.

As per now, the Albanian population is among the youngest in Europe. The mean age of Albania's population was 35.2 years in 2011 and its median age was 32.6 years, contrasting with the EU-28 median of 42.2 years in 2014. In Tirana, 48.5% of the population is under the age of 35 years old! These factors represent an opportunity to imagine an attractive future. The fact that Tirana has been awarded the title of European Youth Capital for 2022 – an initiative to empower young people and boost youth participation through projects focused on youth-related cultural, social, political and economic life and development – sounds like a signal in that direction.

Pyramid of ages in Albania (UNSTAT, 2017)

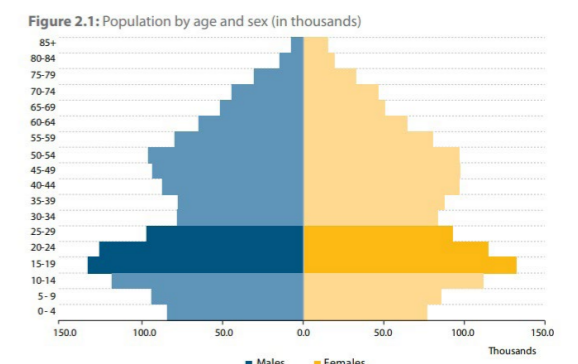
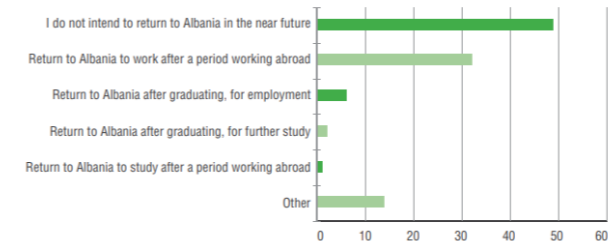


FIGURE 8. INTENTION OF ALBANIAN STUDENTS TO RETURN TO ALBANIA AFTER GRADUATION, BY %



The Tirana-Durrës corridor

The overwhelming weight of “Durana” in Albania

Not only does Tirana attract the young and educated population from all over the country, but it also has an overwhelming weight in Albania’s economy. It accounts for 40% of the country’s GDP. It is the commercial and manufacturing centre of the country, home to about half of all Albanian companies and three-quarters of foreign-owned enterprises. The city hosts 20 of the country’s 40 universities. The two start-up incubators in Albania – Oficina and Yunus Social Business – are located in Tirana.

Tirana is classified by the GaWC as a “Gamma” world city: a world city linking smaller regions or states to the world economy. It jumped in 2020 from “Gamma –” to “Gamma”, meaning the city has reached a higher level of international connectedness.

As Tirana is crucial to Albania’s economy, its connection to the rest of the country and to the world is decisive. In this sense, Durrës, Albania’s main port town, located only 32 km West of Tirana, has a specific and complementary role: that of connecting the capital city to the sea. The Tirana-Durrës corridor (nicknamed Durana) functions as a cohesive area and generates 48% of the GDP and represents



Durrës has recently revamped its waterfront public spaces



the region with the highest income per capita, which is 1.32 times more than the national average.

Durrës is the second biggest city in Albania (about 290,000 inhabitants, Eurostat). It is a dynamic city with complementary assets to Tirana. Its long sandy beaches are one of the main tourist destinations in Albania. It is home to Albania’s main port – the 10th largest cargo port on the Adriatic Sea – which handles more than 3.4 million tonnes of cargo per year. The port has a significant passenger activity, carrying 878,867 ferry passengers in 2019 and offering a daily trip to Bari in Italy.

The Port of Durrës is located in proximity to the city (Durrës Port Authority)

The crucial corridor between the two cities

This port holds an important potential for future development. Durrës is located at a geostrategic position in the Balkans and Europe, a gateway between the Black Sea and Adriatic Sea. Durrës marks the entrance to the Pan-European Corridor VIII, one of the crucial international corridors in Eastern and



Path of the Pan-European Corridor VIII



Path of the trainline between Durrës, Tirana and the airport

Central Europe, that aims to efficiently connect both seas. However, the corridor still lacks a continuous train line or a four-lane highway that stretches the entire length of its path.

A train line between Durrës and Tirana was built during 1948–1949 and started to operate in 1949. This 38-km railway was the second national line to be built for Hekurudha Shqiptare (HSH), which is still the national state-owned operator. The trains are hauled by diesel electric locomotives and the journey lasts about 49 minutes. Nevertheless, the train line now terminates in Kashar, a few kilometres away from the city centre of Tirana. The Tirana train station was actually torn down in 2013 to make way for the lengthening of the Zogu I Boulevard. Local buses provides the link to the city centre of Tirana. As of December 2020, the HSH has uploaded

a “theoretical timetable” showing two daily trains in both directions. Trains are currently not running due to the COVID crisis, which has made the HSH short on fuel and drivers.

Projects have been launched to rehabilitate and upgrade the railway line between Durrës and the new train station in Tirana (Tirana Public Transport Terminal (PTT)), located about one kilometre away from the original station. Approximately five kilometres of new railway line between the Tirana PTT and the Tirana International Airport (TIA) will also be constructed. This project should allow the trains to reach speeds of at least 100 km/h and offer a more regular service. Albania awarded a technical consulting contract for railway modernization in February 2020.

Parallel to this railway path is State Road 2 (SH2), a four-lane highway linking Durrës to Tirana. It was the first highway to be reconstructed following the fall of communism, though along a different path than its predecessor. From Durrës, the highway bypasses the road to Tirana International Airport and ends at the Kamëz Overpass in the outskirts of Tirana, where it meets the SH1 highway heading to northern Albania and the 5th ring road (in the process of completion) surrounding the capital city.

The lands around the highway are under pressure and are experiencing some changes in their land use. About 50% of them would still be devoted to agriculture and a quarter to industry and commerce, but the currently growing number of commercial and industrial activities along the axis is leading the whole area to become an industrial corridor.

Looking towards the future

National and regional plans

The General National Spatial Plan

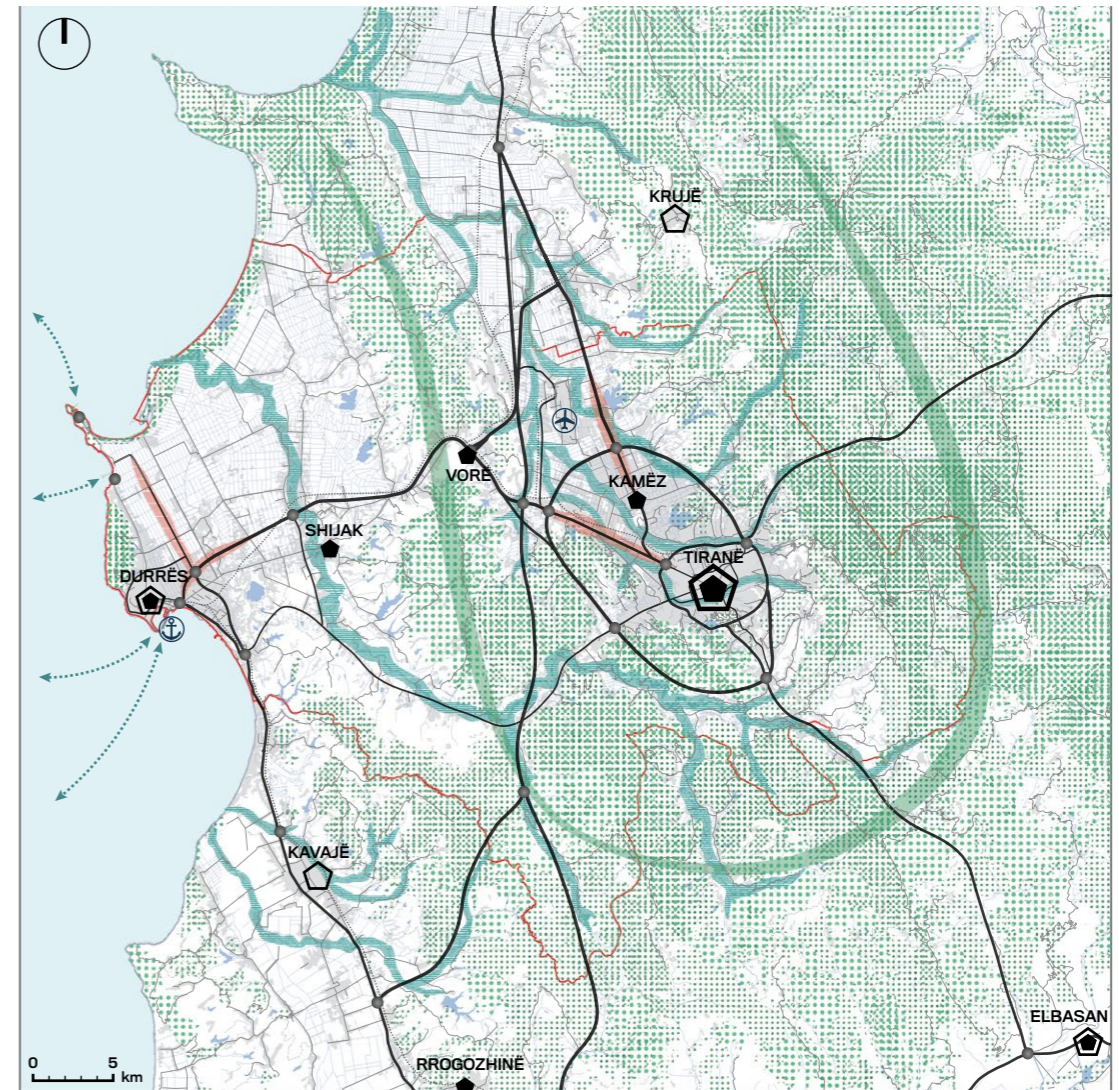
The General National Spatial Plan (GNSP) – Albania 2030 – is the first national spatial planning elaborated in Albania. Prepared during two years by the National Territorial Planning Agency and the Ministry of Urban Development, it follows the momentum created by the 2014 administrative reform. It was approved by the Council of Ministers in 2016. This 250-page document establishes the principles for an integrated development and the legal framework on which the secondary and local plans will be detailed.

The vision of the territorial development is summed up as followed: *“An integrated centre in the European economic and infrastructure system, a diverse and competitive economy within the Balkans, a state aiming at equality of access to infrastructure, economy and knowledge, ensuring the protection of natural, historical and cultural heritage, with the aim of becoming an authentic destination.”*

The GNSP acknowledges the recent unequal and mono-centric development of the country and the sharp disparities between the rapid urbanization associated with a high concentration of businesses and populations in Tirana and Durrës, and the depopulation of rural areas and smaller cities. As a reaction, the GNSP offers the perspective of a “polycentric, comprehensive and densifying territorial development for the purpose of smart growth and [the] mitigation of economic and social disparities”. The plan also provides for a specific protection of the coastal areas and monitoring of the activities on the coast.



Map projecting the main intentions of the General National Plan "Albania 2030"

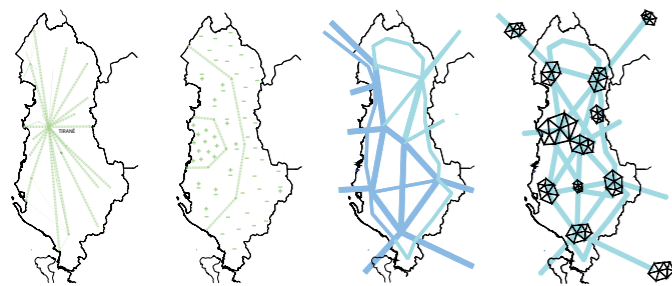


The “Durana” Integrated Cross-Sectorial Plan (ICSP)

As the General National Spatial Plan identified the Tirana-Durrës corridor as one of the most important economic areas in the country and in the Balkan region as a whole, the Ministry of Urban Development, in cooperation with the National Territorial Planning Agency, came up with the Integrated Cross-Sectorial Plan (ICSP) for the economic area of Tirana-Durrës to ensure a sustainable territorial and urban development. The plan encompasses economic, territorial, touristic and environmental policies and provides guidelines to regulate and monitor them.

The ICSP envisions the metropolitan region as a competitive area driven by innovative investments, creative businesses and a high level of education and vocational training, that also respects and preserves its environment with an efficient mobility system.

To face the urban sprawl across agricultural lands and the degradation of the landscape and environment, the ICSP has taken the direction of competitiveness and a balanced polycentric development. It promotes densification and the revitalization of compact urban centres, the integration of informal areas, territorial zoning and the consolidation of agricultural land, an integrated mobility system and the development of touristic zones.



Current and future organization of the system of zones, corridors and centres, as well as their overlapping

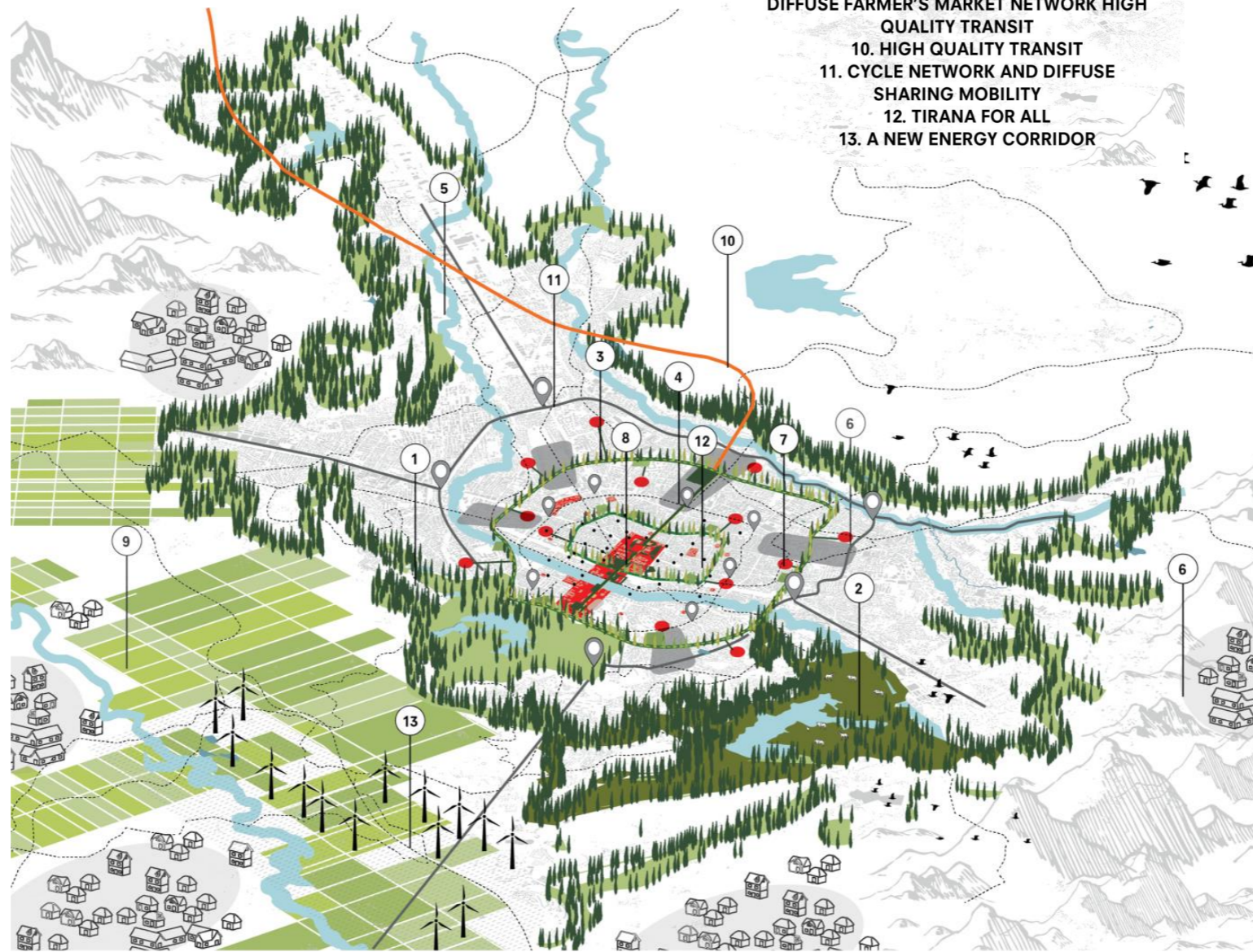
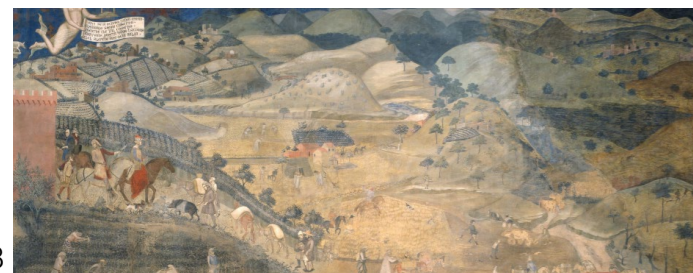
TR030: a kaleidoscopic and sustainable metropolis

A new general local plan

In a parallel movement with the national and Durana plans, and following the territorial reform, the Tirana Municipal Council adopted a General Local Plan called "TR030" in April 2017. This plan was developed by the Italian architect Stefano Boeri and the UNLAB studio based in Rotterdam (NL). TR030 defines the legal framework for the strategic and spatial development perspective for the future of Tirana. The vision is projected over the next 15 years, with provisions for 138 pilot projects and the establishment of a list of priority interventions in the short-, medium- and long-term. Three main parts are to be found in the development plan: the Fresco (the territorial analysis), the Atlas (13 strategic projects) and the Chart (the regulatory policies).

TR030 starts with three fresco panels from Ambrogio Lorenzetti: Allegory of Good Government, Effects of Good Government in the City and Effects of Good Government in the Country (1338, Siena). The paintings depict how good government needs to be thought of as a balance between the city and the countryside. Thanks to the expansion of its administrative borders, nearly 25 times in size, Tirana may now be equipped with a plan at the right scale. The vision is ambitious, and depicts the capital city as a polycentric ("kaleidoscopic") metropolis with a specific attention to the recovery of the landscape.

Lorenzetti's fresco of Good Government in the City and in the Country



Illustrations of the Boulevard, blue and green corridors, the Metrobosco Orbital Forest and a new agricultural system

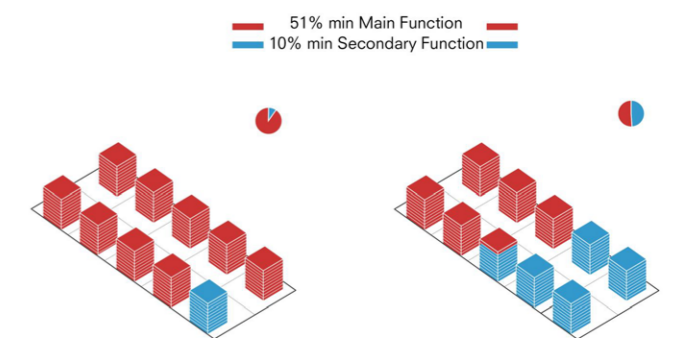
13 strategic projects

The thirteen strategic projects mostly aim at giving birth to the vision of a green and polycentric city. The most iconic is the Orbital Forest: a belt of 2 million trees surrounding the city, mitigating land consumption and linking the natural elements as a green corridor. Tirana City planted 100,000 trees in the year after the adoption of TR030 and encouraged citizens to take part in the tremendous project. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) agreed in 2020 to lend up to 7 million euros to the Tirana Municipality to achieve the Orbital Forest. In the same "vegetalized" spirit, the "2nd ring" and the "4th ring" are green belts within the city allowing for soft mobility, and the Farkë Lake is envisaged as a protected natural area.

