



International Urban Planning Workshop Tirana | Albania | 2020

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

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maîtrise d'œuvre urbaine

Les Ateliers de Cergy

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Table of Contents

I Workshop origins

II Workshop goals and approach

III Context

3.1/ Tirana today, a dynamic and vibrant capital

- European Youth Capital
- Between mountains and sea
- From isolation to integration
- Administrative reform: from city to metropolitan region
- Tirana-Durrës Corridor: gateway to the Mediterranean
- Political center and economic hub

3.2/ Tirana's plan for a polycentric and kaleidoscopic Metropolis

- #Tirana100: celebrating the capital's centenary with an eye on the future
- TR030
- Urban transformation and renewal
- Post-earthquake reconstruction, a catalyst for urban regeneration

IV Core Challenges

4.1/ Integrating 30 years of informal urbanism

4.2/ Meeting rapidly growing demand for housing and services

4.3/ Transition to efficient and sustainable mobility

4.4/ Restoring and preserving threatened and fragmented ecological systems

4.5/ Building resilience in communities of many identities and contradictions

4.6/ Balancing urban-rural development

4.7/ Exploring Tirana's future as a Mediterranean Capital

V Repairing and Preparing Tirana with Urban Resilience as a frame

VI Possible sites of interest

I. Workshop origins

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 organises 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.

The first ideas related to the International Urban Planning Workshop of the city of Tirana came to life during the visit of the President of *Les Ateliers*, Mayor of Moulins and French former Minister, M. **Pierre André Périssol** in Tirana in May 2018. During his visit Mr. Périssol met with the French Ambassador to Albania and the Mayor of Tirana, both of whom expressed interest in a potential workshop in Tirana. Representatives of the French Development Agency (AFD) also became involved. A few months later, in December 2018, the Director of the Ateliers Christine Lepoittevin participated in the AVITEM Metropolis Seminar, organised in Tirana.

These first and crucial contacts led to the beginning of the preparations of the Workshop, with the first step being the Exploratory Mission that took place in Tirana between the 27th and 31st January 2020. During the mission a variety of actors within the municipality, city planners, academia, and civil society were consulted in order to understand the pressing issues in the city and the challenges that the workshop could address.

The municipality's primary interest in the workshop is in how it could contribute to the urban regeneration programme already underway in Tirana and explore perspectives for the city's future. It is specifically looking for **actionable ideas and approaches at a variety of scales which can be quickly implemented while aligning with a long term vision of the city.**

The following chapter will discuss how the workshop endeavours to address the municipality's aspirations while simultaneously integrating the unexpected concerns caused by the devastating earthquake in 2019 and the pandemic that followed in early 2020. **The workshop takes these crises as an opportunity to launch Tirana, on the year of its centennial anniversary, towards a new century of sustainable development defined by urban resilience.**

II. Workshop goals and approach

A city in transformation

Tirana is the political and economic capital of Albania and a thriving city of 850 000 inhabitants. It is a complex and rapidly changing city full of paradoxes. Its lively, chaotic urban fabric reflects its extraordinary history. Having experienced one of the harshest authoritarian regimes of the Cold War period, Albania entered a radical process of change in the 1990s. The last 30 years have been characterised by a transition towards pluralism, democracy and market economy, involving mass urban migration and unregulated capitalism. Consequently, Tirana has experienced an explosive population growth and continues to absorb a steady influx of newcomers from all over Albania. Accounting for a third of the country's total population, Tirana is unsurprisingly marked by an intense densification of existing neighbourhoods along with the creation of self built informal suburban patterns in its ever expanding metropolitan region.

Recent administrative reforms have greatly increased the geographical area covered by the municipality of Tirana, amalgamating with surrounding suburban and rural communities. Decision making has also been centralised allowing for urban planning at a much larger scale. Even though there is a lingering skepticism towards projects aimed at the betterment of the public sphere, the city is currently in a very active period of urban regeneration and transformation.

One of the first notable regeneration projects was in the early 2000s when the then mayor of Tirana mandated that communist-era apartment buildings which had become dilapidated, be painted in bright colours and patterns to enliven the city and create civic spirit. Since then, Tirana has seen a series of acclaimed urban and architecture projects designed by renowned international architects. Of particular note is the reimagining in 2017 of Skanderbeg square, an iconic space in Albanian consciousness, as a pedestrian public space. In 2018 Tirana adopted its first urban vision and masterplan since the administrative reforms, Tirana030, designed by Stefano Boeri. It covers not only the city centre but also what used to be independent towns and villages at the outskirts of the city, including rural mountainous areas in the periphery. There is also a vision for the main economic corridor of the country, a 30km stretch connecting Tirana to Durrës, a major port town on the Adriatic coast. Further outward, Tirana imagines itself becoming a modern Mediterranean capital and a key link in the economy of the western Balkans.