A polycentric organization is guaranteed by "transformation areas and new polarities in the urban area", most of them being already identified as "development poles" in the 2012 General Local Plan. These areas and poles are important and multifunctional projects at the district scale. Most of them already have master plans designed by international urban studios; the earthquake and the need for housing accelerated the process. Ten rural centres are also designated as dynamic epicentres to limit urban growth in the rural areas.

Other projects include the establishment of new schools, a new agricultural system at the metropolitan scale, high-quality transit and soft mobility, and a renewable energy corridor along the Elbasan-Krabbë valley.

As part of the Chart section, TR030 also introduces the possibility of a flexible land-use system.



After the crisis

Reconstruction post-earthquake

Following the important impacts of the 2019 earthquake, the Albanian State and the Municipality of Tirana launched an emergency programme to rebuild homes for the numerous families affected by the catastrophe. These programmes have been allowed through gigantic grants from the international community, totalling €1.18 billion (400 million from the EU). The families will get these homes free-of-charge in new districts with settings similar to their original homes. A strict typology imposes an adjusted number of rooms according to the size of the family.

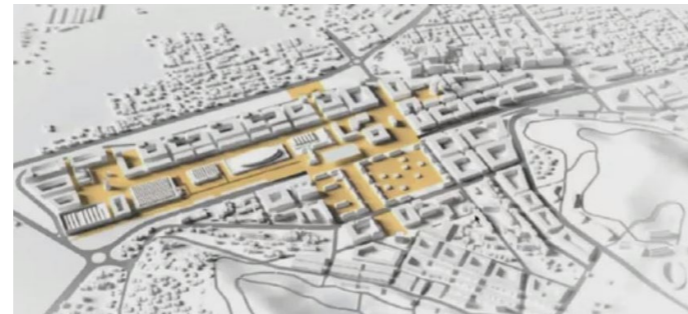
In Tirana, four urban areas and five villages have been identified for the hosting of these projects and the 7,100 families whose homes were damaged. In the city, four complete and multifunctional districts will be built-up: Kombinart, Tirana Riverside, Köder Kamëz and Shköze. The municipality aims to host more inhabitants than the affected families in order to densify the urban area and to meet the continuous demand for housing. The area of Köder Kamëz is home to the Agriculture University and student housing; the reconstruction will focus on these elements. Shköze is mostly an industrial area and has not received any plan yet.

Kombinat and Tirana Riverside are more advanced as their master plans have been unveiled: Italian star architects Marco Casamonti (Kombinat) and Stefano Boeri (Tirana Riverside) conceived contemporary and green cityscapes for the new neighbourhoods.

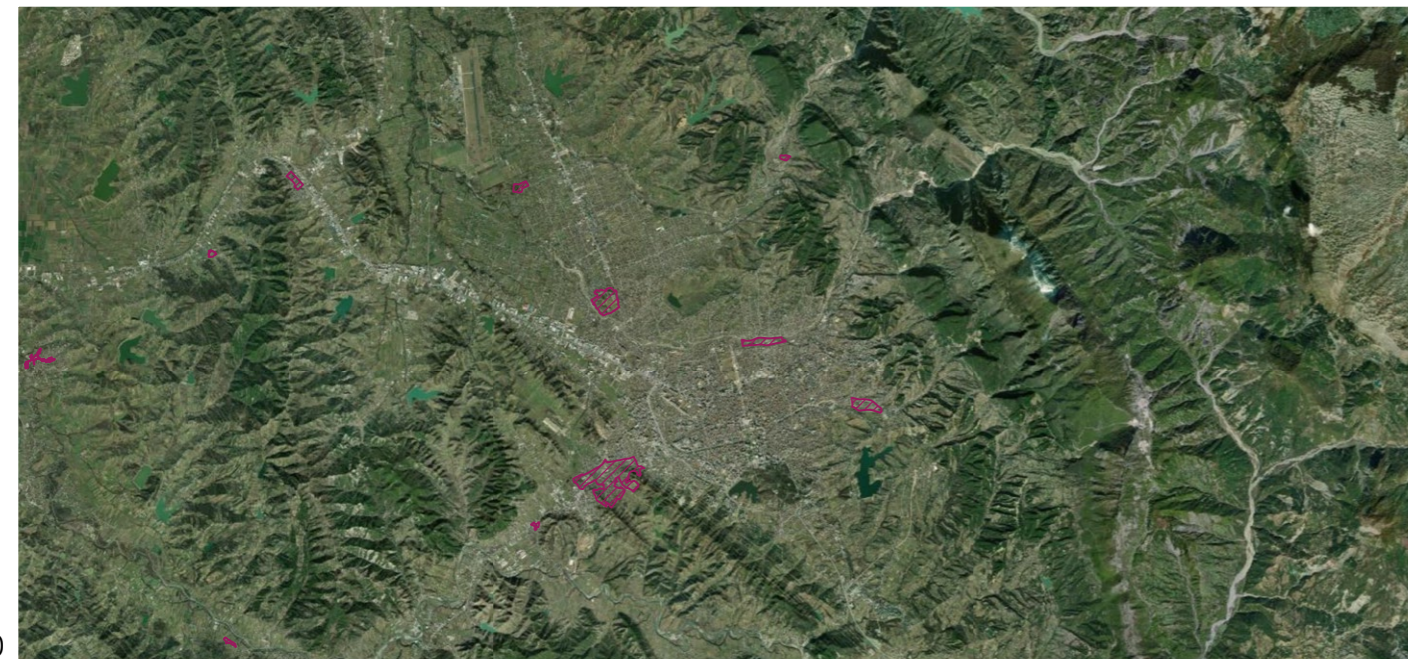
Kombinat, a peripheral and communist district largely impacted by the earthquake, was also one of



Visuals of a soft mobility axis in Kombinart



Pedestrian area in the Kombinart masterplan



Location of the reconstruction areas in the Tirana metropolitan area (AKPT)

the “transformation areas” of the TR030 plan. It will become Kombinart, an artistic hub hosting 21,000 inhabitants (including 8,000 touched by the earthquake), a shopping centre, two museums and the University of Architecture. Some of the communist fabric will be kept, but at least 50 low-rise buildings from the regime will be demolished.

have changed and to bring in services, the houses are being rebuilt into small neighbourhoods. As the demand to settle in rural areas remains low, there will only be as many houses as families affected by the earthquake. Work on these areas has already started: on 8 December 2020, 52 out of the 870 planned individual houses were announced to have been completed.



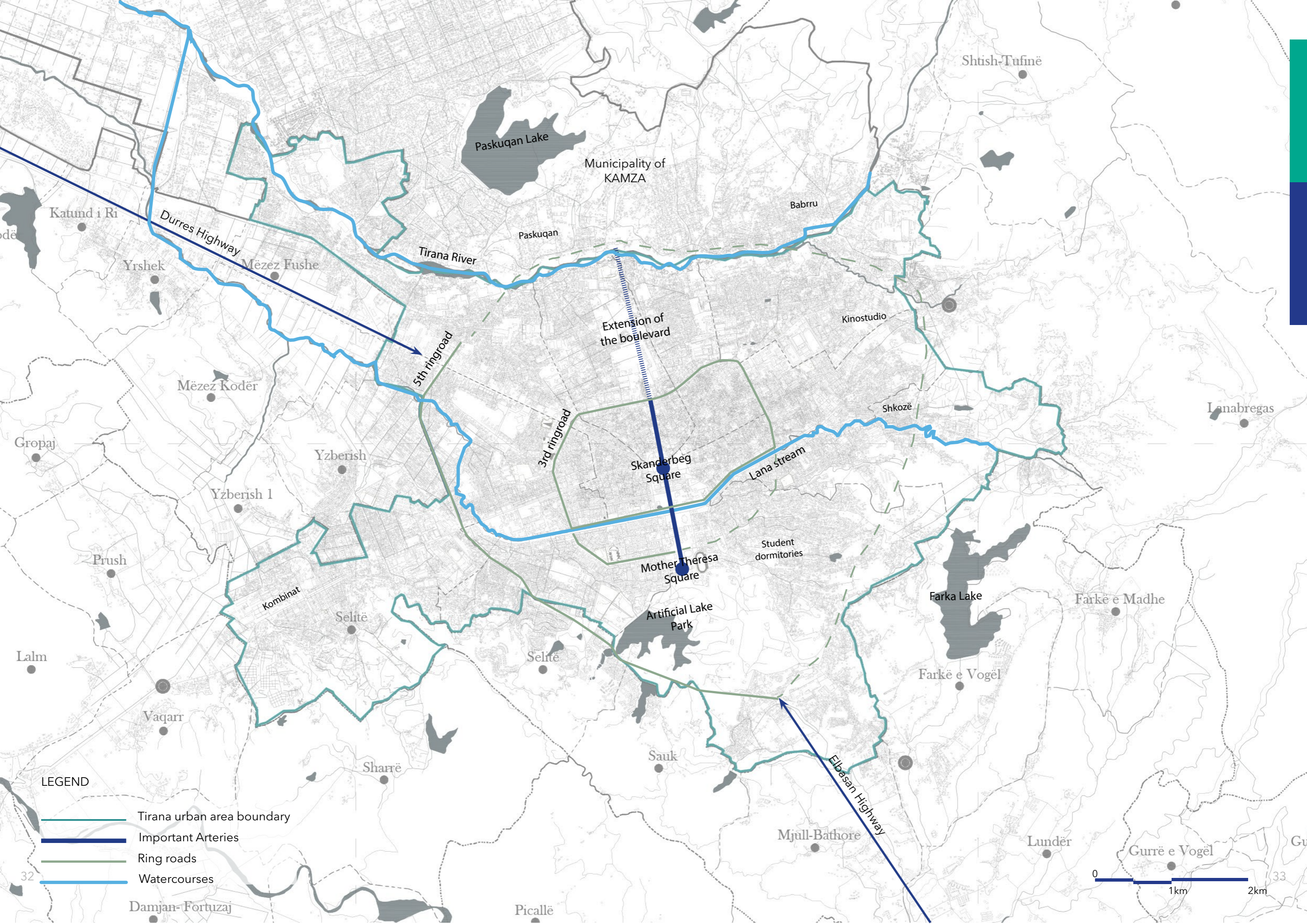
Boeri foresees the post-covid city as a pedestrian and green area, surrounded by drones

In the north of the capital, along the Tiranë River, Boeri presents Tirana Riverside as a technologically advanced, green and sustainable neighbourhood, created to respond to the new needs of the post-COVID-19 pandemic period. The 12,000-inhabitant area will have a few high-rise buildings and will be equipped with Smart City and anti-seismic technologies.





The rural areas identified are Pezë, Baldushk, Zall-Herr, Ndroq and Vaqarr. In these areas, houses used to be isolated from each other. Because lifestyles

The EU as destination

In all likelihood, Albania’s future will be on an international level linked with the European Union. Albania applied for EU membership on 28 April 2009, which led to the creation of a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) between the two entities. The SAA is based mostly on the integration of the accumulated European legislation, facilitated by financial assistance. Albania had to pass reforms in its justice system and create a new electoral law, open trials for corrupt judges and improve human rights protections for its Greek minority, among other actions. Since June 2014, it has been an official candidate for accession. Accession talks officially started in March 2020, at the same time as North Macedonia. The continuation of these talks should have been held in December 2020, but they have been postponed as the Netherlands opposed Tirana’s accession, claiming that it had not succeeded in meeting all of the conditions set by the EU Council.



LEGEND

-  Tirana urban area boundary
-  Important Arteries
-  Ring roads
-  Watercourses



Part 2

Challenges for the #Tirana100 metropolis

Natural landscapes of the Tirana basin

Ecosystems under pressure

Tirana's urban core is located on the Tirana plain, a flat terrain surrounded by Mount Dajti (1600 m) in the east and the Sharra Hills (about 400 m) in the west. Spanning nearly 5 km, the plain continues to the northwest up to the towns of Fushë-Krujë and Lezhë. The city has expanded by nearly 20 km² in every direction since the 90s: urban developments now reach the foot of Mount Dajti in the east, follow the Tirana-Durrës corridor in the west and continue on to the northern plain. Some of this urbanization is happening in environmentally, geologically and geomorphologically sensitive areas in the east and southwest, such as in the Farkë and Dajti zones. The area lying between the Lana and Tiranë Rivers is now fully urbanized.

The Lana is a small river – the main branch of the River Tiranë – which runs through the city from east to west. It originates in the western part of Priska and is 29 km long. At the entrance to the city, the Lana follows the path of the eastern mountains before feeding into the River Tiranë, which finds its source to the northeast of Mount Dajti. After passing through the city, the River Tiranë continues in a northerly direction where it becomes part of the Ishëm River, eventually flowing into the Adriatic Sea.

According to a study conducted by the Institute of Environmental Policy in 2010, the waters of the River Tiranë contained nitrite values 4 to 32 times higher than the maximum allowed by the EU directive on fish protection. The values of coliform bacteria found in faeces were also 13 times higher than EU standards. The destruction of the River Tiranë's ecosystem has been aggravated by the discharging of solid waste directly into the river, a phenomena which can be observed in many places. This has led to the shrinkage of the river and the destruction of the river bed, thus transforming the river into a simple sewer channel.



The entrance to the Dajti mountains



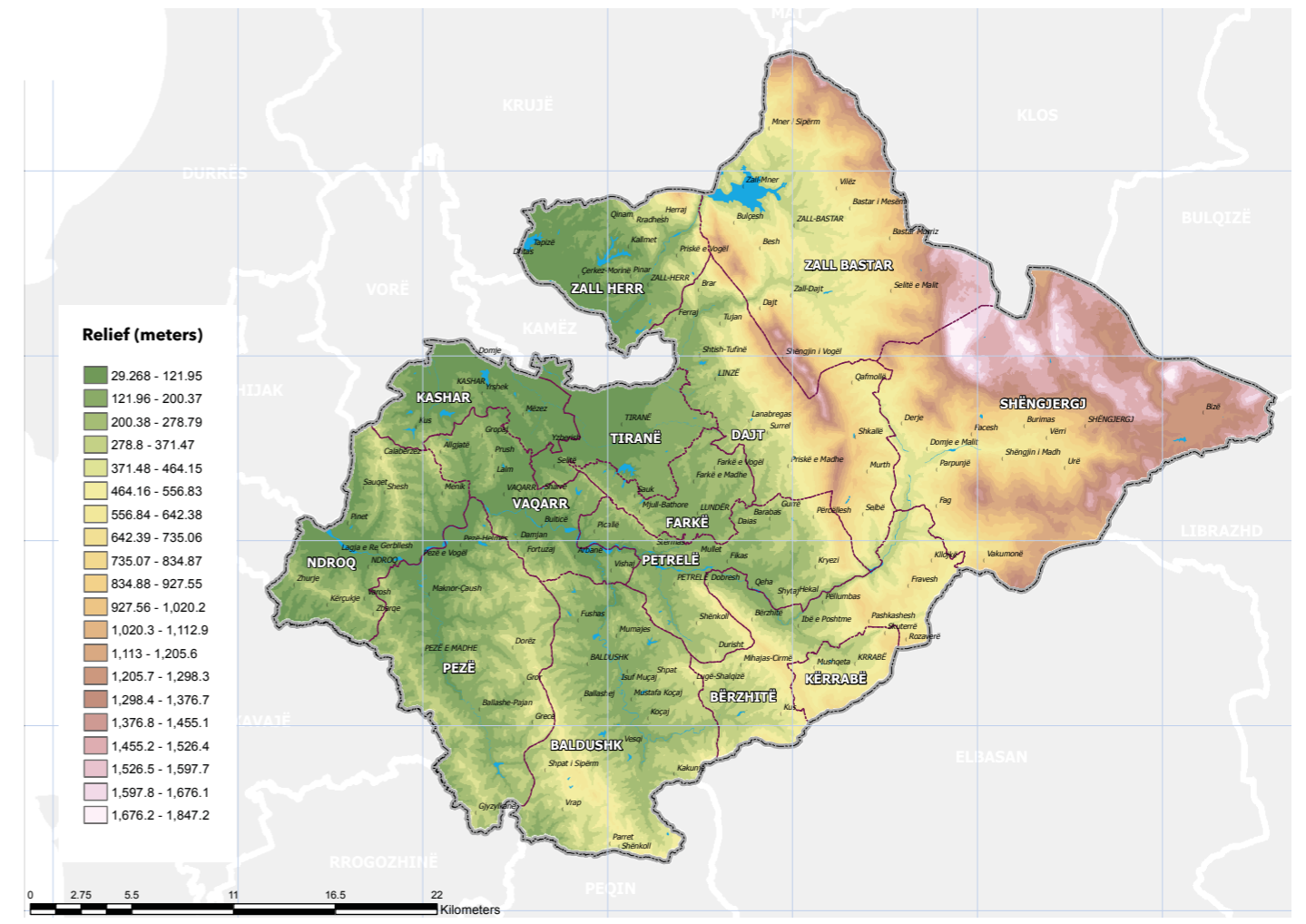
The Tirana River near Paskuqan



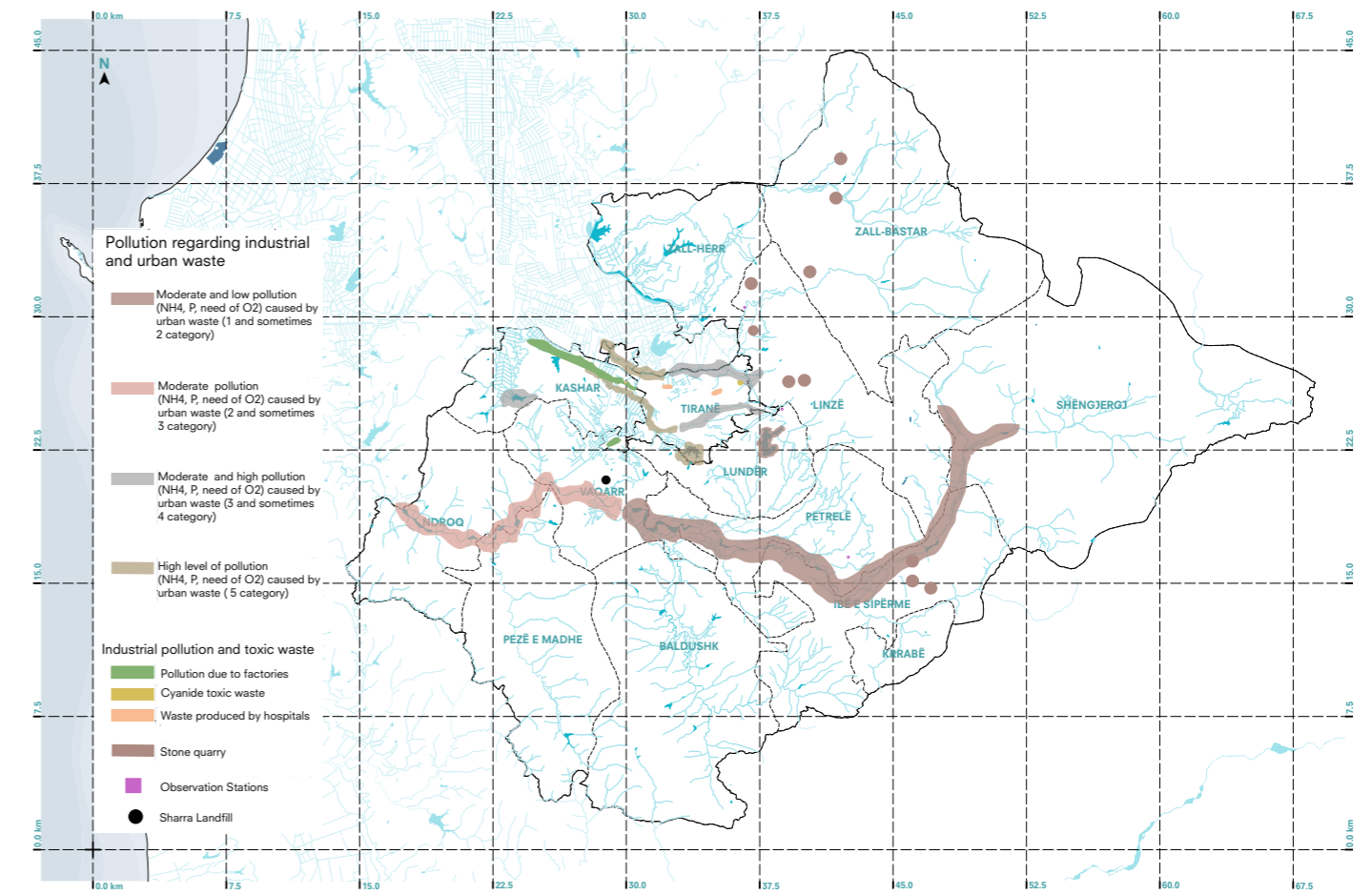
Lana River in the city centre



Solid waste along an affluent of the Tiranë river



Topographic map (TR030)



Map of environmental hazards (TR030) 37

What forms of protection are needed for the numerous natural spaces?