Challenges

Despite these positive changes and aspirations, it is said that the mayor of Tirana is the mayor of every Albanian's plan B. Plan A is to emigrate abroad. There is some truth to this feeling as evidenced by the high rate of emigration into and out of the city. The reasons behind it are complex. Despite, or because of, its phenomenal growth in the postcommunist years, recent progress in urban planning, and many eye catching projects that could easily fit in a Western capital, Tirana still faces many pressing issues.

For over two decades there was a proliferation of informal buildings, mainly in the periphery, which are now in the process of legalisation but lack the formal urban services and infrastructure. Although Tirana's economic conditions are better than in the provinces, there is still a relatively high unemployment and especially high under-employment as young people from all over Albania flood into the city to study and then search for work. This young and dynamic workforce is also one of Tirana's key advantages. The uncontrolled economic and demographic growth has led to heavily damaged water and green networks and a generally neglected ecology. An inefficient transport system, coupled with an Albanian car culture that views the car as a status symbol, results in severe traffic gridlock which has economic, ecological and health-related consequences. Urban resilience studies call these types of challenges Chronic Stresses —

slow moving disasters which have a direct impact on the wellbeing of the city's inhabitants, and also must be addressed in order to minimise impact of unpredictable shocks.

In the past year Tirana has suffered two such shocks. The earthquake of November 2019, whose epicentre was not far from the city, caused significant damage and has left about 2000 families homeless. The municipality responded quickly to move the victims into temporary housing. It was still in the process of examining the full extent of the damage and exploring reconstruction plans when the Covid-19 pandemic arrived also in Albania. The national government responded by imposing a very strict quarantine, shutting down businesses and the teeming cafes and public spaces, which is particularly traumatic for a city and culture where most business and social activity happens in public spaces, cafes, and bars. It's long term effects are still uncertain.

Aims and approach

The combination of these persistent challenges and acute shocks may appear daunting, but in the face of these demanding situations lie opportunities for reimagining the future - a crisis as opportunity. **In this workshop that future will be seen through the lens of Urban Resilience.** It is both a theoretical framework and a goal - a socially, environmentally and economically resilient Tirana.

The workshop will explore **actionable ideas and approaches on repairing the current cracks in the urban fabric, while preparing to sustainably manage the rapid demographic and economic growth** that is expected to continue.

Repair and Prepare - A two-prong approach

Repairing the urban fabric and providing municipal services after years of informal building, internal migration, and recent natural disasters, while maintaining core qualities and identities.

Preparing so as to anticipate the provision of services for the expected growth in population, density, built areas, and economic activity.

What can be done to switch the stance from reactive to proactive in providing services to a growing population? How can growth be managed in a way that encourages sustainable forms of development and reduces Tirana's vulnerability to natural and manmade disasters? How can the city's advantages, such as its young demographic, be used to advance economic as well as social and environmental objectives?

Both "repair" and "prepare" have immediate/short term as well as long term dimensions. Actions must be taken now with a long term resilience strategy in mind. For these interventions to have a meaningful impact, they would have to operate at different scales: from block and neighbourhood level to city and territorial development.

The end goal remains turning Tirana from a stepping stone into a final destination.

From Plan B to Plan A :

A place of opportunity and delight.

A lively, affordable destination for tourists and residents alike.

A hyper-connected cultural capital of the Balkans.

A distinctly quirky, diverse and uniquely European city.

An inclusive, resilient and sustainable city, in harmony with nature.

III. Context

3.1/ Tirana today, a dynamic and vibrant capital

Tirana City Centre | Skanderbeg Square



The Lonely Planet describes Tirana, Albania's capital city, as one bustling with vigour and a burgeoning confidence fuelled by old-world hospitality and a refashioned aesthetic. Bland, concrete-grey buildings are now canvases for a Pantone rainbow of creativity. What gives the urban tableau its flavour is the juxtaposition of culture and eras. In the city center, communist era and modern buildings can be seen alongside an Ottoman mosque and Mussolini style government buildings from the 1930s. The city is a study of contrasts where reminders – and the reinterpretation – of an iron-fisted, post-WWII communist legacy are scattered around a metropolis where a strong and dynamic generation is growing up without being influenced by the legacy of the past.

European Youth Capital

Albania, on Southeastern Europe's Balkan Peninsula, is a small country with Adriatic and Ionian coastlines and an interior crossed by the Albanian Alps.

It is located in the Western Balkans, between Greece in the south, the Republic of North Macedonia in the east and Montenegro and Kosovo in the north.

Tirana is located almost in the center of the country, 30 km from the Adriatic coast.

Tirana is the largest city in the country with a population of around



850 000 inhabitants and a surface of 1110 km². The number of inhabitants has seen a steady increase since the early 1990s. During the fall of the communist regime the right of movement made a large number of people migrate to the capital in search of better possibilities of employment and living conditions. Together with the city of Durrës, they represent more than one third of the country's total population. This migration led to a massive formal and informal surge of constructions in the city and its surroundings.