With a large territory of 1,110.03 km², the Tirana Municipality hosts both urban areas and natural spaces. Whereas the 10th administrative unit of the capital city has a very high density (36,122 inhabitants per km² in 2017), villages such as Shëngjergj count only 13 inhabitants per km²! Large natural spaces (forests and pastures) are present across the municipality.

The most famous protected area is the Dajti National Park. Created in 1966, it covers 293 km². It is currently managed by the Albanian Agency of Protected Areas (AKZM) and Tirana Municipality Parks and Recreation Agency (APR).

Deforestation and waste management are the main threats to these natural spaces. Deforestation happens mainly for individual heating needs and the illegal development of agricultural lands. These changes in land use occurred mainly during the period right after the fall of communism due to the absence of regulations.

Although the municipalities were enlarged, the 2014 territorial reform also brought new possibilities for Tirana to protect its natural spaces. The planning of forests and pastures came under the jurisdiction of the Tirana Municipality (Tirana is the only Albanian municipality with this authority). The municipality implemented a new protection plan, albeit one based on the former plan. The disadvantage to this is that it does not completely fit with the reality. Some "forest and pasture areas" are actually not forests anymore. The question of how to adapt the plan to today's current reality, to officially designate these areas as agricultural land is on the table but has yet to be resolved.

The TR030 aims to make Tirana a green city reconciled with its metropolitan ecosystem. The Orbital Forest, the green and blue corridors and the protection of important natural spaces are strong and visible actions towards this vision.

The city also has a Green City Action Plan (GCAP). Finalized in April 2018, it was prepared by the ARUP and developed for the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). The GCAP serves to support the establishment of a transport system consisting of low-emission buses, green corridors and the creation of legislation to protect green spaces. It also promotes an energy-efficiency programme for municipal buildings and encourages investment in household waste collection and recycling centres.



The second and fourth ring, and the orbital forest (TR030)



Lana River Technological Park

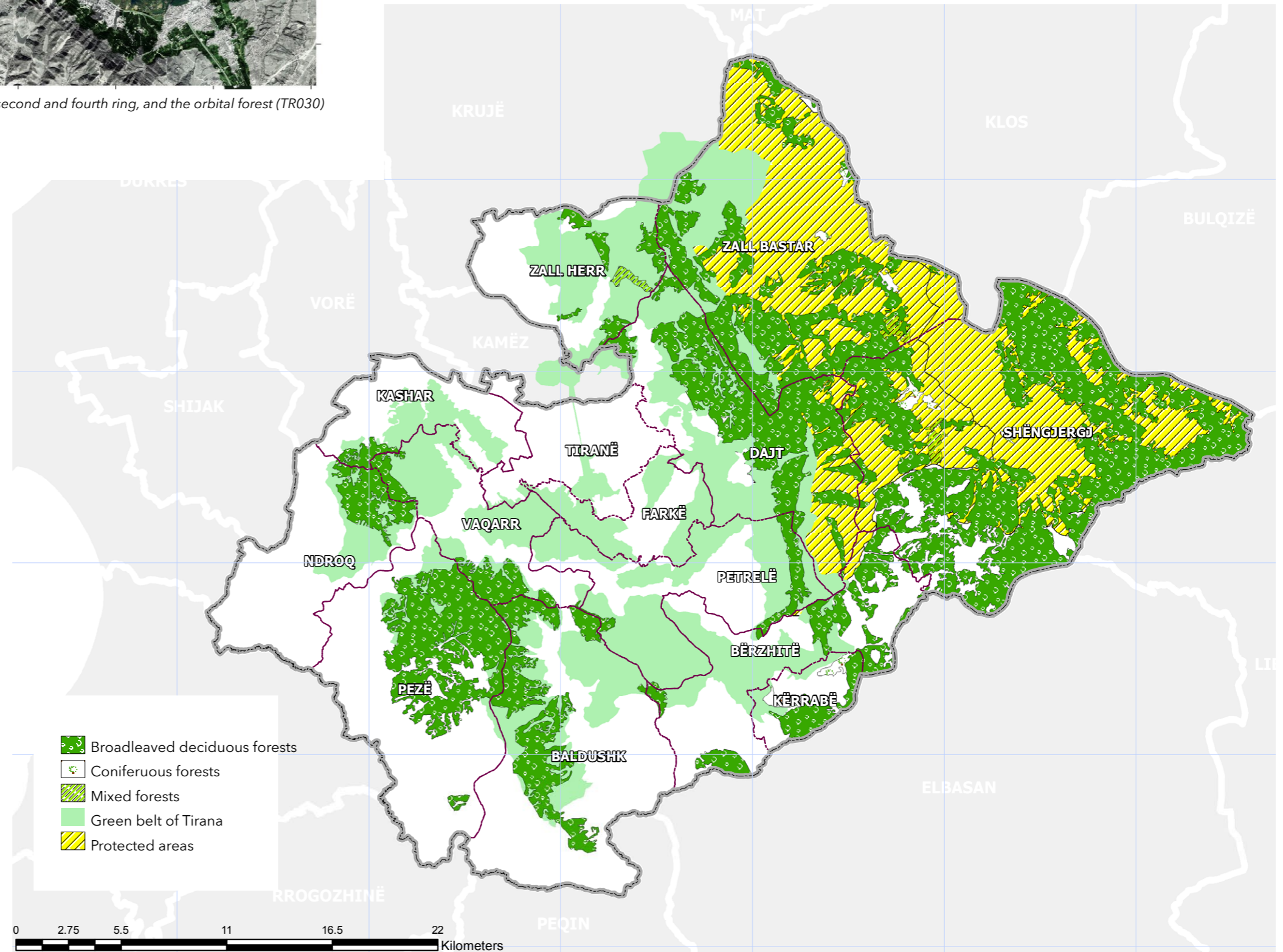


Tirana River Park

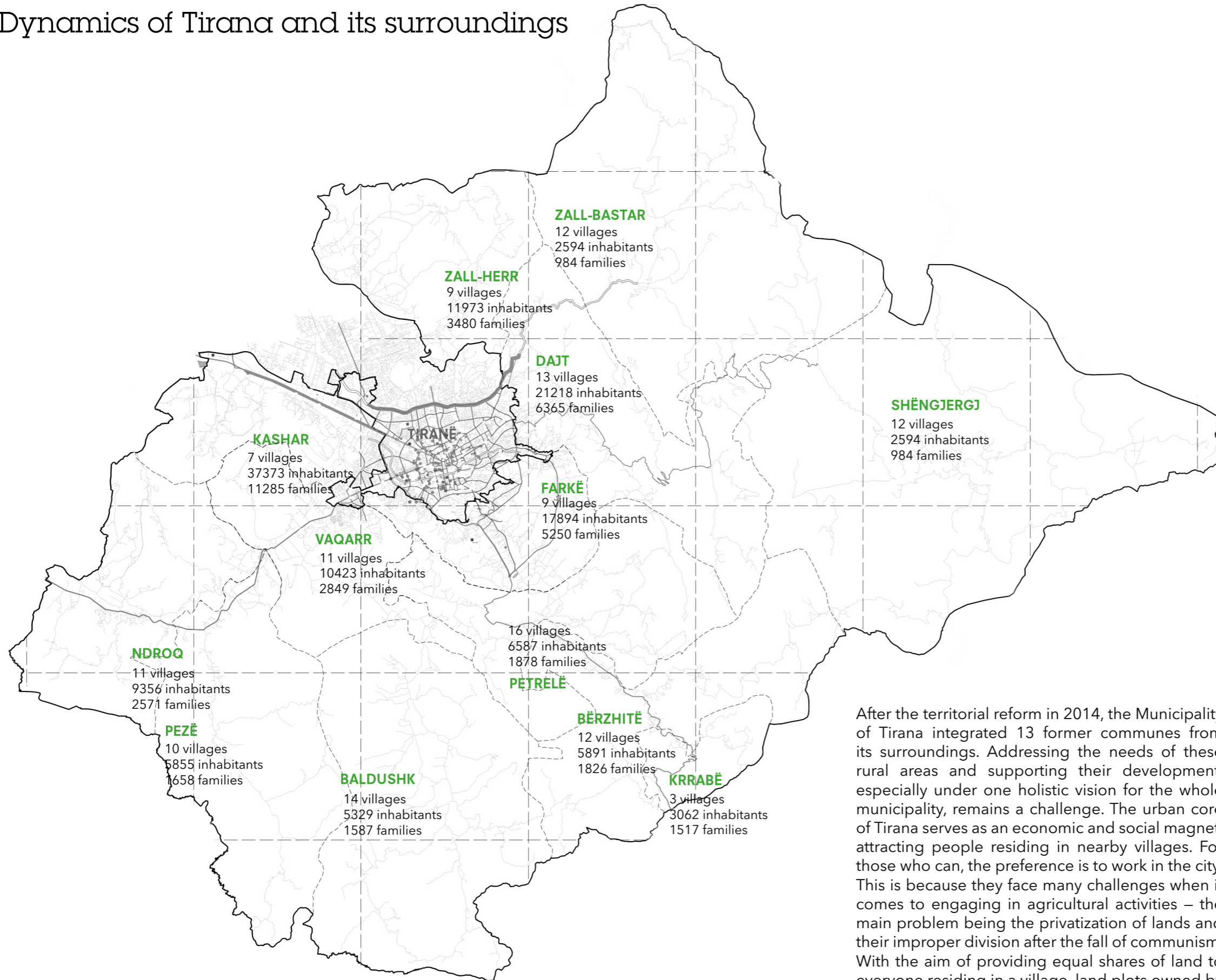


Erzen River Park

Visuals of green and blue corridors from the TR030



Dynamics of Tirana and its surroundings



Map of Tirana's rural administrative units (TR030/Les Ateliers)

After the territorial reform in 2014, the Municipality of Tirana integrated 13 former communes from its surroundings. Addressing the needs of these rural areas and supporting their development, especially under one holistic vision for the whole municipality, remains a challenge. The urban core of Tirana serves as an economic and social magnet, attracting people residing in nearby villages. For those who can, the preference is to work in the city. This is because they face many challenges when it comes to engaging in agricultural activities – the main problem being the privatization of lands and their improper division after the fall of communism. With the aim of providing equal shares of land to everyone residing in a village, land plots owned by one family were dispersed across different parts of the area. Land was divided into narrow strips,



Stream of Zhullima in Baldushk (tirana.al)



Eye of the Cyclops, Krrabë (tirana.al)



Agricultural fields, Ndroq (tirana.al)



Dajti National Park (tirana.al)

making their cultivation difficult and financially infeasible for their owners. Besides this, ownership disputes over agricultural land continue to be very common and, in many cases, villagers do not have ownership titles, thereby preventing them from being eligible for grants or other support programmes.

The administrative units of Ndroq, Zall-Herr and Farkë are currently the territory's main agricultural producers. Besides vegetables, these areas are home to olive trees and vineyards.

Several villages have also started to gain attention due to their beautiful and rich landscapes, and have since become popular weekend destinations for Tirana residents.

Round Table

Balancing urban-rural development for territorial resilience

Introduction

The 2014 administrative reform transformed Tirana from a small capital city to a metropolitan region that absorbed its surrounding districts into one big entity: a small capital city of 40 km², Tirana is now a metropolitan region of more than a 1,000 km². Yet, most of these peripheral villages continue to see an exodus of young people and families due to a lack of jobs, infrastructure, services like schools and health care, and activities. This is not only detrimental to the safeguarding of the rich cultural heritage of these areas, but it also strains the city's resources due to increased social, economic and environmental costs.

As Tirana continues to develop, it needs to adopt a sustainable territorial strategy that simultaneously tackles rural development alongside the city's urban renovation projects. This round-table discussion intends to focus on the symbiotic relationship between the rural and the urban, while seeking optimal and ecologically sound development trajectories to prepare Tirana for a resilient future.

Fragmentation between city and land: Challenges and issues

It is important to remember the fact that, before becoming the capital of Albania, Tirana was a small town in perfect symbiosis with its surrounding villages. It was only from the moment its status changed that the aspiration to become a city began and thus the creation of a first fragmentation with its rural past. This has also greatly influenced the vision and mentality of the city's urban planning ever since – namely, the greater interest in urban spaces and the abandonment of rural areas in terms of planning. The complexity of managing rural areas for the Municipality of Tirana also comes from the fact that these rural areas are close to/are part of a growing metropolis that notably attracts the inhabitants of these remote suburbs which lack infrastructure and services. The following are some of the main challenges that these areas face in terms of development.

Rejection of past agricultural cooperatives

As pointed out, the rural areas in the outskirts of Tirana fell into a cooperative system of production during the communist era. With the end of the regime, the rejection of the political doctrine was accompanied by the abandonment of all systems set

up by the communist government. The same was true of agricultural cooperatives. Nowadays, it is very complicated for the Municipality of Tirana to establish cooperation between farmers without first encouraging a change in mentalities with regards to agricultural associations. However, for these farmers, collaboration is crucial in order to increase their production, to reduce production costs and to gain a place in the agricultural market.

Lack of human capital

Beyond the issue of mentalities, the rejection of collaboration between farmers also comes from the fact that human capital is very low in these rural areas and that the workforce is lacking when it comes to creating or further developing agricultural associations. It is a major drawback for agricultural productivity as a lot of agricultural land is simply not used, and it can become problematic for the environment.

Land fragmentation

After the fall of the communist regime in the 90s, farmland was privatized and then divided and subdivided into small plots of around 1.3 ha. The small size of the farms does not allow for efficient production and generates additional costs related to production that are difficult for farmers to manage. These costs include, among others, the maintenance of the drainage systems and flood risk prevention, but also the irrigation of the agricultural land. In addition, the small scale of the properties does not allow for access to state-financed grants, since their small amount makes such grants more difficult to allocate.

Property titles

Besides the small size of the land that everyone was able to recuperate, another big problem is the lack of valid property titles. Sometimes land was returned to its original owners (before all agricultural land became public property), sometimes to the farmer who had the right to use the land during the communist regime, which then resulted in conflicting titles. Another problem arising from the lack of an accurate title is the administrative processes involved in applying for funding.

Diversity of the land

It is important to mention that the rural zones in the outskirts of Tirana can be very different in terms of landscapes (plains, hills, mountains) and can also be located in protected areas. Such a case is the Bovilla watershed, which is part of the Dajti National Park but also the main source of potable water in Tirana: farms situated in this territory face high risks of erosion. This represents not only a risk for the farmers but also a risk for the whole city of Ti-

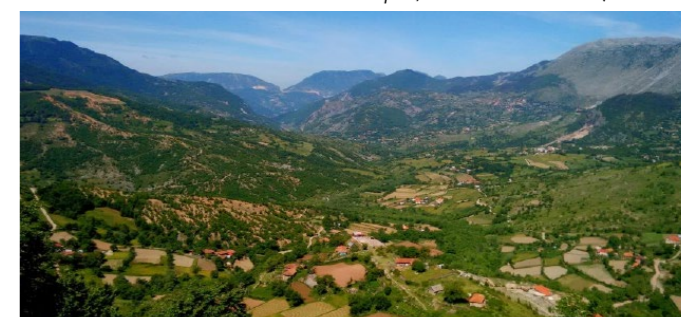
rana which could be deprived of its main source of drinking water.

Resilience and climate change

According to climate change projections concerning Albania, and particularly the western part of the country, high levels of rainfall over short periods of time will be experienced in the near future. This implies a tendency towards flooding and long periods of droughts. These changes raise two questions for people living in rural areas: the need for flood protection in these areas where infrastructure is not up to standard and the type of crops that should be planted since current varieties require a significant amount of water.



Vaqarr, west from Tirana (Tirana.al)



Shengjergj, in the mountains of eastern Tirana (UNDP Albania)



Pastures and urbanized land near Farkë lake

Steps towards a reconciliation between the urban and rural

Since the end of the communist regime, the mobility of Albanians has continued to increase – both towards foreign countries as well as to other urban areas within the country, especially the capital. Nonetheless, the rural areas around Tirana seem to be the most undeveloped and neglected. Inhabitants of these areas tend to leave “forever” by choosing to emigrate to another country or “for the day” by searching for employment in the city. With the past year and the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, many of these households have experienced periods of unemployment due to the closure of the city's shops and services and have returned to their land. How can this trend of a return to the rural continue to be forged and sustained over time?

Making the rural attractive

In order to inspire farmers to return to their land, it is important for the Municipality of Tirana to make the activity economically interesting, i.e. profitable. Various tools should be proposed to farmers such as the transmission of knowledge on how to develop their land, what to produce in order to meet demand, how to join together with other farmers in the form of agricultural collaborators or local action groups, etc.