	Albania	Tirana
Population	2 845 955 inhabitants (2020) -0.6% drop from 2019	842 019 inhabitants (2019) +1.64% growth from 2018
Surface	28 748 km ²	1 110 km ²
Density	104.6 inhab/km ² (2018)	758 inhab/km ² (2019)

Source *INSTAT* and *OPEN DATA TIRANA*

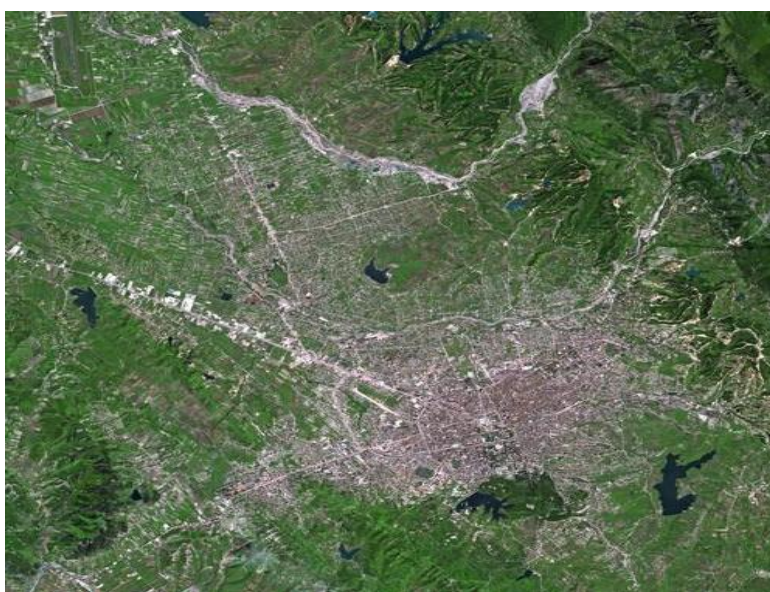
The official language is Albanian. However several small ethnic groups live in the city, such as Aromanians, Romani, Egyptian, and more foreigners coming to settle, the vast majority of whom are from the neighbouring country, Italy.

Tirana's population is relatively young at an average of 36 years (2019). In fact it was recently awarded the title of the European Youth Capital of 2022. Consequently the municipality of Tirana will work hand in hand with youth organisations and prepare an agenda for 2022 with many activities for and with the youth of the city.



Between mountains and sea

The city is located about 34 kilometers west of the Adriatic Sea. From the south and west it is surrounded by relatively low hills, while on the northwestern side Tirana extends over a flat area. The average altitude is about 110 m above the sea level. Its relief is diverse, both in height and shape. Dajti, a popular retreat to the local population of Tirana, is a mountain and protected national park on the north-east edge of the city standing at 1613 m. Further east lies Mali me Gropa-Bizë-Martanesh, at 1828 m, another protected landscape.



Tirana is rich in water resources. Three rivers cross through the city:

Erzen, Tirana River and Tërkuzë River. The river of Tirana passes on the northern periphery. A few kilometers further south flows the Erzeni River and the center of Tirana is crossed by the Lana stream, which joins the Ishëm River at the estuary. On its territory there are also a considerable number of artificial lakes, built in both mountainous and lowland areas.



Lana River



Erzeni River

From Isolation to Integration

Tirana's history as a modern city began in 1614 when Sulejman Pasha Bargjini, a rich feudal from the village of Mullet, built some main buildings: a mosque, a Turkish bath, a bakery. Unfortunately, none of these buildings has lived until today. The city began to grow in the early 18th century, but continued to be a marginal city until February 11th, 1920 when it was declared to be the capital of Albania. It was a new beginning for the city. 1925, under the first president of Albania, Ahmet Zogu, the Italian architect Armando Brasini was chosen to lead the first regulatory plan for the city of Tirana. The Palace of Brigades, the ministries buildings, the government building and the municipality hall are designed in this period of time.

As the Second World War approached, Tirana became a center of anti-fascist resistance with the Communist Party of Albania being established by November 1941. On the morning of November 17th 1944, Tirana was liberated. Upon the conclusion of the war, Albania entered a 40-year-long communist dictatorship. The country became heavily influenced by Stalin and the Soviet Union which was reflected in the significant changes made in Tirana's appearance as the city came to adopt more Stalinist styles of architecture until the early 1990s. At this time, Tirana was called the "Capital of Congresses" as every five years delegates from all over the country would organise a congress in the city.

The spaces where these congresses took place are nowadays important city attractions such as: the University of Arts, the Palace of Culture, and the Palace of Congresses.