Creation of an agricultural hub

At present, a private agricultural market exists in the north of Tirana. Nevertheless, it is difficult for many farmers to access. Therefore, with the help of AVITEM and AFD, the municipality has decided to create a new agri-hub. It is currently in the planning stage in which its implantation territory will be chosen, probably in the southern part of the city. This hub is conceived as a strategic project that will allow for:

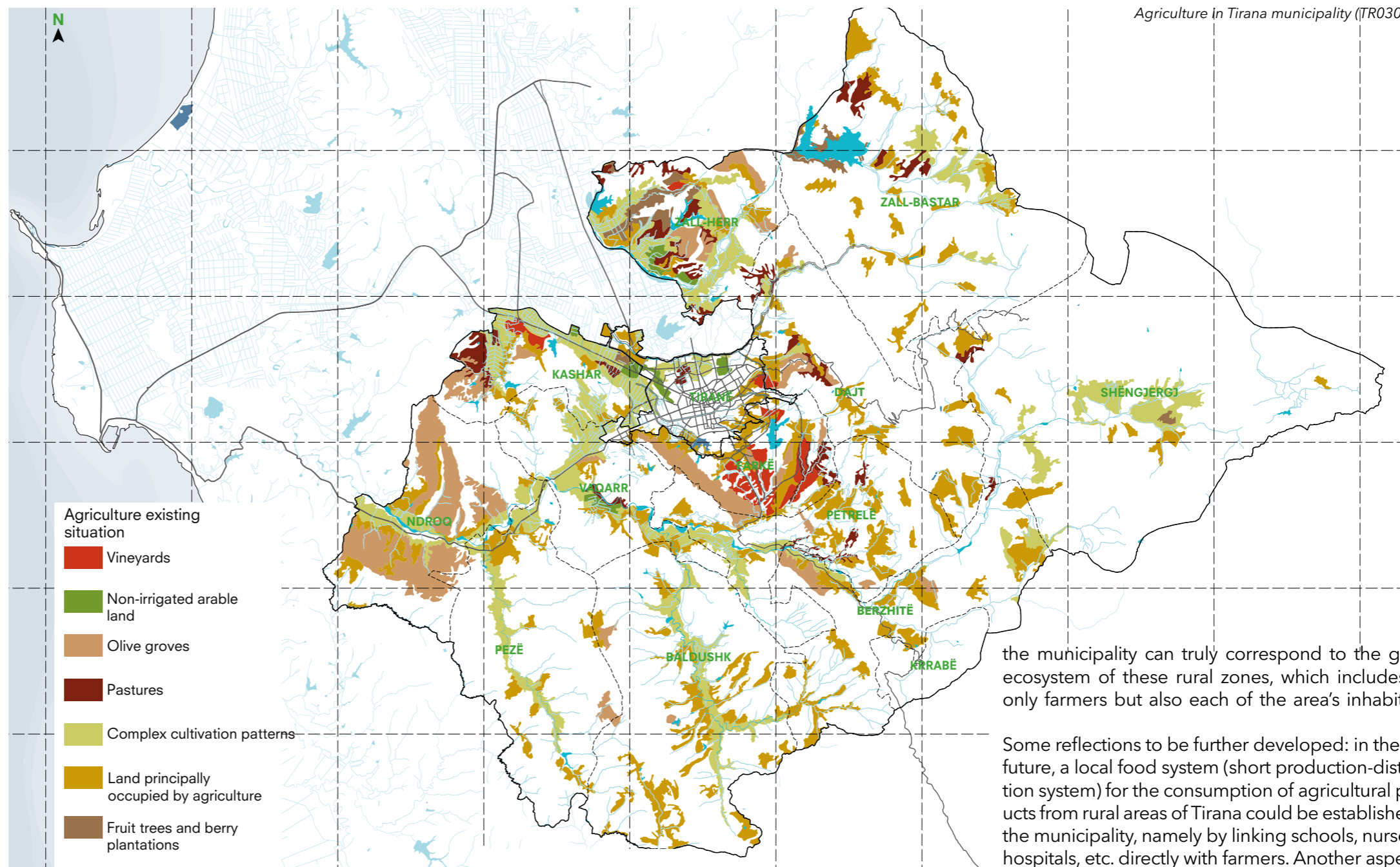
- the completion of the production circle with the creation of a distribution system and market space for producers
- services for farmers: training, production, marketing and market access assistance, etc.

Reconnection of producers and consumers

Since the earthquake of November 2019, which notably affected a significant portion of these rural areas, the Municipality of Tirana has embarked on a multi-centric approach to redesign the city. This has already allowed some of these areas to become more closely linked to the city centre through the provision of not only necessary permanent infrastructure and services, but also more punctual events such as specialized markets or celebrations based on traditional products from these areas. These new centres not only make the villages more attractive to their inhabitants, but also attract citizens from the city's urban area, thus shortening the distance between the demand for local agricultural products and the farmers themselves. For example, the village of Vaqarr offers three products that are mainly grown by its villagers: chicken, green salad and rocket salad. The municipality then takes on the responsibility of informing the inhabitants of Tirana about these products with the goal of orienting consumers towards these specialized villages and their agricultural markets.

Touristic function of the rural

The development of supplemental activities such as agritourism in rural areas could be a bridge linking the city with the farmers, thereby also being a source of profitability for the area's development. Options could include the creation of an olive tree or wine route, following the example of other countries.



The Subashi Olive Oil Enterprise: A success story example

In 2005, Silvana Subashi left her white collar job in Tirana to go back to her husband's village in Marikaj to work on his family's olive plantation and to start an olive oil business. Since then, she has diversified with other products from the orchard – herbs, olive oil cosmetics and olive wood products. Her investment in this project contributed to the growth of the region's local economy and also helped to "educate" other farmers. Silvana Subashi has since founded the Olive Oil Producers Association in Albania for which she is president.

Conclusion

To develop these rural areas that have become part of the Tirana Municipality since the administrative reform while simultaneously preserving their biodiversity, good governance must be the keyword so that all actors can work together. Transparency, along with a greater vision of the overall situation (through a systemic collection of data), is necessary so that each project implemented by

the municipality can truly correspond to the global ecosystem of these rural zones, which includes not only farmers but also each of the area's inhabitants.

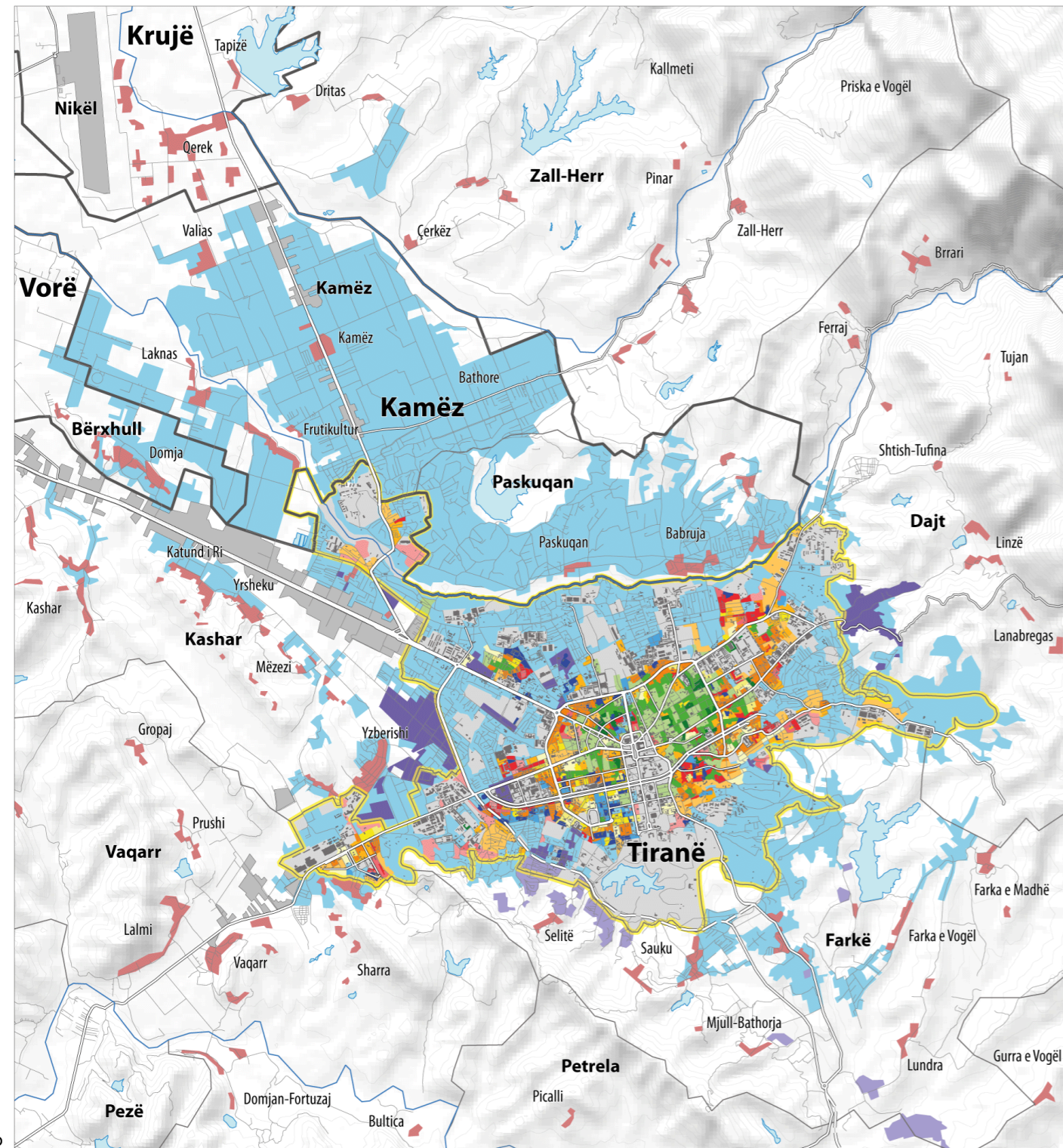
Some reflections to be further developed: in the near future, a local food system (short production-distribution system) for the consumption of agricultural products from rural areas of Tirana could be established by the municipality, namely by linking schools, nurseries, hospitals, etc. directly with farmers. Another aspect to consider is the establishment of a policy for landscape infrastructure in order to avoid a fragmented landscape as is the case actually (rural, informal, urban, etc.).

It is important not to forget that these rural zones we are taking into consideration are not only agricultural lands but are part of a bigger ecosystem; and when reflecting on the development issues of these areas, a systemic and more holistic long-term approach is required for a future resilient Tirana.

This roundtable was held online on 15.12.20. It was organized by Les Ateliers and animated by the pilots of the workshop, Reena Mahajan and Ermal Kapedani.

Speakers: **Besmira Haskaj**, Head of the Economic Rural Development at the Municipality of Tirana
Ledio Allkja, Urban Planner and Territorial Governance Expert at Co-Plan, Institute for Habitat Development. Part-time lecturer at POLIS University
Etleva Muça (Dashi), Lecturer at the Agriculture University of Tirana [Faculty of Economy and Agribusiness - Department of Economy & Rural Development Policies]
François Lerin, Social scientist, agro-ecologist, long time senior-researcher and professor from France. Member of AIDA - International Association Agroenvironment Development. Currently working on the European process of integration of the Western Balkans countries.

Thirty years of informal urbanism



Evolution of the city of Tirana, A Jarne 2018



Informal neighbourhoods, Tirana



Informal residential development from the 90s onward

According to ALUIZNI, 59,909 ha of the Municipality of Tirana's territory is land that has been developed informally since the fall of communism. This sprawl is mostly represented by low-rise residential neighbourhoods with a low density and in which no infrastructure of any kind was anticipated. The largest of such developments is located in the north of the city and stretches from the River Tiranë to the Municipality of Kamza. Most of the residing population originally came from villages or other cities around Albania and therefore still retain a rural character, when it comes to the practice of agriculture for personal use.

Integrating these areas in the city continues to be a challenge

Informal extensions to existing buildings

Tirana's residents also took it upon themselves to change the city according to their needs. The phenomenon of building extensions can be seen on almost every housing block – a solution for acquiring much needed living space. These interventions were done individually, but also collectively by inhabitants living in the same building.

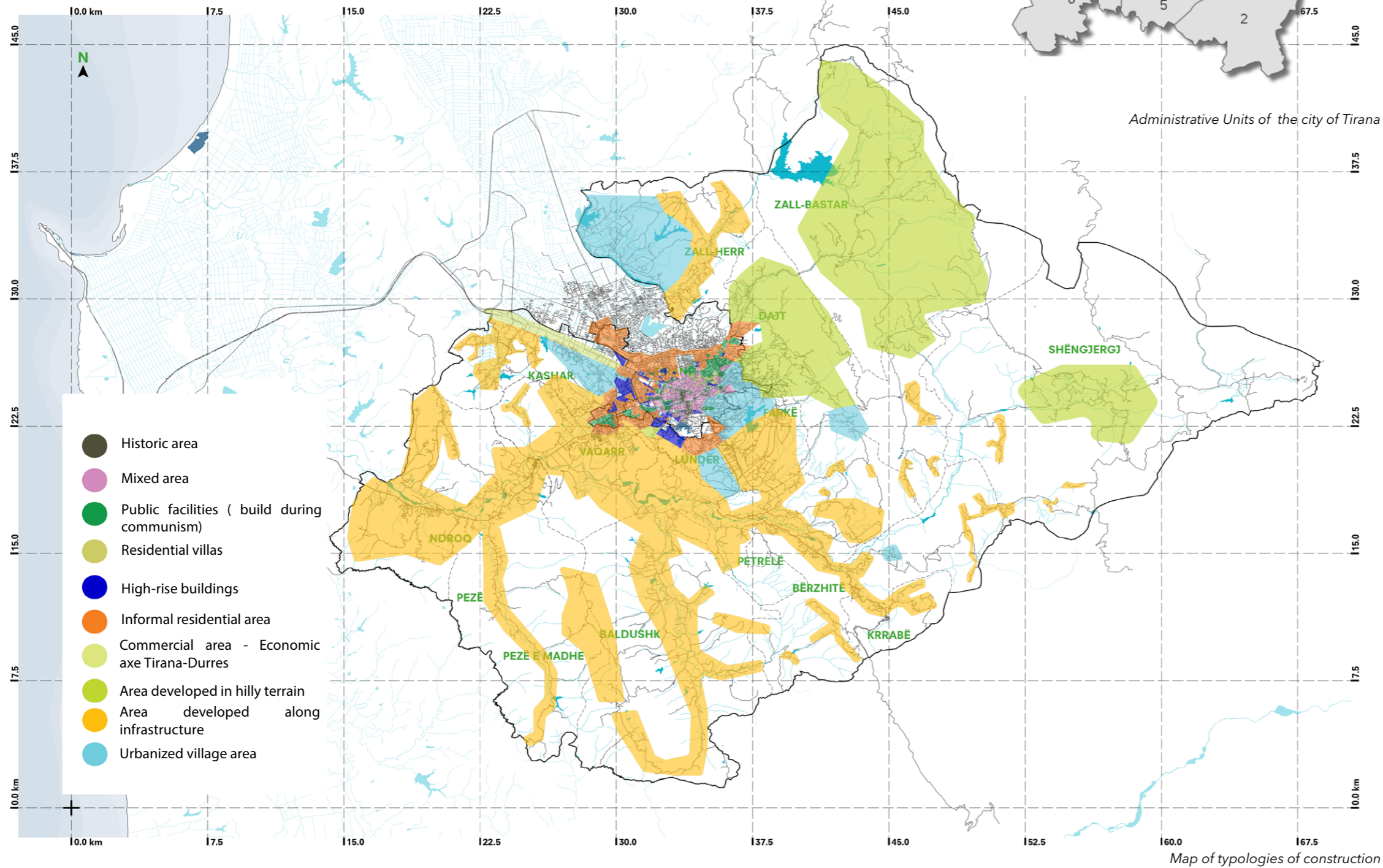
Stabilization and legal processes

It has been decided that all informal buildings and interventions built before 2014 should be part of the legalization process. This process is being led by the Agency for Legalization, Urbanization and Integration of Informal Areas (ALUIZNI) which was created in 2006. This process has already begun, even being completed in several areas, but has yet to be totally finished.



Informal interventions in buildings, Morphosis exhibition UPT FAU 2018

New forms of city growth



Current growth of the city

The capital city, contrary to the rest of the country, continues to report increases in its population numbers and economic development. According to Tirana Open Data, during 2019, the population increased by 1.6% from the previous year. This increase in population was accompanied by a rise in population density, which reached 758 inhabitants/km². While these overall numbers are quite positive, different trends can be noted across the various administrative units. Units 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11 already show decreases in population. Units 2, 7 and the periphery are the ones which help to create balance and positively shift numbers. This data only affirms the previously stated trend of internal and external migrations, with Tirana being the main city accruing the rest of the country's population while also losing a share of its own.

New developments

During the year 2019, the Municipality of Tirana approved 277 building permits, 54% more than in the previous year. The well-known motto of "build it and they will come" was also the hope of the mayor of Tirana, who continuously promoted big construction projects, both public and private. Tirana is experiencing a private-led development. Private investors and developers are the most important actors. Currently, construction sites are spread all over the city, with mostly high-rise commercial buildings in the central area and residential blocks or individual buildings in the surroundings.

Provision of public services: Challenges and projects

During the last decades of transition, the city has suffered from a lack of provided services. Uncontrolled concentrations of population resulting from the prevalence of the real estate market in decision-making continue to negatively impact the situation, making this a challenge for the municipality.



Current construction projects in the center area



Current residential projects

Round Table

Matching municipal services to housing development in a rapid growth context

Introduction

The central “older” neighbourhoods of Tirana were holistically planned to include all the essential elements for a liveable area: housing, schools and kindergartens, clinics, community centres and public spaces as well as the underlying physical infrastructure for water, electricity, sewage, transport, etc. These neighbourhoods, along with the newly built areas in the periphery, have experienced both legal and informal densification over the past three decades with services failing to keep up with the growth. While the municipality is aggressively trying to reconcile these services with the existing situation, population growth and construction continue.

Anticipating through planning

The City of Tirana can be divided into three historical zones:

- the urban core, mainly constructed before the 90s;
- the semi-urban periphery, consisting of informal settlements created after the 90s;
- the rural periphery in the outskirts of the city.

In this analysis, we are going to consider the areas situated between the urban core and the rural zones in the periphery of the City of Tirana, where



Housing blocks during communism

the Municipality of Tirana faces one of its first major challenges: retroactively providing services and infrastructure to communities in great need.

Main tools and instruments already in place

According to the General Local Plan TR030, some instruments have already been put in place to improve the planning of these areas and more specifically to organize the provision of services and infrastructure.

Legislation

- There have been two major reviews of the planning legislation, one in 2009 and the other in 2014. Therefore, the notion of private property in terms of the law has only been considered as such in the last ten years or so. For the area in which we are interested, the new existing by-laws take into consideration the fact that it is the duty of the new private developer/investor to provide housing to an owner of an informal construction, who in effect has no other solution in terms of housing since many of these people have immigrated from rural areas or other cities of Albania.



Mixed-use neighbourhoods (top-channel.tv)

- Agreement of a planning process between the developer and the municipality in the form of a land “donation”

- New private developers have to take into consideration the actual structure of the plot they are interested in and must propose a solution in terms of housing for every owner of a property on that plot, even if the property is not yet legalized. One of the main challenges for the municipality is to create public areas in these zones where there has been an invasion of informal settlements; an agreement must be reached between the municipality and developers to obtain free or public spaces where public infrastructure (nurseries, schools, health care facilities, etc.) for the neighbourhood can be developed. In a few cases, private developers have made “donations” to the municipality which do not consist of land but rather part of a new building. For example, one or two of a building’s first floors are used for public services and infrastructure.

- By-law concerning the creation, management and maintenance of public spaces (including any public infrastructure), which includes several instruments:

- Business improvement district
- Special Area district
- Betterment Fee
- Tax Increment Financing

- The transfer of development rights is a tool intended for the protection of natural and historical sites. This instrument is particularly difficult to implement as it requires a real market for development rights, which does not really exist in Albania yet.

- A Conditional F.A.R. bonus can be given to developers in exchange for investment in public infrastructure

Other types of mechanisms to improve the provision of infrastructure and services can also be mentioned. For instance, financial tools which can include taxes and fees, but also programmes that offer financial assistance (aids) or knowledge transfers.

- The Infrastructure Impact Tax (IIT) on new constructions built by developers is, according to Albanian legislation, an impact fee that is collected as part of the local government’s revenue. This tax (4%-8% of the construction cost) is very important as it can serve as a real participatory tool when used for infrastructure investment and service provision in the areas where it is collected. The Tirana Municipality assumes that 90% of the revenue coming from the IIT is reallocated to infrastructure development; however, there is no evidence that it reaches the targeted population (i.e. those who pay being the ones who benefit from it). In general, the collected revenue goes into the general operating budget and is then reallocated to areas that are in greater need of development. One proposal is for the tax to be tailored to the future impact of the territory’s development. This is because it can, over time, become problematic if future generations inherit the costs of a new development without knowing who should have paid for it. As mentioned before, the expansion of the urban borders of Tirana has somewhat blurred the lines between urban and rural areas. A possible solution would be to increase the rate of IIT in previously informal and rural areas to that of formal areas (current levels) since the reform should give these areas increased economic potential and further development.

- Property Tax has increased considerably in the last several years in terms of the Albanian context.



-  MORNING
-  Elementary school
-  Activities for children
-  Health care
-  Legal support
-  Employment support
-  Open market

-  AFTERNOON
-  Discussion on current affairs
-  Leisure activities and courses
-  Information technology support

-  EVENING
-  Leisure activities and events
-  Cinema

Schools as community centres, TR030 graphics

However, the problem is not only in its amount, but in the fact that it is not easily collected when one understands that it is only paid by citizens who are already in the system. This means that informal properties are not part of the database and therefore represent a loss in terms of revenue.

Challenges in increasing citizen awareness

Albanian society has changed in many ways in the last decades but has not yet achieved a strong standard in its participatory or decision-making processes be it for communities or institutions. Concerning the citizens' side, the major challenge comes from the planning tradition to which many were used to; namely, a territory was planned according to the economic direction that the government envisioned for that particular territory. It was a rigid approach to urbanism. On the other hand, the democratic system after the 90s brought two major changes to the planning tradition:

- The freedom of movement
- The introduction of the private property system

This change in tradition makes the participatory/inclusive processes of communities complicated, as the will to take part is not natural. Furthermore, this causes major difficulties for the instruments mentioned before to be put in place justly and ethically

Lack of participatory tools

Several studies have been done on the engagement of citizens and other stakeholders in the planning process, and a legal framework is in place since civic participation is provided in the planning law. However, simply recognizing citizen participation is not effective. The Municipality of Tirana is required to publish in the national register all new planning studies and development projects. After publication, 30 days are left for comments from stakeholders, in particular from communities. However, the issue with this process is the lack of interactivity as there are usually no hearings organized for such an exchange.

One could thus deduce that information is present, but the transparency of the process is less evident when it comes to communities being confronted

with very specific technical details such as those given in local strategic plans. The complexity of the latter can lead to a lack of interest from citizens who do not have the necessary knowledge for understanding and participating in the process. The challenge becomes even more important when taking into account the time spent and the political motivations that can come into play at crucial moments such as elections.

Searching for solutions

For the moment, the existing administration units in every district allow for a connection between the neighbourhoods and the Public Works Department at the municipality. Moreover, the Municipality of Tirana foresees in the General Local Plan, local strategic projects in every neighbourhood of the city that would be connected to schools. The existing schools would be renovated and new schools would be built. Most importantly, a new function would be given to school buildings – namely, the creation of social centres or community centres that would welcome not only students during school hours but also the inhabitants of the neighbourhood during the second part of the day or on weekends.

The idea would be to create centres that could catalyse the life of the neighbourhood while remaining in the logic of a polycentric Tirana. In the long run, these centres would allow the municipality to create closer links with inhabitants and, in the best case, gain transparency and help citizens of these neighbourhoods to trust in the planning processes. Another project aiming to improve the service provision to citizens is the concept of macro-public-zones, which consists of transforming very small to small plots of free public space between private buildings into green spaces, community spaces, etc.

Increasing the trust of communities, through the transparency of processes and the installation of a healthy and sustainable dialogue, seems to be one of the crucial solutions needed for moving towards a participatory society and inclusive processes. This, in turn, could lead to the municipality improving the provision of services and infrastructure where they are most needed and in the most ethical form.

This roundtable was held online on 17.10.20. It was organized by Les Ateliers and animated by the pilots of the workshop, Reena Mahajan and Ermal Kapedani.

Speakers: **Frida Pashako**, Director of the Urban Planning Department at the Municipality of Tirana
Rudina Toto, Senior Researcher, Polis University, Territorial Governance and Spatial Planning Unit at CoPlan
Peter Clavelle, Former Mayor of Burlington, Vermont (US), former manager at TETRA TECH ARD

Mobility systems and current evolutions

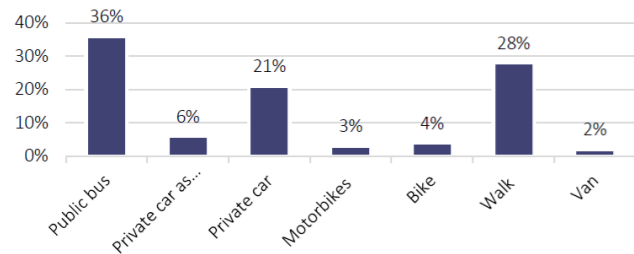
Saturation in the existing networks

Before 1990, Tirana was a compact and organized city with very few private cars. Mobility was therefore a matter of walking or using public buses for daily work commutes. As Tirana grew and reached a new scale, many inhabitants acquired cars, thus greatly influencing the city's mobility systems.

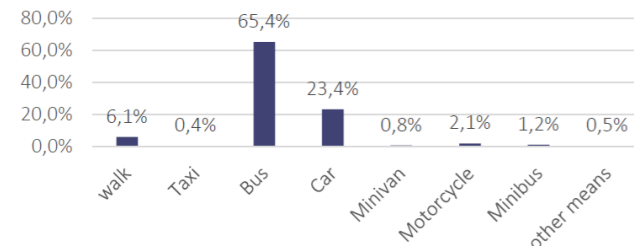
In Albania, the vehicle fleet has increased very rapidly in the last 25 years. During this time, the number of vehicles has increased 4.5 times; and the phenomenon is not over. Car ownership in Tirana more than doubled during a span of 7 years: 105 inhabitants out of 1,000 owned a car in 2011, that figure rose to 220 in 2018.

Cars now account for about 20%-25% of all travel within the city, as well as in connection with the suburbs. While walking remains a relevant mode of transportation within the city, public transport is the dominate form of travel between the suburbs and the city centre, and also represents a significant share of travel within Tirana.

Modal share within Tirana (SUMP)

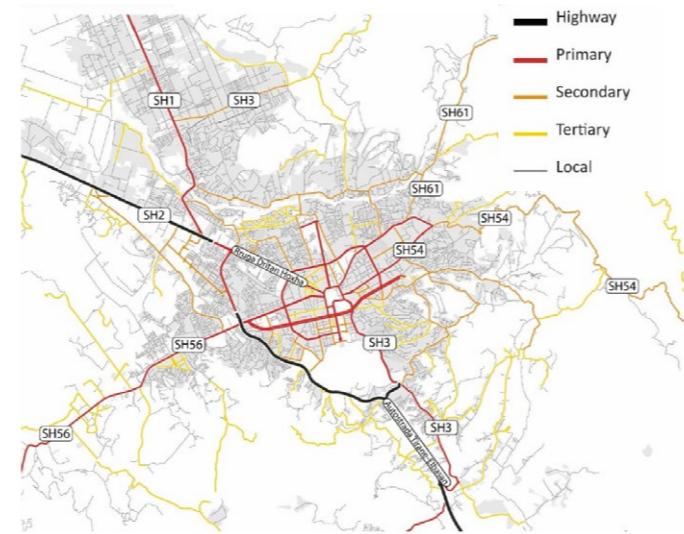


Modal share to/from Tirana suburbs (SUMP)



The public transport network in Tirana is entirely built around buses. The sole alternative system is the Dajti Ekspress cable car linking the lower sta-

Current road hierarchy within Tirana (SUMP)

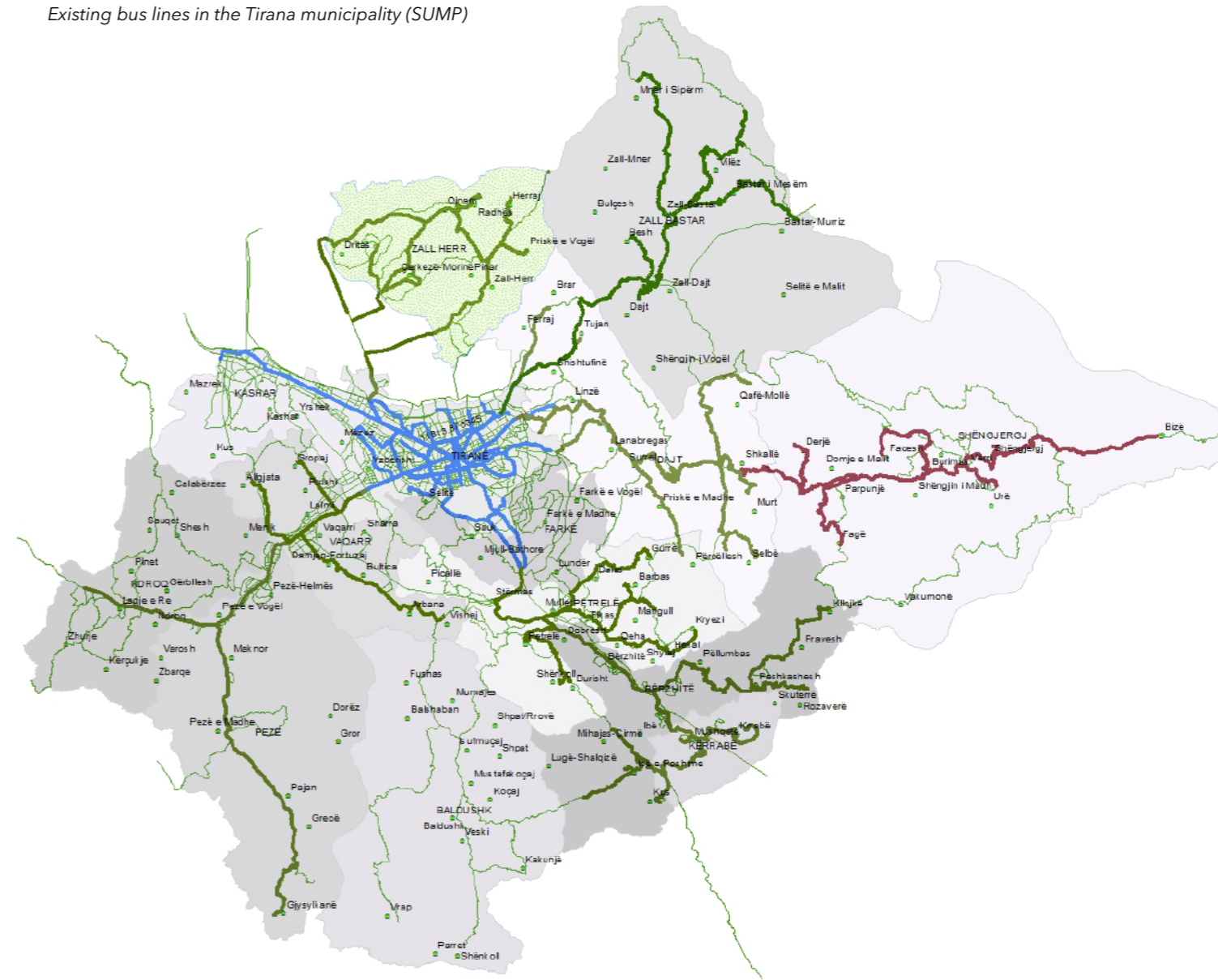


tion of Linzë to the Mount Dajti. Since 2013, the urban public transport service has been contracted out to 10 private operators based on a route system. These private transport companies currently operate 16 urban and 25 suburban bus lines that mostly connect the rural villages and suburbs to the city centre.

There are almost no dedicated bus lanes (7 km for the entire city), making bus travel quite slow and subject to traffic congestion. Traffic flows are not equally distributed across the territory: most travel flows either to/from the west or the northwest of the city towards Durrës and Fushë-Krujë. These axes consist of main highways and infrastructures with grade separation interchanges. The road towards the east of Tirana links the city to the Dajti National Park and other minor towns and hosts far fewer commuters.

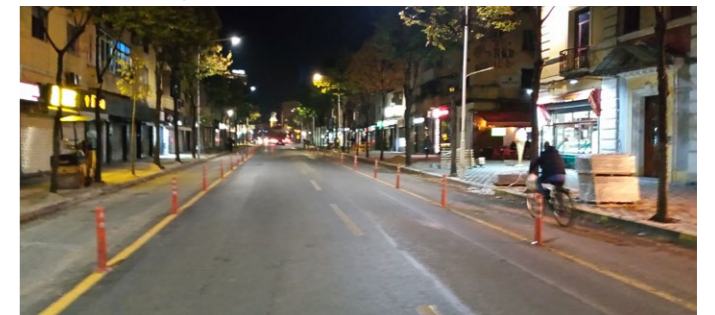
Bikes are present in Tirana, as a bike culture has always existed in the city. Many bike sellers and repairmen can be found near the Bazat. Dedicated bike lanes have been established in the city centre over the last ten years and are highly visible to all Tirana inhabitants. The network remains small but effective and is generally safe in the central areas. Bike sharing networks were established through the Chinese private operator Mobike and the local initiative Ecovolis, but neither were successful: Mobike left the country after a short time and the Ecovolis system does not seem to be operational

Existing bus lines in the Tirana municipality (SUMP)



despite its stations still being in place.

The COVID crisis had, as in every big city, a large impact on mobility in 2020. Public transport use declined dramatically (-30% in March 2020, about -60%-70% in late 2020), thus weakening bus operators. The municipality also created new bike lanes, completing the network in the centre. These temporary lanes have tubular markers and a buffer zone to ensure safe mobility.



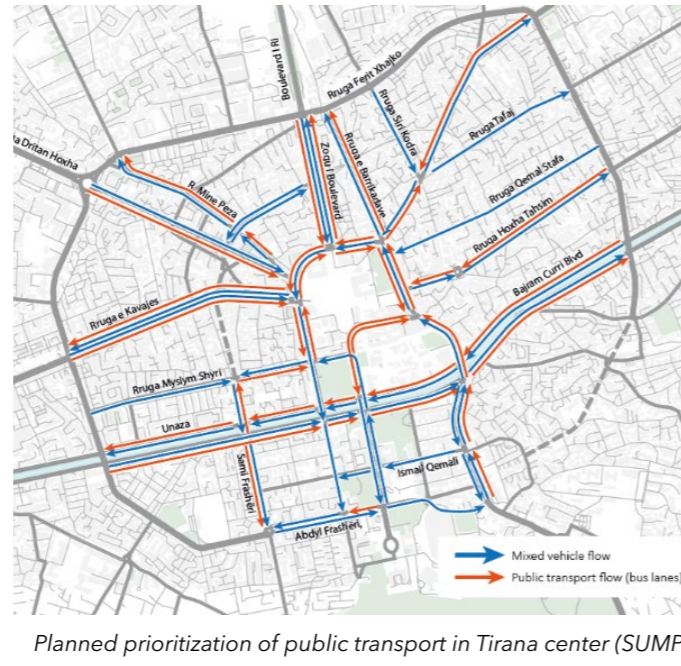
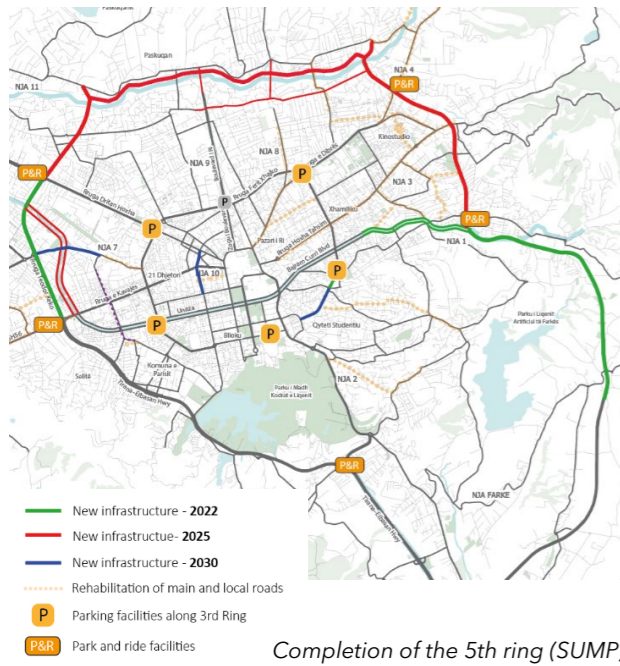
New bike lanes in Rruga e Durrësit, 2020



Large buses going from Kinostudio to Kombinat



The bike network ends abruptly towards Kinostudio



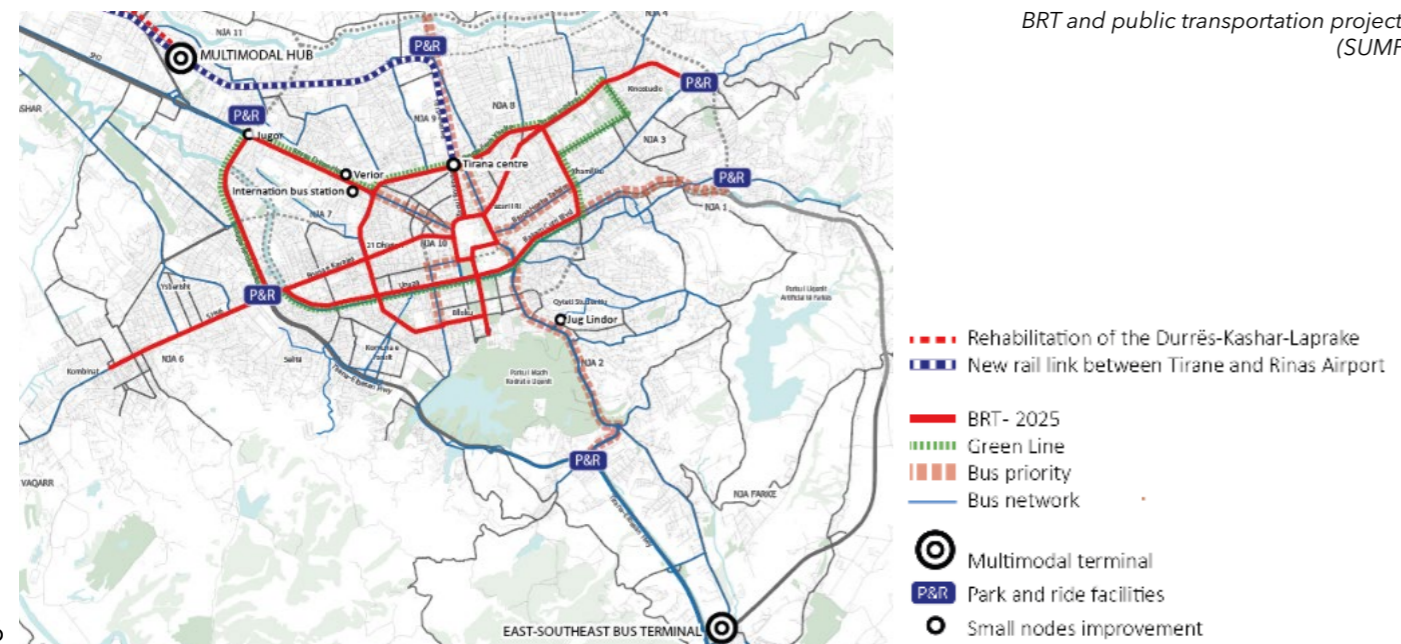
Towards greener mobility systems

The new General Local Plan TR030 provides the city with a more functional and hierarchical road system. TR030 offers to construct and complete the primary network, to separate collective and private flows, regulate vehicular accessibility in certain areas and limit the presence of on-street parking which can exacerbate daily road congestion levels.