Skanderbeg square, Tirana's nerve centre and symbolic site for the whole country, reflects Albania's complex, convulsive history. Left: Plaza Tower, the Mosque Et'hem Bey & the City Hall; Right: National Museum

Administrative reform: from city to metropolitan region

Albania underwent an administrative and territorial reform in 2014 that completely changed the map of the country. Defunct communes were merged with municipalities, reducing 400 local units to 61. Before this, Tirana city's area was only about 31 km². Since the reform and the consequent merging of districts, the municipality of Tirana governs an area of 1110 km². The new municipality of Tirana consists of 24 administrative units, comprising of 11 districts of Tirana city and 13 neighbouring districts (which were added to the existing municipality of Tirana), namely Petrelë, Farkë, Dajt, Zall-Bastar, Bërzhitë, Krrabë, Baldushk, Shëngjergj, Vaqarr, Kashar, Pezë, Ndroq and Zall Herr.



Districts of Tirana city (urban core)



Admin units of Tirana Municipality (Tirana City + 13 districts)

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 of Tirana surrounded by four partly urbanised municipalities
- the rugged mountainous area to the east.

As mentioned previously, one of the important consequences of this dramatic administrative reform is a centralised approach to decision-making that allows for urban planning at a much larger scale.

Tirana-Durrës Corridor: Gateway to the Mediterranean

Construction of the modern port of Durrës began in the late 1920s, at the same time as the building of institutions and road infrastructure in the central part of the ancient city of Durrës began. For hundreds of years, passenger and freighter vessels docked on two wooden bridges, or waited for discharge boats. The creation of the forts and basins, as well as the deepening of the harbor, continued until 1934.



The port of Durrës is one of Europe's oldest ports in the Adriatic Sea and one of the

© Durrës Port Authority

main “bridges” the Balkans can offer to the east-west communication. About 1.5 million passengers, 250,000 cars and 100,000 trucks were processed in 2018. These amounts represent 78% of the maritime trade at the national level, making the port of Durrës the most important one in the country. The main goods processed at this port are general goods, cereals, containers, minerals, ferries, etc. In 2018, 3.614 million tons of goods were handled.

The Port of Durrës is also a key location for ferry networks and passenger transit, giving the city of Durrës a strategic position in relation to the Corridor VIII, one of the ten Pan-European transport corridors.

Currently, strategic investments are being undertaken by the Government, mainly in deepening the basin and inlet channel, which will enable the processing capacity of larger ferries such as cruise ships, making it a competitive port in the region.

The port of Durrës is situated in the city with the same name. Durrës is the second largest city in Albania, with approximately 200,000 inhabitants. It is located on the Albanian central coast, 33 km west of the city of Tirana, in one of the narrowest points of the Adriatic Sea opposite the Italian ports of Bari and Brindisi. Due to its geographical position and natural resources, Durrës is included in priority areas for tourism development.



Political center and economic hub

Tirana is the heart of the economy of Albania and the most industrialised and economically fastest growing region in the country. It has the highest concentration of businesses and light industry. The economic power of Tirana is distinguished by the much higher amount of savings and credit nationally, the tax revenues, which are overwhelmingly realised in Tirana, and the development of the construction sector. The municipality of Kashar, included in the territory of Tirana’s municipality and along the Tirana-Durrës highway, is considered the most industrialised area of the country due to its large number of businesses and industry.

Tirana's agricultural areas are largely focused on livestock and dairy products, but also on rural tourism (agrotourism). The hilly areas around Tirana also have a tradition of olive trees and fruit trees. Tirana’s territory has some untapped coal resources, although the most widespread activity in the use of natural resources is the processing of stone for construction and decorative arts.

Today Tirana is the centre of political and administrative life of Albania. Housing almost all state institutions, diplomatic representatives, it is also the largest centre of education in the country.

It’s noteworthy that its digital space is gaining strength and this trend is slowly creating a competent and growing pool of young entrepreneurs and technical talents.

3.2/ Tirana's plan for a polycentric and kaleidoscopic Metropolis

#Tirana100: celebrating the capital's centenary with an eye on the future

In recent years, the once isolated Albania has begun to rouse the curiosity of its European neighbours. Albania is favourably positioned just east of Italy across the Adriatic Sea and about 45 minutes away from the Greek island of Corfu by boat. Its cosmopolitan capital Tirana, with its restaurants, shops and numerous galleries, complement the surrealistic picture that merges with the city's past, offering a wide variety of opportunities and low cost services for all Europeans and in particular the inhabitants of the Balkans.

Tirana, named the European Youth Capital for 2022, aims not only to attract tourists and investors but also young people from Albania and Southern Europe by supporting innovation and embracing diversity.

In February 2020 Tirana celebrated its 100th anniversary as Albania's capital. The catchphrase #Tirana100, coined by the Municipality, seeks to mark a turning point as Tirana projects itself for its second centenary, radically transforming its reputation from a once unapproachable city to a dynamic and energetic cultural capital of the Balkans.

© Adjol Sini



TR030 - A new era for the country's capital

As mentioned before, Armando Brasini created the first masterplan for the city of Tirana in 1925. Almost one hundred years later, the Tirana 2030 General Local Plan by Italian firm Stefano Boeri Architetti was approved by the City Council. Boeri seeks to define a new epoch in the country's capital, including controlled development, advanced infrastructure, green corridors and preservation of the city's architectural heritage.



© Stefano Boeri Architetti

An important aspect of the new Local Plan is using the natural environment as an urban development tool. An Orbital Forest of two million new trees will surround Tirana with three main purposes:

- a physical boundary to prevent further sprawl (buffer between urban core & rural areas) but this means that the city will continue to grow vertically and in a compact fashion
- a democratic park (can be accessed from adjoining areas on all sides)
- lungs of the city.

One of the main challenges the Municipality of Tirana has been facing over the past few years is matching the quality of municipal administration and services to the fast pace of urban growth. TR030 aims to bring major investment in the city's infrastructure and services. The city center is set to be connected to the airport and the port of Durrës by a new high-speed railway, which will also contribute to reducing the traffic congestion.

Urban Transformation and Renewal

A few notable ongoing projects:

- Following its application for EU membership, Albania launched a new initiative to decentralise and reform the country's territorial organisation in 2011
- The Tirana-Durrës corridor is of great economic and strategic significance as it connects the two biggest cities in the country, and Durrës is the country's largest port and an important regional hub for international trade
- There are plans for vital infrastructure and connectivity projects to boost Albania's regional and

international ties

- Roads are being re-dimensioned to accommodate pedestrian and bike networks
- Plans — Detailed land use plan, Territorial Reform (100 villages), General Local Plan (15 year lifespan in effect since 2017), TR030 (already legally in place), Agriculture Plan (with the aim of centralising agricultural production in terms of distribution)
- New projects — Tirana Riverbed Project, New Boulevard Project (architectural backbone of the city)
- Ring road under construction — at present no plan or funding for the northern part



© Alb Building | Tirana North Boulevard

Post-earthquake reconstruction, a catalyst for urban regeneration

The earthquake of November 2019 was a major crisis for the country but the Municipality, as well as organisations and volunteers, were quick to respond. Many efforts have been made to find solutions for the 2000 families who lost their homes. The relocation strategy aims to minimise the disruption to these families' daily lives.

The Mayor of Tirana believes that the Municipality has approximately one year to find long term solutions for the people affected by this disaster. The idea however is to go beyond mere reconstruction and renovation, and create new neighbourhoods in strategically earmarked sites. Once complete, these mixed-use cross-financed neighbourhoods would operate as vibrant urban centres that would encapsulate Tirana's vision of a polycentric and kaleidoscopic city.

IV. Core challenges

4.1/ Integrating 30 years of informal urbanism

During the years of the communist regime (1945-1990) the population of Albania tripled. However urban growth was strictly regulated and centrally planned. Private land ownership was not allowed and there was no housing market. All residential construction and infrastructure was publicly financed. In addition, the movement of population was controlled and managed according to economic and political “needs”. This resulted in relatively well distributed urban and economic development that avoided massive concentration of industry, housing or population in one city region.

The transition to a democratic and decentralised government structure after 1990 turned the previous urban development model on its head. Almost all industry, previously centrally managed, collapsed leaving many jobless, without prospects and poor health and educational services, particularly in rural areas and harder to reach regions in the north. At the same time people were free to move, and so they did. Most urban centres, and Tirana in particular, were confronted with a flood of internal migrants. State institutions were too fragile to manage the dramatic changes.



Bathore 1994, 2007, and 2014 | © John Driscoll, IIUD

Through a series of confusing laws in the 1990s most of the land was re-privatised with a combination of recognising pre-communist ownership and distribution between local citizens. Some rural land was reserved for agricultural enterprises which never materialised. Many new landowners and people who moved to the cities built their houses on rural land at the periphery of cities or simply squatted on publicly owned land and built homes there. This spontaneous piecemeal construction was typically started by people related through family or place of origin and varied in size (1000-10000 inhabitants) and quality (from simple 1-bedroom homes to 3-storey villas). Almost all buildings were residential and no infrastructure or services were considered - roads, water, sewage, electricity, education, health etc.

By the mid 2000s informal and illegal settlements covered 3200 km², 1/3 of which was in urban areas. At this point began an effort for legalisation which is still ongoing. A government agency, ALUIZNI was tasked with first legalising informal properties and then using part of the legalisation fees to repay original owners (in case of squatting) and a part to fund infrastructure development and urban integration of the legalised neighbourhoods. However the legalisation process has been slow and the legalization fees have been too low to even repay the original owners. What little money was earmarked for urban integration was transferred to local authorities which usually lacked the capacity for dealing with the challenge.

The recent administrative reforms in Tirana agglomerated surrounding villages and towns to the capital city which has both the capacity and the vision for the urban integration of the informal construction in its periphery. This centralisation at the same time distances citizens in the periphery from their democratic representatives and offers an opportunity to repair the urban infrastructure and services in their neighbourhoods.

How can Tirana provide services and bring basic infrastructure to informal neighbourhoods while facilitating their growth and integration into the urban fabric of the city?

How can further growth and densification be sustained while ensuring wellbeing and quality of life for the residents?