The completion of the primary network relies heavily on the five ring roads to bring a clear structure to the Tirana road system. Five concentric roads are to be finalized around Skanderbeg Square. The first ring surrounds the square, while the 5th ring will serve as a 4-lane beltway around the entire city. Significant work is currently underway to ensure the progress of this ring. The 2nd and 4th rings will be greenways devoted to soft modes of mobility in Tirana, and the 3rd ring is nearly completed.

The key public transportation project underway is the establishment of a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system in which buses use dedicated lanes for the entirety of their routes. The first BRT line will run from Kombinat to Kinostudio via Skanderbeg Square along a west-east axis. It is expected to be completed in 2025. Two more routes are planned which would link the BRT network with the southern part of the city and the Durrës corridor. Park-and-ride facilities and suburban bus stations will be built along the 5th ring and will feed into the BRT system.

Tirana also has an ambitious strategy to encourage cycling, which involves completing the network within the city centre and further extending the grid's reach. Natural bicycle trails are to be established around the large lakes (with the first already completed in the Great Park). All the mobility strategies were included in the 2020 Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan, with the help of GIZ.



Round Table

Enabling Tirana's transition towards alternative and sustainable modes of mobility

Contextual introduction of the topic

Tirana, with its dynamic and young population, is a very lively and vibrant capital that aims to become a hyperconnected city. With its aspirations to become an attractive European capital, the city must rapidly upgrade its transport strategies to prioritize sustainable modes of mobility such as public transport, walking and cycling over private vehicle use. The city is in a favourable position to support this transition – as it is mostly flat and compact, with most services, offices and social contacts within walking distance. The real challenge is enabling a behavioural shift towards a preference for walking and cycling in this city where possessing a car is the ultimate status symbol. What are the challenges in managing a transition to alternative modes of transport? How can the bicycle be made appealing to society? How should more environmentally friendly modes of transport be promoted in order to discourage car use? People's behaviours are not always rational, whether in the long or short term. What can be done to build citizen support for the initiatives/ideas that integrate more active modes of transport in the city? How can the social aspect of these actions be managed to prevent those who do not possess a car from being marginalized? What sustainable, practical actions are needed for the City of Tirana to build a liveable post-pandemic urban future?

that the status symbol of car ownership is carried on from one generation to the next and still remains strongly prevalent even for today's youngest generations. From a social point of view, using a car as a means of transportation positions the driver in a higher echelon of society and guarantees him/her respect. Nowadays, it has become obvious that in Albania social class based on wealth is taking hold and in these types of stratified societies, symbolism becomes all the more important.

What has been done so far?

Over the last few years, the City of Tirana's concern for issues related to transport and mobility has grown, and there is a political will to bring change to the mobility system. There are already several studies and projects being implemented such as the construction of bike lanes and the renovation of bus lines to improve the transport situation in the city's urban areas. The most recent and comprehensive project for the Tirana Municipality, and in particular for the Transport and Mobility Department, is the "Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan for the City of Tirana" (SUMP), which was launched in 2020. It is funded by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and implemented by the German Development Agency (GIZ). SUMP brings a new perspective to traditional transport planning by focusing on people and their accessibility and quality of life rather than on traffic and traffic flow capacities.

Which are some of the main challenges?

Bringing change to the existing situation; confronting long-held mentalities and resistance from the community. Data management expertise when introducing a more digitalized system of management. Conflicts with the multiple public transport operators and finding a new model of business. A strong communication campaign can be a first move towards a change in the mindsets of every age group. to have a program training and preparing children from their very young age for a city that offers more active and, simultaneously, more sustainable ways of mobility are offered.

«The most sustainable cities aren't going to be the ones that have the smartest tech, or roads made of plastic instead of asphalt. They're going to be the ones where you don't need a car in the first place. When you solve for active transportation like biking and walking, you solve for other things like local economies and closer communities and public safety.»

Janette Sadik-Khan, former commissioner of NYC Department of Transport

Enabling behavioural change

The infrastructure of the City of Tirana was mainly designed and built during the communist era, when private car ownership was not allowed. In the 90s, cars began to own the roads and this led to the collapse of the public transport system. Studies show

Active mobility – such as walking and cycling – has to be an integral part of any political agenda engaged in more people-centric policies. When it comes to cycling, in order to encourage a shift in mentality, it is important for citizens to see riding a bike as a desirable choice by presenting the activity as pleasant, convenient, cheap and fun, rather than showing its benefit for the environment.

Dividing the city into sectors may be a solution to prevent people from excessively using their cars. One could choose the best form of transport to move from one sector to another, with the knowledge that by car, drivers would first have to quit their sector, then take the ring road in order to access the sector they want to reach. This way, using a car is still possible, but walking, cycling or public transport to change sectors would become the more convenient and practical option.

Testimony from Bogotá

“A developed country is not a place where the poor have cars. It’s where the rich use public transportation.” (2012) Gustavo Petro, former Mayor of Bogotá



The Ciclovía in Bogotá (Diana Sandoval)

Bogotá is situated about 10,000 km away from Tirana and yet the two capitals are more similar to each other than one might think. Bogotá has a flat topography, is the 6th most congested city in the world and has significant pollution. Nonetheless, since the 70s, there has been a strong political will to shift the mindset of its population from private car use to bicycles. The year 1974 saw the birth of Ciclovía, a mass cycling event during which cars are banned from certain city streets on Sundays and holidays (more than 100 km of roads are closed-off to motor vehicles). In the 90s, several hundred kilometres of bike lanes were added to the Ciclovía. Nowadays, Bogotá is known the world over as a bike friendly city. This consolidation of the bicycle as a means of transport was due to some of the elements mentioned before but was also the result

of a strong investment in infrastructure and the promotion of the activity. The most effective form of promotion tends to be the one that presents biking as a very normal activity that “normal” people do, so that everyone can find their way around, more precisely every age group from the young to the elderly. It is important to underline the major role of pro-cycling campaigns for young children and the positive outcomes for the present (their influence with parents and the community) and the future.

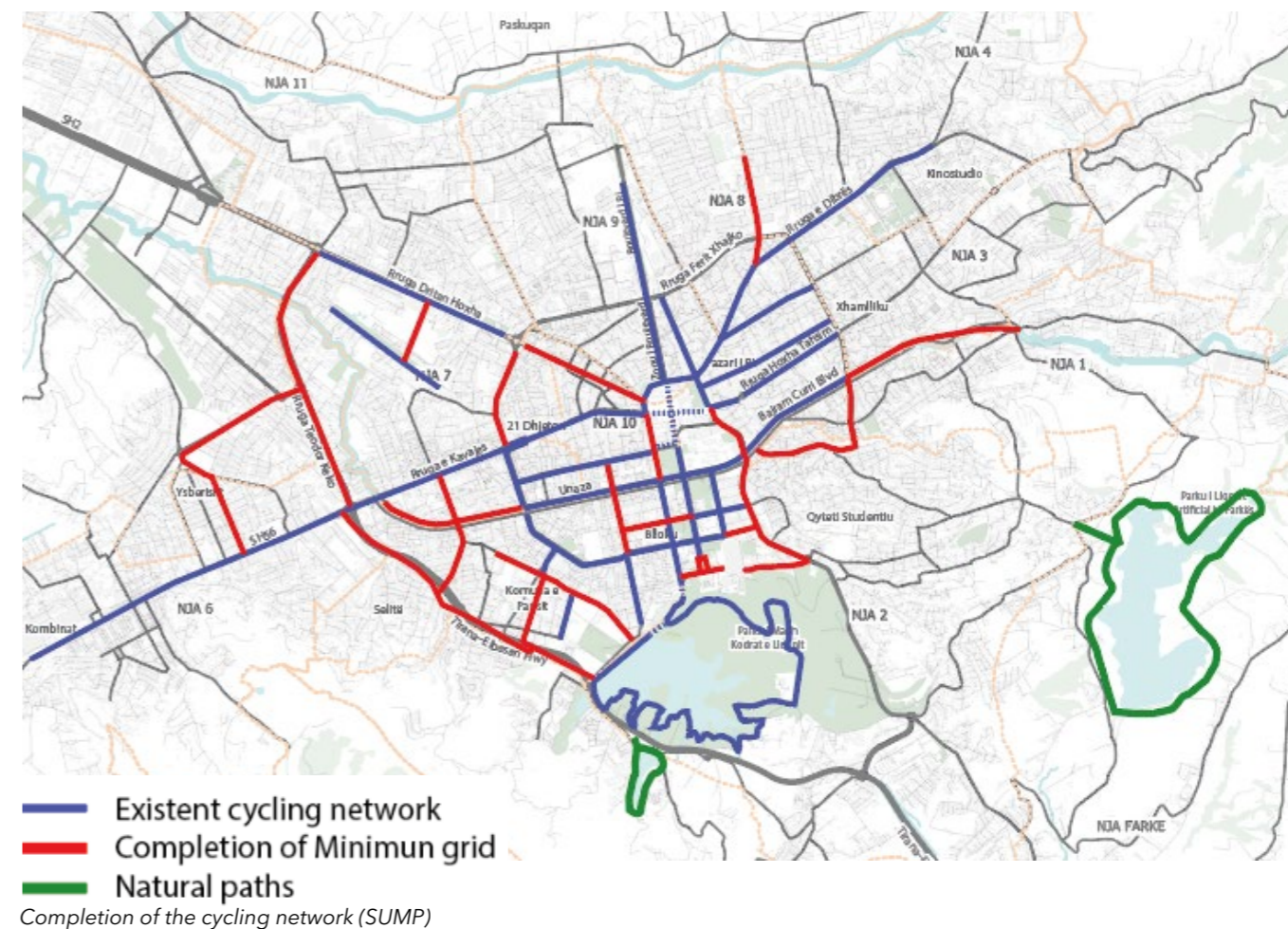
Innovation in Urban Mobility prompted by COVID-19

During the past few months, cities around the world have reshaped themselves to meet the needs of their citizens during the pandemic. From the pedestrianisation of streets to the repurposing of public spaces, COVID-19 has prompted innovation in urban mobility. As such, the pandemic has been the occasion for many municipalities to develop and implement projects related to active mobility infrastructure – for example, temporary cycling infrastructure that welcomes the surplus of users who can no longer use public transport. Using this new form of transportation has made it safer and easier to move around.

Since the beginning of this crisis, the Parisian example has shown that any change in infrastructure has to be coupled with other measures in order to be efficient. Not requiring masks when riding a bicycle, temporary parking spaces, cycling lessons as well as other measures such as the €50 vouchers to repair one’s bicycle have made the choice of bike riding much more attractive to users.

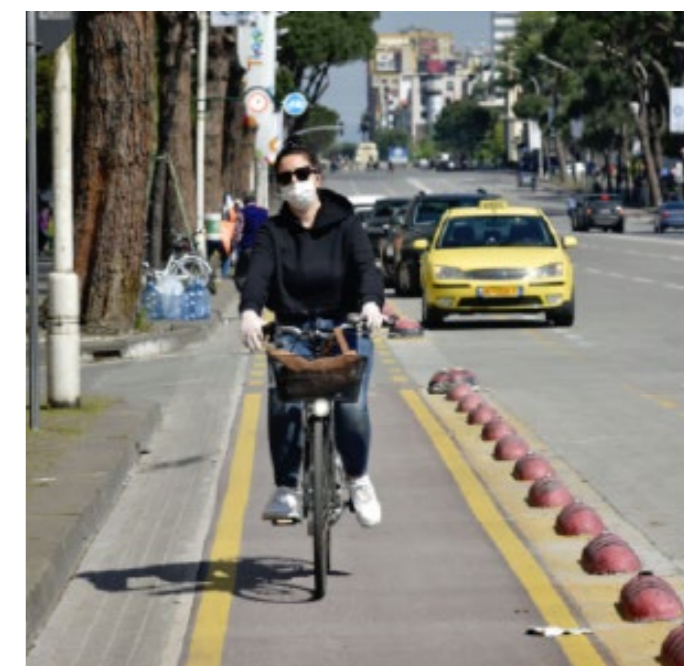
This moment in time is an unprecedented opportunity to experiment and test new ideas in the public realm and rethink public spaces as well as welcome urban spaces that encourage street life. In fact, in the last few months, Tirana has been quick to add “pop-up” bike lanes in response to the pandemic. There were 47 km of bike lanes before March 2020, and their extension since then has made it possible to double the number of users from 4% to 9% of total transport users. Moreover, what were initially planned to be temporary measures will now be long-term implementations.

Along with walking in the city, short distances and the notion of proximity are other phenomena that the pandemic has helped people rediscover. It is, however, important that the measures put in place to develop walking as well as cycling be adapted to the spirit of the city rather than be implemented from A to Z in the image of examples from other cities.



Tactical and Transitory Urbanism

A tool that is gaining a lot of traction since the pandemic is tactical urbanism. It is an approach to community-building using short-term, low-cost and scalable projects to catalyse long-term change. It offers a taste of what life could be like – for instance, if streets were designed and managed differently. It has proven very effective in instigating behavioural changes. The idea is to get the community involved through participatory processes and mechanisms via a 3-stage project that includes project preparation, implementation and feedback.



Temporary lanes opened in 2020 (Erion Veliaj, Tirana’s mayor Twitter)

This roundtable took place online on 29.09.20. It was organized by Les Ateliers’ team and animated by the pilots of the workshop, Reena Mahajan and Ermal Kapedani.

- Speakers : **Enton Punavija**, Director of the Transport and Mobility Department at the Municipality of Tirana (Albania)
- Diana Sandoval**, Architect, urban planner and advisor (Bogotá, Colombia)
- Dorina Pojani**, Senior Lecturer in urban planning at The University of Queensland (Australia)
- Jean Grébert**, Architect, urban planner and transportation/mobility systems expert (France)
- Olivier Schneider**, President of the French Bicycle Users Federation (FUB) (France)

The role of civil society

An emerging sector to be strengthened A few significant actors

During the state of terror maintained by the communist regime, any form of dissent or community movements were virtually eliminated. At the time, the notion of "civil society" did not even exist in Albania. Social capital was considered family- and clan-based, and there was no organization at the community level – the notion of family still holds significant importance in the Albanian mentality. When the government suddenly withdrew from public and private life in 1990, Albanians were forced to start from scratch as they had no material or intellectual infrastructure to develop a political system of pluralism.

Beginning in 1991, political parties emerged and a number of NGOs were created; the latter of which boasted a significant participation by women, notably in the fields of society and culture. The two main crises of the 90s (the collapse of the economy in the aftermath of the failed pyramid scheme in 1997 and the war in Kosovo in 1999) also helped the sector grow, particularly in relationship with international organizations. Beyond this initial period of strong growth, civil society participation has yet to progress much. Since 2005, the rise of civil society leaders to government and parliament has caused a certain decline in the role of civil society in public debate. The 2014 administrative reform also led to a weaker link between elected municipal counselors and the population.

Nowadays, the European integration process and its requirements in terms of civil society participation acts as an incentive for the existence of important civil society organizations. One can also note that in a country not accustomed to protests, such acts are beginning to take place more regularly. In 2020, the demolition of the National Theatre and the death of a youth during the curfew led to charged protests in the streets of Tirana. Global and societal debates are also growing in the public space (protests against sexual violence in 2020, climate strike in 2019, etc.).

MJAFT! is a non-profit organization that defines itself as a pressure group working to combat civic apathy and engage citizens in Albania's political debate since the fall of communism. Erion Veliaj, Tirana's mayor, emerged from this group as its Executive Director in 2005.

Open Society, the Albanian branch of the famous organization led by the philanthropist George Soros, began its work in 1992 to encourage the country to become open and democratic. Initially focused on providing basic equipment and education, it currently aims to upgrade public services and bring transparency to public life, while also helping to position the country for European integration.

Co-PLAN is a non-profit organization that has been working on good governance at the urban and regional levels, environmental issues and community participation since 1995. Co-PLAN has strong ties to Polis, a private university. Since the beginning, it has been one of the main actors accompanying the transformation of informally developed areas such as Bathore.

Regional Environmental Center is a Hungary-based organization with offices in many countries, including one in Albania that was opened in 1993. It tackles issues such as local environmental action plans, citizen participation, environmental education and awareness, local initiatives, etc.

Ecovolis is an environmental group working on neighbourhood litter problems, which then went on to deal with air pollution in 2010. It established the first bike-sharing network in Tirana in 2011, naming it simply Ecovolis.

Hapësira Kulturore Uzina is an organization occupying the former communist tractor factory with an agreement of the municipality. They lead activities to create ties with the local communities that are facing social challenges. The factory is located in an area touched by the earthquake identified as a reconstruction area.