How can citizen involvement and accountability be maximised in order to successfully mitigate against future crises?

4.2/ Meeting rapidly growing demand for housing and services

As previously mentioned, Tirana's municipality faces a constant struggle matching the provision of services, such as housing, schools, and infrastructure, to the population growth rate.

The central "older" neighbourhoods of Tirana were holistically planned to include all necessary elements: housing, schools & kindergartens, clinics, community centres, public spaces, and the underlying physical infrastructure of water, electricity, sewage, transport etc. These neighbourhoods have experienced both legal and informal densification over the past 3 decades while the services have failed to catch up to the growth. The newly built areas in the periphery, which until recently were separate municipalities, lag even further. While the municipality is aggressively trying to catch up to the existing situation, the population growth and construction continues.

At the moment, the housing and commercial buildings are built first, and then services are provided later. How can this be reversed?

How can infrastructure and services anticipate continuous rapid demographic growth?



Traditionally, the housing need in Albania has not been characterised by “quantity”, but rather “quality” and “location”. After the fall of the communist regime and privatisation of land, there was a natural desire for home ownership and good quality housing. As a result, many buildings in informal developments are built to a reasonably good standard. At present, the formal housing market has focused on this aspiration for quality housing. Some would argue it has over-delivered in high-quality and high-price housing, but has not been able to provide adequate affordable housing to meet the need of growing migrant populations.

This is evidenced by the acute shortage of housing despite a large number of vacant or unsold apartments in Tirana and its suburbs. In some ways this is not a unique situation. An acute shortage of affordable housing and widening inequality are common issues in large cities around the world that are gravity centres of their nations economies in the same way as Tirana is for Albania. Paris, London, Amsterdam, New York, Seoul, Tokyo etc. all suffer from the same condition. This housing gap becomes all the more relevant in the post-earthquake context of Tirana when one considers the over 2000 families who have lost their homes.

How can the earthquake reconstruction projects contribute to an economically and socially inclusive long term strategy?

How can more affordable housing be provided in view of the current construction market that is not necessarily catering to the needs of the economically marginalised?

What social infrastructures can be set up to ensure that residential neighbourhoods are safe and resilient to future disasters?

4.3/ Transition to efficient and sustainable mobility



Traffic gridlock in Tirana © Armando Babani/EPA

Today Tirana is ranked as one of the most polluted cities in the world (38th) with one car for every two inhabitants. In keeping with its aspirations of becoming a coveted European capital, Tirana must rapidly upgrade its transport strategies to prioritise the movement of *people*, giving residents and visitors a wider variety of attractive transport options.

How do we drive a modal shift from private vehicle use to public transport, walking and cycling?

Although the city has been investing in redesigning streets to reduce reliance on cars (bike lanes, tree lined sidewalks), these efforts will fall short in the long term if they don't welcome multimodal connectivity.

The good news is that Tirana is in a favourable position to support a transition to alternative modes of transport, as its terrain is mostly flat and it is a compact city with work, services, and social contacts typically within walking distance. Current feasibility studies on mobility and sustainability recommend high impact and low cost strategies for Tirana.



Critical Mass, Tirana 2014 © Cynthia Ord

The bigger challenge is shaking off the bicycle's 'communist' image, and convincing a society that had long been deprived of car ownership to now reject the car as a status symbol. What seems to be the need of the hour is to fuse public policy and public desire: real alternatives that people will choose.

What incentives (promoting cycling, walking) and disincentives (discouraging car use) would be most optimal for Tirana to stimulate a behavioural shift in the short to medium term, to achieve a larger modal shift to transit-oriented development in the longer term?

Ultimately urban form and urban land development trends need to go hand in hand with urban transit policy.

How do we best direct Tirana's urban development to prepare for a future of integrated mobility, where non-motorised travel and public transport become the preferred modes of transport?

While the transition away from personal car is key, the car will remain in use for the foreseeable future and meanwhile the city suffers from inadequate road infrastructure and perennial gridlock. *How can the traffic situation be improved while accommodating the continuing demographic and economic growth?*

4.4/ Restoring and preserving fragmented and threatened ecological systems

Urban mobility cannot be thought of as something independent; there is an intrinsic link between mobility systems and green infrastructure or biodiversity corridors.

Before the fall of the communist regime, Tirana used to be relatively attractive, clean, quiet and compact, with a substantial amount of park space. Much of the public space was filled in with buildings in the past 30 years. Today, despite being flanked by mountains and forests, Tirana has one of the lowest amounts of green space of any major European city. A paradigm shift that integrates biodiversity into the urban fabric is absolutely imperative for Tirana to transition to a contemporary world-class city that boasts a high quality of life.

Architect Stefano Boeri's plan for Tirana 2030 includes a continuous orbital forest system around the city with two million trees comprising protected nature parks and oases to preserve and nourish the local biodiversity. It also plans for new ecological corridors along the Lana, Tirana and Erzeni rivers and a green circle known as the "4th Ring" intended as a linear public space for mobility and in a central position with respect to the larger Tirana metropolitan area.