The «Lake View» residences in construction, along the artificial lake

Panorama over the city from the vicinity of Farkë Lake



Part 3

**A slice of the city : from skanderbeg square
to the mountains (through kinostudio)**

Slice to the east

**Skanderbeg
Square**

**University
Hospital Center
«Mother Teresa»**

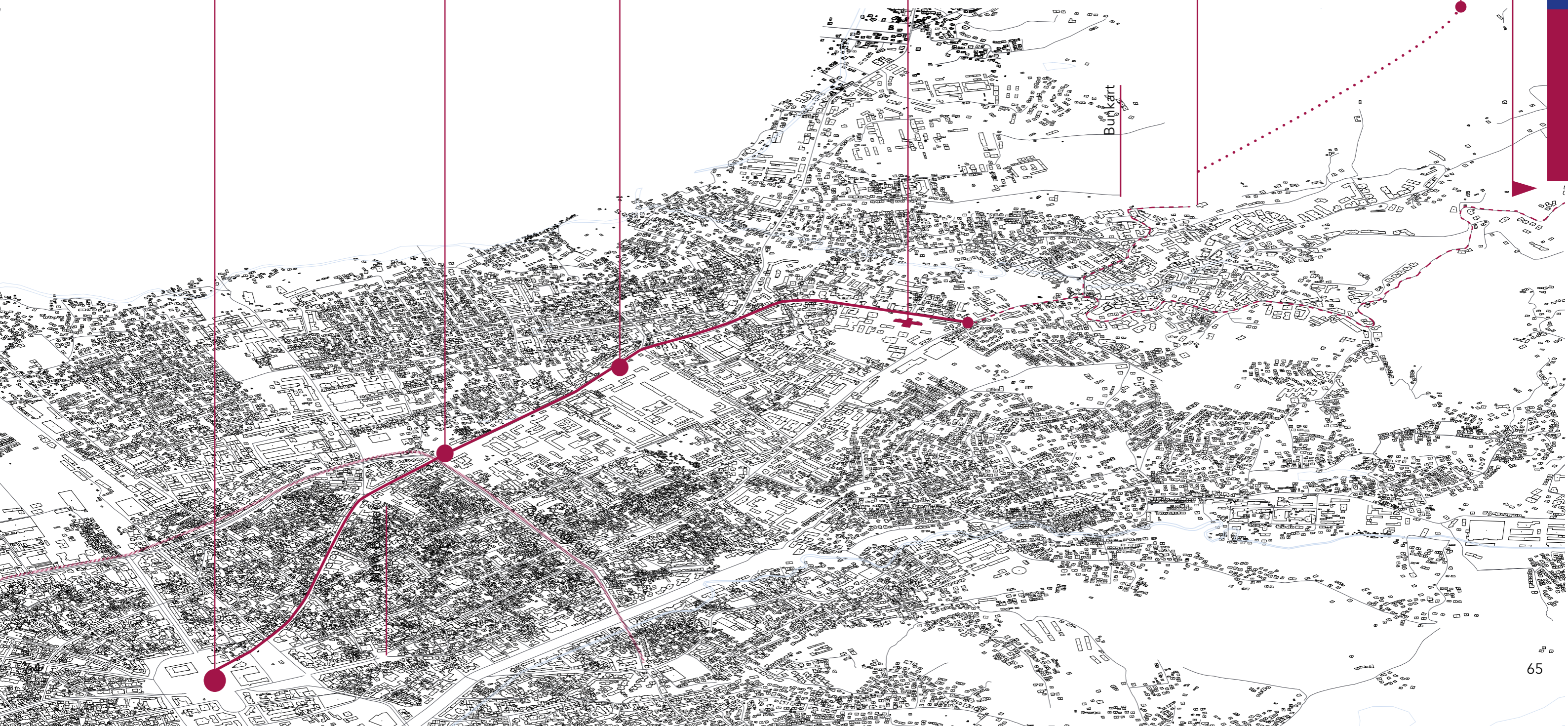
**Ministry of
Defence**

**Kinostudio
now Ministry of Culture**

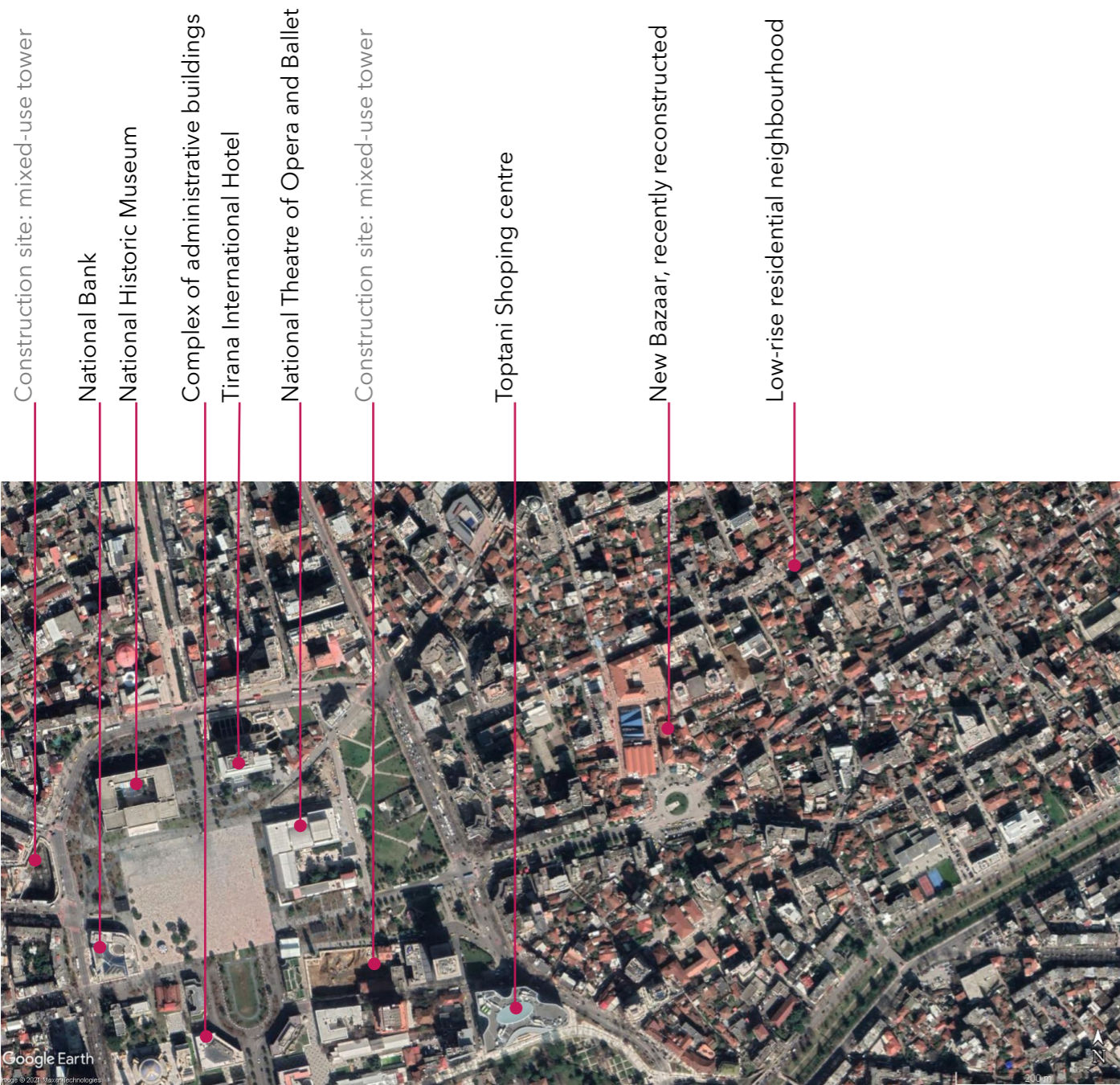
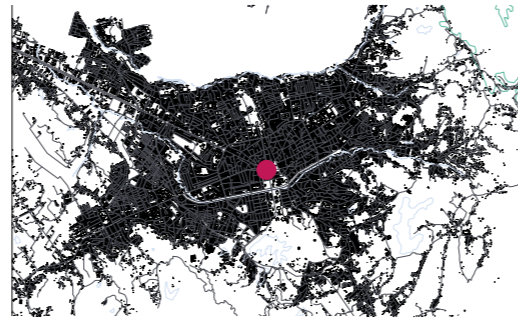
Cable car

**Dajti Mountain
National Park**

Zall-Bastar



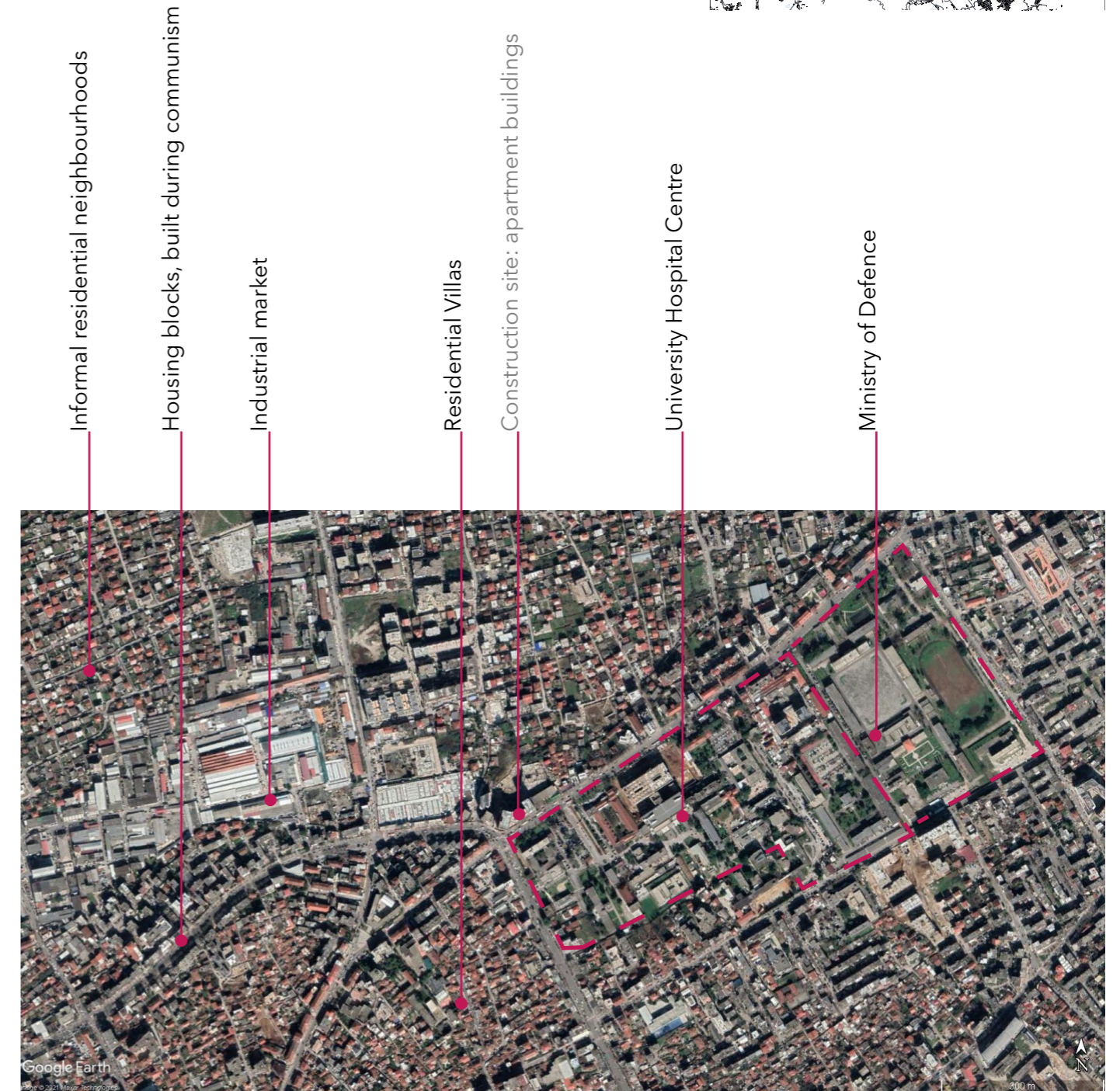
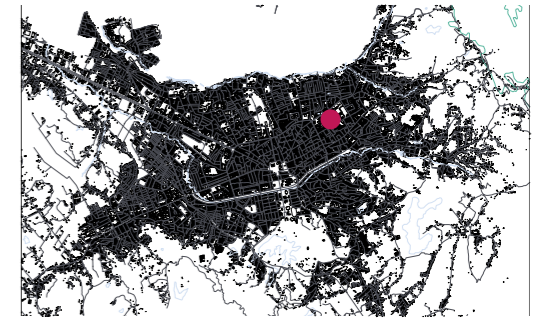
1. Skanderbeg and the bazaar



Skanderbeg Square (Filip Dujardin)

The central area of the Tirana has been in a constant state of change since it was declared the capital, resulting in a physical overlapping of different time periods. Old low-rise residential neighbourhoods stay in the shadow of important representative buildings and new high-rise developments. The relationship between them is far from harmonious, offering different realities in a close proximity.

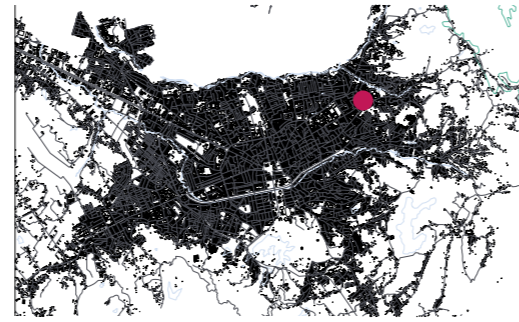
2. University Hospital Centre and Ministry of Defence



Advancing further in the east of the city, the same relationship is noticed. The organic fabric of low-rise villas is bordered by higher mixed-use buildings. In the north of the 3rd ringroad, another layer can be noticed, that of informal low-rise residential neighbourhoods, clearly different from the previous mentioned residential villas.

The University Hospital Centre and the Ministry of Defence are 2 enclosed complexes, isolated from the other neighbourhoods.

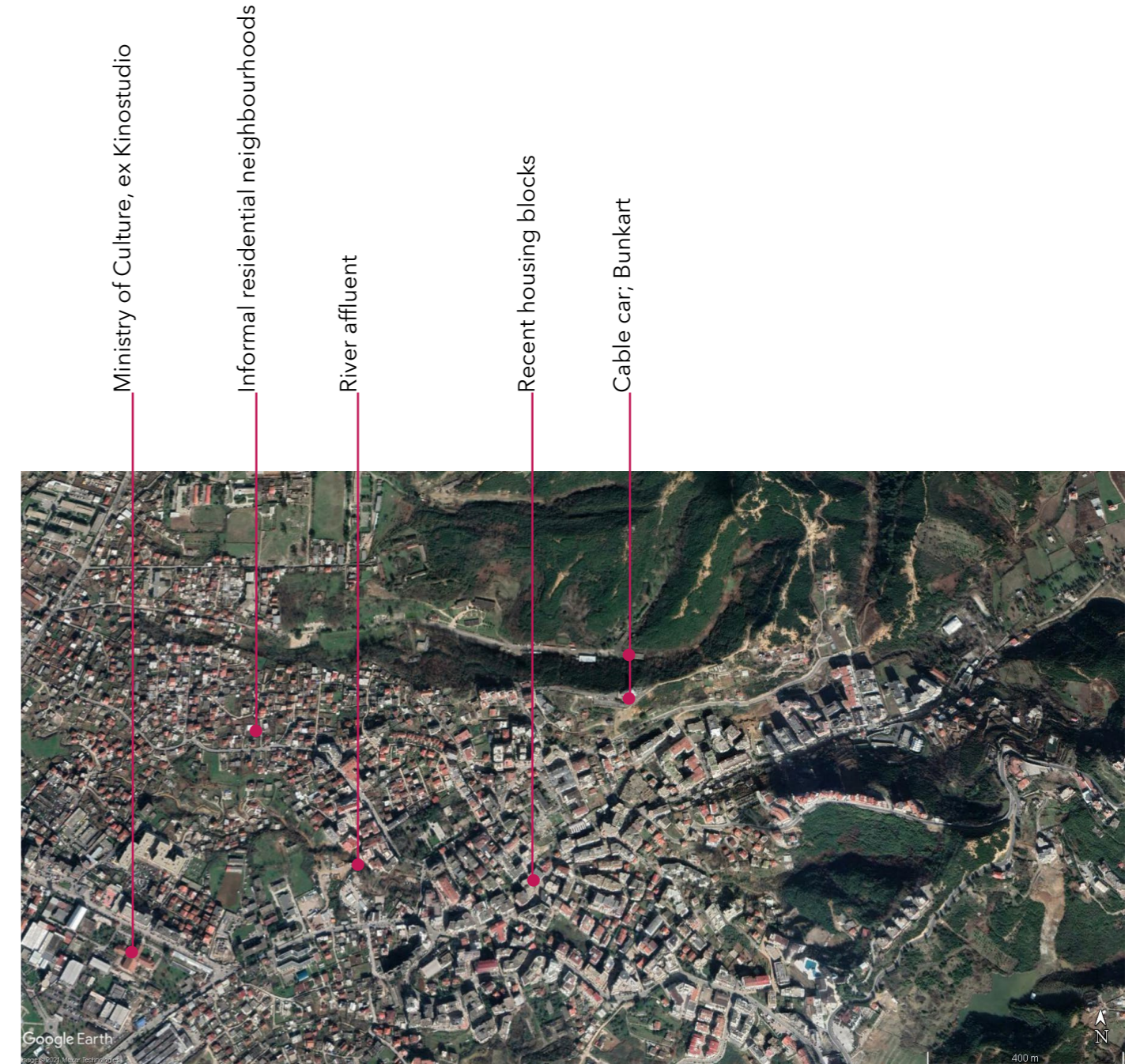
3. Kinostudio Area



ex Kinostudio building, now Ministry of Culture (dosja.al)

The Kinostudio area takes its name from the former cinematographic studio, responsible for the production of all films during communism. Back then the area was not very urbanised. It had an industrial character, because of the 'Porcelani' factory complex and several supporting housing blocks. Today the area continues to be a periphery of the city, although it has undergone a densification, of formal and also informal developments.

4. Urbanised area of Dajti administrative unit

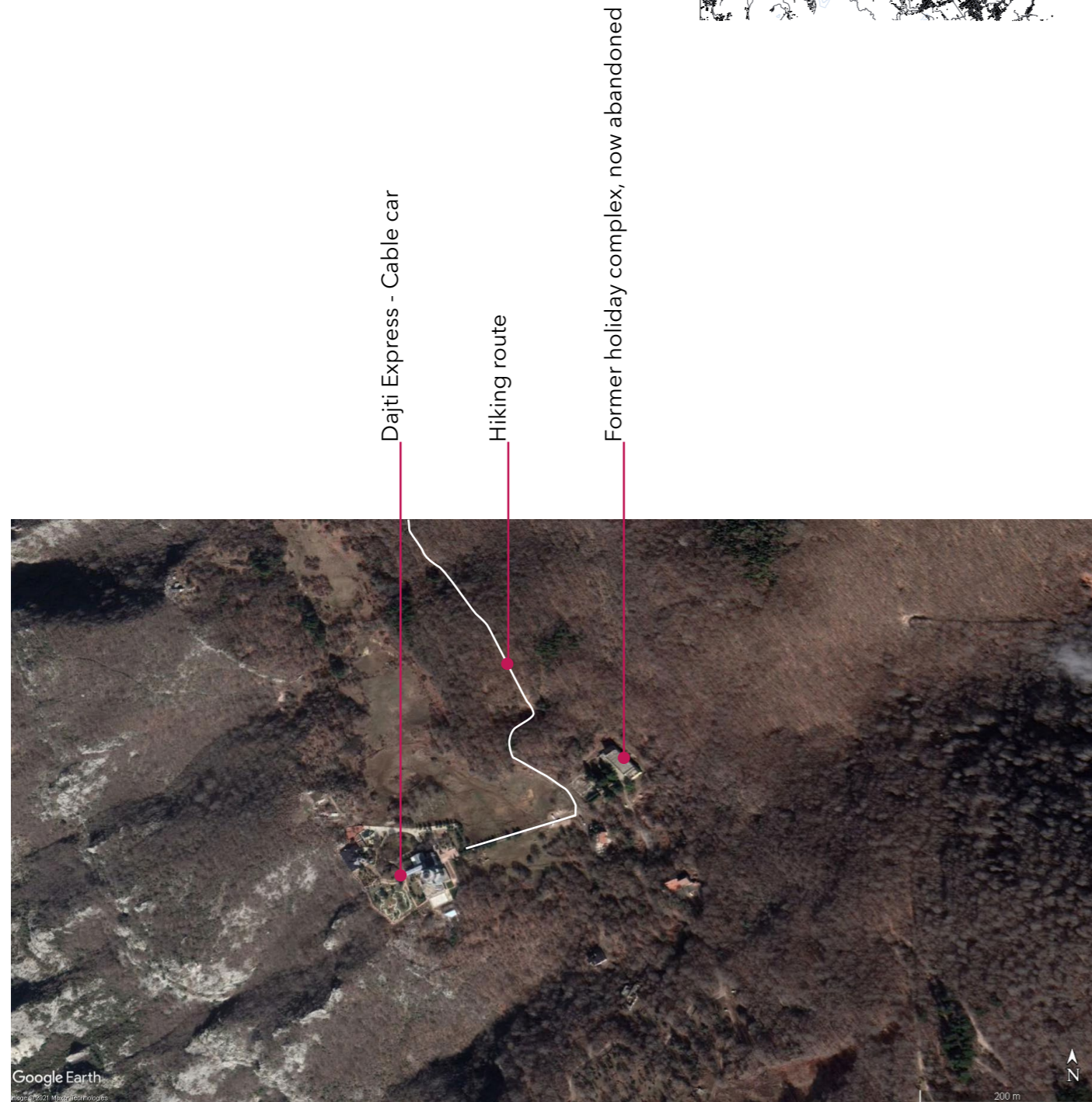
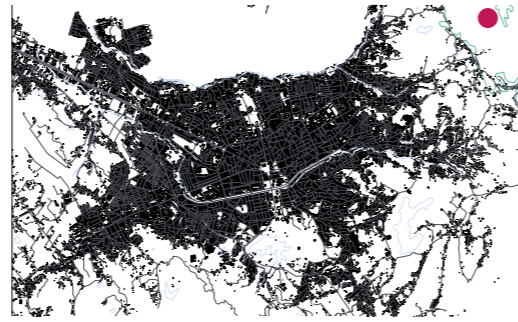


This peripheric area is a very recent development, consisting of dense high-rise housing buildings. It came as a result of a big need for cheap housing units the city faced during the 2000' and developers who were allowed to built in the most profitable way for them. The neighbourhood is less than 2 decades old.