While these projects have great value, they are not necessarily based on credible environmental data or evidence-based decision making. According to Albania's Resource Environmental Centre, environmental data collection in the country is woefully insufficient for producing environmental impact assessments that can stand up to the pressures of urbanisation.

How do we develop efficient environmental data management systems to support biodiversity protection in urban areas? Moreover, can this need be aligned to Albania's ongoing digital revolution?

Another important consideration is that there has already been so much haphazard construction that it has severely fragmented and jeopardised the territory's ecological systems, be it territorial scale linear corridors, stepping stone corridors or landscape corridors. The same is true for water networks as it is for green networks.

How do we reverse and repair this damage while considering the ethical and economic difficulties of simply removing existing (illegal) construction?

Can grassroots interventions address biodiversity conversation at a neighbourhood scale? Can community driven micro interventions contribute to the City's green belt initiatives and minimise urban flood risk?

At the territorial scale, could there be linkages between sustainable rural livelihoods and biodiversity conservation?

4.5/ Building resilient communities in a city of many identities and contradictions

Identity and conflict

Tirana has a significant cultural heritage that is a real source of identity for its citizens. As Tirana develops, its identity is constantly being shaped and redefined: it's a city of many identities, an agglomeration of heterogeneous clusters. This is one of the reasons the image of Tirana as a kaleidoscopic and polycentric city works beautifully in the collective vision. This heterogeneity is an asset for Tirana, although it is worth examining the tensions and conflicts that can arise when migrants from different parts of the country come together with existing residents and form a new community.

What platforms can we create to improve exchanges between the citizens, the municipality and the private sector to solve these conflicts? How do we endow citizens with a collective sense of pride for their adopted city?

Integration and inclusion

In the contemporary urban set-up, the citizens of Tirana, often in the middle of urban transformation of initially rural settings, find themselves at odds with natural systems. They struggle to live "inside the borders" This is one of the natural consequences of rural to urban transformation.



How do we bring about the full social and economic integration of these formerly rural and traditional communities? What is the path towards building strong, supportive and resilient communities?

Governance and representation

Albania's administrative reform accompanied by the expansion of Tirana's territory through the merging of its surrounding communes into one region has allowed for a centralised planning approach. However, the disappearance of smaller communes has led to a new challenge: the lack of representation at the community level, and consequently an ever-increasing feeling of alienation for its citizens, especially those living in the suburbs.

Adding to this, the frenzied rate of urbanisation has resulted in spatial anonymity, a severe lack of greenery and public spaces and a disconnected 'fringe' population. To some, Tirana is a land of opportunity, to others, it may represent alienation. Sometimes it is both at the same time.

The forever changing demography owing to a population that is in constant flux (people coming in from rural areas and then moving on to Western Europe or the US) makes it very difficult to build a core participatory group. In this sense persistent migration is problematic as it constantly breaks connections and doesn't allow for long lasting social and cultural associations.

What incentives could dissuade emigration so as to develop a more stable and constant population in Tirana? How can citizen engagement be maximised in decision making and public policy? How can citizen participation be integrated in the ongoing reconstruction projects in the city? How can the gap between the Municipality and the suburban populations be bridged?



Adapting to change while preserving neighbourhood character

Some of the older residential neighbourhoods in Tirana like Kombinati have excellent public spaces with a dynamic and bustling street life. While the regeneration and reconstruction of these neighbourhoods within the purview of ambitious urban densification projects is a welcome move, the human scale of the urban grid and neighbourhood character of these areas should definitely be preserved.

How can urban reconstruction and regeneration projects preserve the unique character of these neighbourhoods characterised by their social networks, street structure and neighbourhood amenities?

What long term impacts would the current pandemic crisis have on the psychology of Tirana's inhabitants and the way they experience their beloved city, and what can be done to mitigate the impact of the pandemic?

4.6/ Balancing urban-rural development



Understanding and improving the urban-rural condition is a key challenge to prepare Tirana for a resilient future. As Tirana continues to develop, for the sake of balance, it needs to move towards a synergy between urban and rural territories. It needs to adopt a territorial strategy that simultaneously tackles rural development alongside the city's urban renovation projects.

Currently there is already a growing interest in agro-tourism and the slow food movement.
How can this movement gain momentum?

*Most villages see an exodus of young people and families due to a lack of not only jobs but also lack of infrastructure, of services like schools and health, and of activities.
How can the gap between urban and rural attractiveness be reduced?*

If we look at agriculture specifically, the size of average farming plots is very small. Those who are unable to cultivate their plot of land must sell it. This is a deterrent to agricultural initiatives. In addition, farmers need assistance with distribution, marketing and cooperation.

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, as new habits are formed and proximity to work is no longer considered indispensable, would Tirana's population surge continue or can we imagine a new trend in the opposite direction, one of reverse migration, or at least a shift in trend to move away from the urban cores and closer to the suburbs?