Tirana, view from the cable car (Dajti Express)

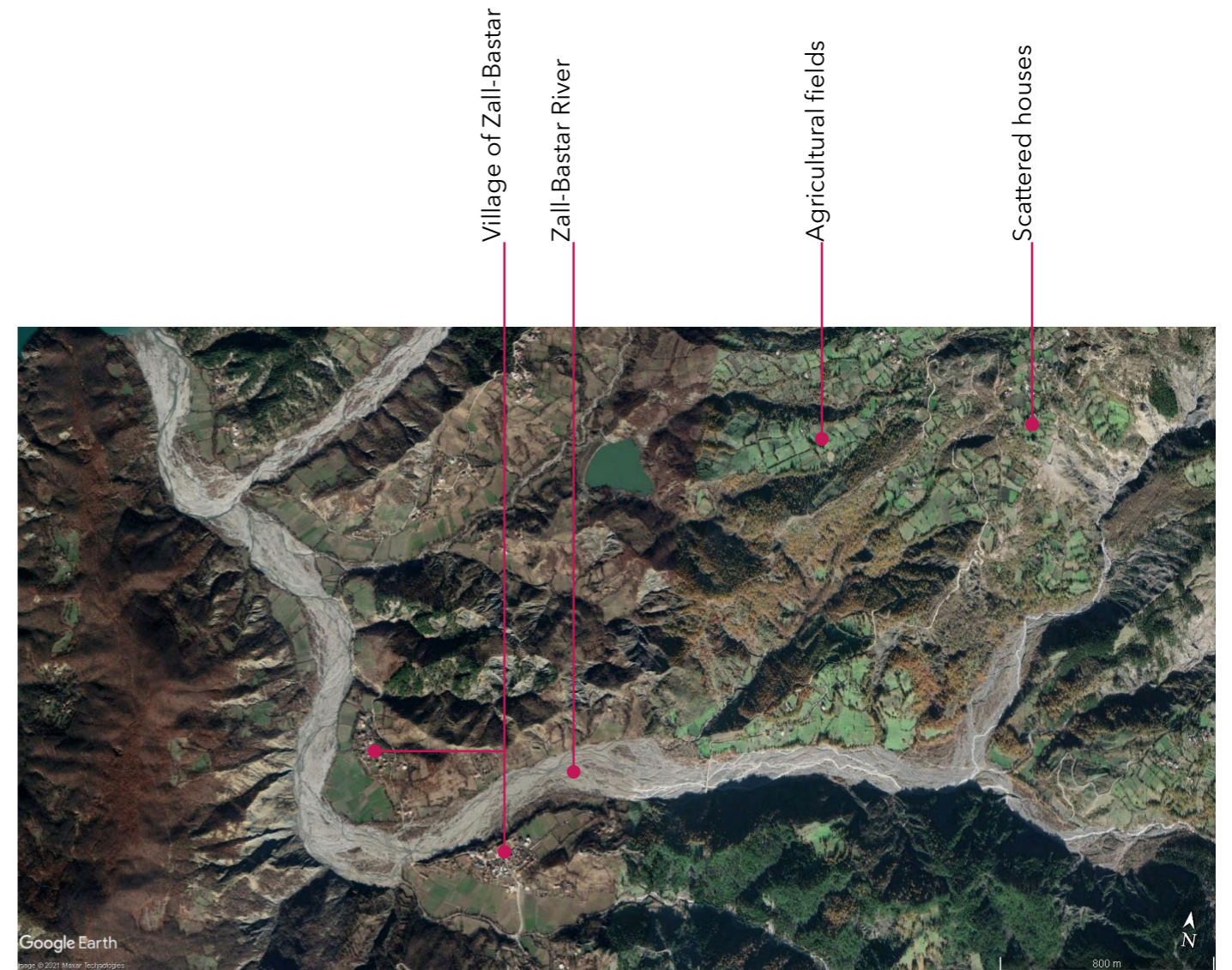
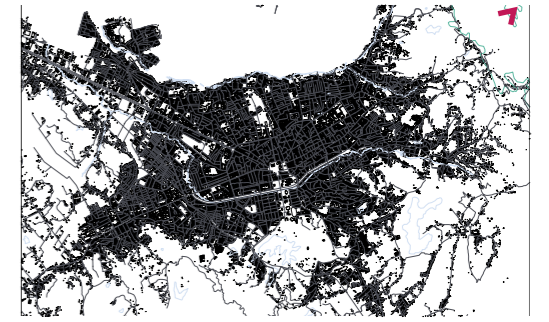
5. National Park of Dajti



Cable-car complex (Dajti Express)

The National Park of Dajti is one of the main touristic attractions in Tirana. The Dajti Express cable car is usually the gate to the park, for tourists and citizens of Tirana. The complex offers various facilities such as: a hotel, restaurant, rotating bar, adventure park; and several activities including hiking, mountain biking/ climbing, mini-golf, paragliding. Over the years the popularity of the complex has declined and it is mostly visited by foreign tourists.

6. Zall-Bastar



Zall-Bastar village (tirana.al)

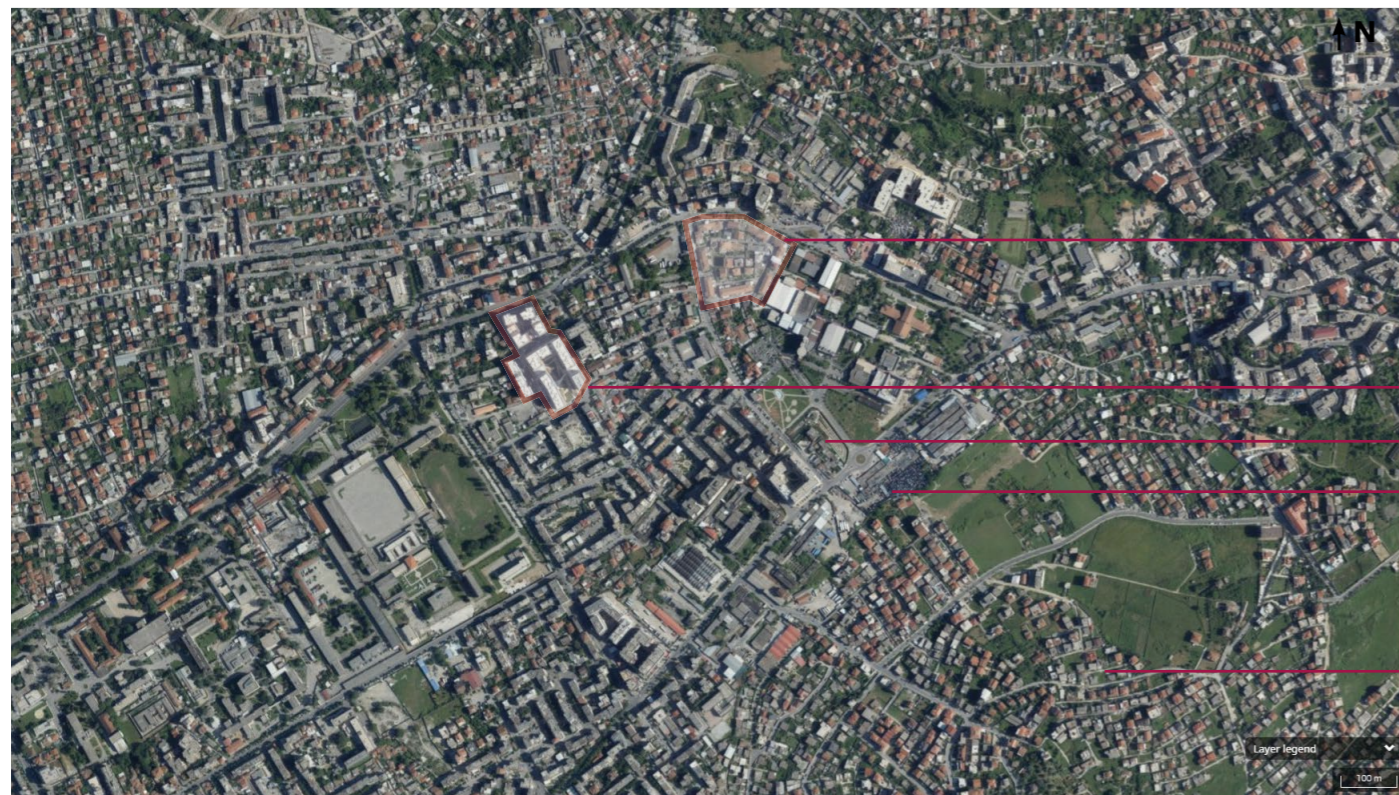
The village of Zall-Bastar is part of one of 13 rural administrative units of Tirana and lies on the other side of the Dajti mountain, 18 km away from the city. Located in a hilly terrain, it offers spectacular views of nature. The administrative unit has a surface of 1320 ha, of which 785 ha are agricultural fields and 4500 ha forest and pastures. Its main economic activity is agriculture and farmers struggle to support themselves.

Kinostudio and Porcelani

From the edge of the city to a pole of the metropolis



Excerpt of topographic map from 1980-1984, ASIG



72 Satellite view of the same area, 2018, ASIG

The Kinostudio / Porcelani area was once the end of the Tirana city. The land slowly rises from its vicinity to form further the Dajti mountains, and the Tirana river affluent (2) goes nearby to reach up north the main stem of the river.

The area started to be urbanized because of two large projects led by the communist regime. On one hand, the Kinostudio Shqipëria e Re (3) was founded in 1952 with the financial support of the Soviet Union. This building and its neighbours were then housing Albania's national film studios and their national film archives, as Enver Hoxha understood the value of cinema as a powerful ideological tool. Between 1957 and 1990, Albania produced 247 fiction movies - and between 1975 and 1990, the average reached 13 movies per year. The attendance to the cinema was impressive: 20 million seats sold in 450 outdoor and indoor theaters, annually. Some of the stage sets are still stored in the buildings of the area, but are nonetheless not accessible.

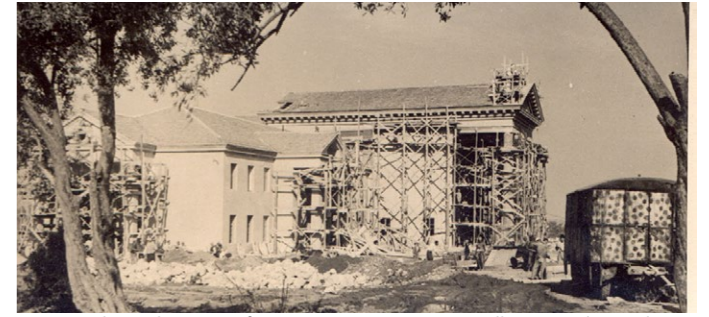
All this complex is nowadays home to the Ministry of Culture, and to the Albanian National Center of Cinematography, the Marubi Academy of Film and Multimedia, and several Albanian TV and radio studios.

The other major facility was the Porcelain factory (4), implemented in the late 50s, making porcelain tiles and ceramic for the whole country. A residential district (6) was also built for the workers. The Porcelain factory stopped its production at the end of the communist regime and is now occupied by a painting factory and shop.

After the 50s, new residential districts (5) were implemented by the regime with different techniques, making these buildings look different and higher than the first ones.

In the 90s, informal development took place in the available land around the area, such as areas where there used to be greenhouses (1), and on the natural hilly surroundings in the south (10). The area got also denser with informal extensions to existing buildings and the construction of new houses.

Nowadays, Kinostudio is recognized as one of the "poles" of the polycentric city. It has nevertheless not received any masterplan, except the "Park of Art" under development.



Kinostudio at the time of its construction in 1952, Albanian Film Archive



Logo of the movies by Kinostudio "Shqipëria e re" ("New Albania")



Propaganda showing the productions from the Porcelain factory, 1978

Private residential and commercial buildings are rising in the area, the most important being the "Tower Bridge" complex by Orion (7), an important Albanian construction company. Tower Bridge 1, 2 and 3 are already existing and the fourth part of the project is starting. A few other activities, like garage and repairshops (9), or a gardening shop (8), can be found in the southern part.

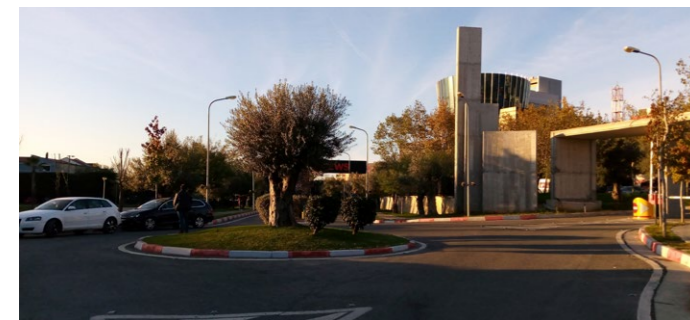
Visuals of Tower Bridge 4, Orion



A first approach in pictures



400 m



Some of the most important TV and radio stations headquarters are gathered near the Ministry of Culture and the old cinema studios. It welcomes notably RTV Klan, one of the biggest media group in Albania, RTV Ora, TV Scan, Abc News and Radio Nacional.



2 ↑ Despite the end of the Kinostudios activities in 1992, the area still welcomes actors of the cultural and cinema sector: the Ministry of Culture (a), the AA Film company "Tirana Teater" (b), private audiovisual production company, the Marubi Film Academy (c), cinema school and festival organizers, and the Central State's Film Archive of Albania (d), which keeps the original albanian cinematographic productions and holds screenings from times to times.

This small neighborhood is typical from the early communist albanian residential areas. After the fall of communism, extensions on existing buildings took place, creating a less linear landscape.





↑ 4 The Porcelani Park holds his name from the nearby factory. It is the only green space for all the neighborhood, but suffers from a lack of maintenance. It is surrounded by blocks from the communist time but also from buildings implemented more recently.

Schools and kindergartens have received some attention through recent renovations.

↓ 5



5a



5b



6a



6b



↑ 6 ← 6 These residential areas were built after the 50s. Public spaces are in some places in poor condition.

Residential and commercial buildings are rising and are slowly changing the face of the area.

7 ↓



7c



7b



7a

The Art Park, a first step to a new era in Kinostudio?



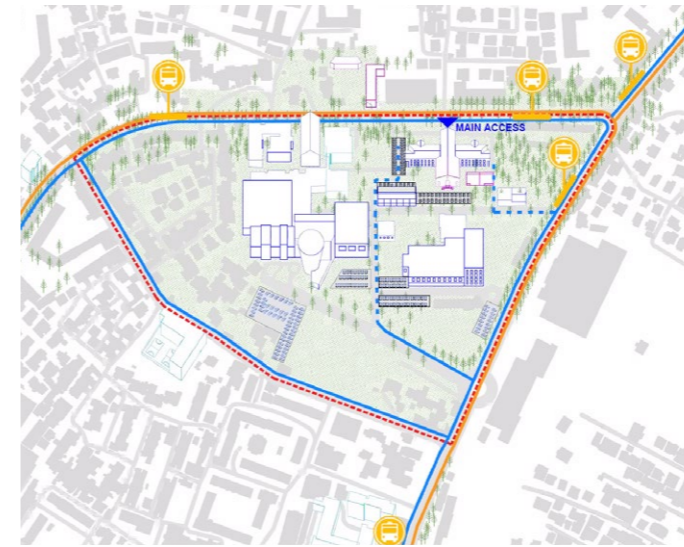
Kinostudio as an "Art Park"

As part of the agreement called "Shokë dhe engjëj" ("Friends and Angels") signed in 2018 between the region of Puglia in Italy and the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry has launched on 10 December 2020 workshops to re-imagine the area of Kinostudio as an "Art Park." The aim is to transform this space into an art park displaying temporary and long-term art works - it is seen as a center that may become a new cultural destination, but also an open park for the children of the area. The Park itself is limited in size, but in order to make it accessible to the local community, it would mean a few changes in the area.

An important part of the project is the creation of the film museum, an initiative that started 10 years ago and failed to be completed. A large art work from Alfredo Pirri shall be found in the art park. Pavilions for artists, a bar and a more functional pavilion may welcome artists and public. In a broader vision, the connections between the Ministry, the Marubi Film School and the State Film Archives are to be emphasized, transforming this place into a "green campus" and removing fences to make the green area more accessible.



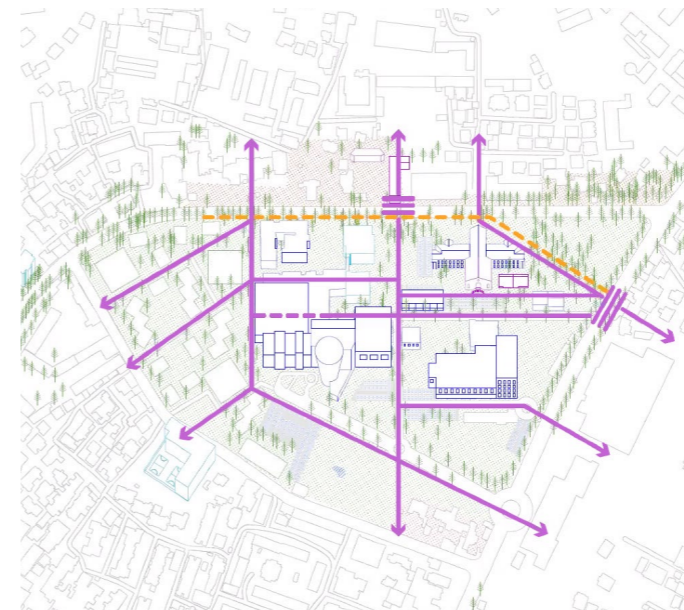
Visitors are invited to walk in the piece of art of Alfredo Pirri "Compagni e Angeli" in Roma (arte.it)



Bus stops and main access to the area (Ministry of Culture)



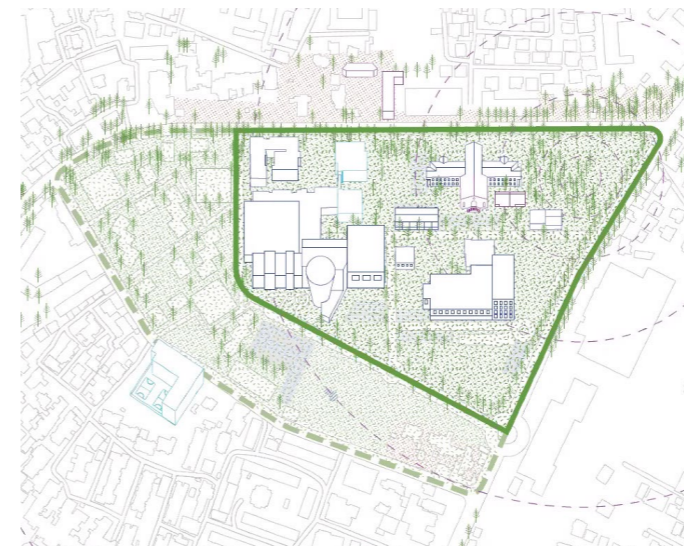
Proposed accessibility to the area and within the district: in red, autobus lines, and in yellow, pedestrian paths (Ministry of Culture)



The campus is seen as a "permeable campus", where you can freely come from a point to another (Ministry of Culture)



To this effect, it is offered to remove the existing fences and barriers between the institutions (Ministry of Culture).



The area shall also become a green campus (Ministry of Culture)



Visual impressions of the pavilions (Ministry of Culture)

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