Would changes to the general lifestyle, remote working and supported supply systems trigger an intensification of digital infrastructure and accelerate the much sought after digital revolution Tirana has been aspiring to?

What effect would this have on reverse migration and the development of surrounding villages?

If the services are up to the mark, would remote working capabilities allow people to benefit from cheaper property and a higher quality of life, hence providing an incentive to remain in the villages?

4.7/ Exploring Tirana's future as a Mediterranean Capital



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Tirana benefits from a strategic location and a favourable geographic position on the Adriatic Coast, but suffers from inadequate multimodal connectivity to the Port of Durres and other regional and international cities.

One of the key aspects required for Tirana to become an internationally connected city with a Mediterranean appeal is a territorial infrastructure development that matches these ambitions. Improving connections with neighbouring countries is vital for promoting international tourism and investment.

What connections should be prioritised so as to benefit rural and territorial development as well as international connectivity?

What angle would serve best to pique the global imagination about the city's international appeal?

Considering that Tirana has a green, circular economy, with light industrial production, what sort of Development Strategy would make the city attractive for StartUps in a sustainable and structured way?

V. Repairing and preparing Tirana with Urban Resilience as a frame

Now that we have laid out the context, covered the various challenges and asked the fundamental questions, it is time to look at these issues through the lens of *Urban Resilience*.

Urban resilience entails “the capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses, and systems within a city to survive, adapt, and grow no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience”

100 Resilient Cities [online] (2017). <http://www.100resilientcities.org/>

During the course of the workshop, we will work to design initiatives and projects in a forward looking, risk aware and integrated manner. We will be “repairing” and “preparing” some of Tirana’s strategic neighbourhoods, covering social, economic and ecological aspects:

1/ **Social resilience** — identity, governance, participation, behavioural change, bottom-up innovation, avoiding gentrification...

2/ **Economic resilience** — inclusive growth, preventing brain drain, addressing infrastructure funding deficits, regional infrastructure, global attractiveness, suburban development...

3/ **Ecological resilience** — urban-rural balance, integrated ecological systems, green/blue/brown networks, intelligent and sustainable transportation solutions, transit supportive development, data-based decision making...

The Workshop aims to address multiple challenges and facilitate multidisciplinary brainstorming sessions between the participant-experts as well as interactions with local actors in order to provide the municipality with actionable steps to:

- **REPAIR some of the damage caused by uncontrolled expansion of the urban landscape, chronic stresses and recent disasters**

As explained in the previous chapter, Tirana has “stopped the bleeding” of unauthorised construction but it is left with the legacy of unplanned and illegal buildings and neighbourhoods from the past 3 decades. These need repairing. Currently going through a legalisation process, these neighbourhoods require the provision of basic services, infrastructure and integration into the city, physically, socially and economically. There have been some efforts at integration, particularly in the denser areas around the ring road, including some creative participation to make small-scale but socially catalytic interventions in the urban fabric. These urban acupuncture initiatives need to be combined with large scale strategic planning to bring about a significant transformation in the larger urban context.

In addition, since the 2019 earthquake there is ongoing disaster management work that is being implemented such as the provision of permanent housing for the victims. These deep and necessary changes in the city fabric present an opportunity to not only patch up current problems but to create a basis for growth into resilient neighbourhoods.

- **proactively PREPARE to incorporate a sustainable approach to future development**

In addition to the difficulty of providing services to existing (unplanned) areas, the city has to deal with a rapid demographic growth and the resulting housing construction which is often in green fields. Instead of “playing catch up” the city wants to proactively manage provision of adequate housing (in terms of both quality and cost), social services such as schools, parks and public spaces, infrastructure, and employment, while simultaneously ensuring the protection and enhancement of ecological systems.

Lastly, Tirana needs to shape its regional future and prepare its networks of connectivity to match its vision as the Balkan’s “Creative Cultural Capital” and seductive tourist destination. Improving connections with neighbouring countries remains a priority.

A variety of time horizons and geographical scales

Multi-scale and temporal aspects of urban resilience will be addressed for a greater understanding of sustainability challenges.

SCALE: The sites proposed to the participants should be considered as focus areas within a larger territory. It is expected of the teams to think strategically, overlapping the block or neighbourhood level with the city scale and extending on to territorial and international scales.

PHASING: It is expected of the experts to keep a long-term strategy in mind while focusing on proposing short-term actions and approaches.

VI. Possible sites of interest

A few key sites that could be used to explore the “repair” and “prepare” methodologies in a tangible way:

- The Tractor factory neighborhood, considerably destroyed by the earthquake and one of the sites earmarked for restructuration
- A suburban site located in the urban-rural continuum, for instance, Kashar on the Tirana Durres corridor or another site on the economic corridor connecting Tirana to the airport, or an agricultural trade hub
- The Kombinati neighbourhood, also a strategic site with much to repair and much to preserve