

An Architectonic Recovery Plan over the North-East Historical Sector of Tirana, Albania

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ABSTRACT

The first signs of historical settlements in Tirana date back to the year 1614. These settlements and their road system belong to the Ottoman city structure.

Nowadays this historic north east area of Tirana consists of a conglomeration of buildings that date back to different historical periods. A good part of these dwellings are informal ones, which damage the morphology of the area.

In this paper is considering a genuine historical basis to create an intervention model in this specific area of Tirana. The total surface of the area which is rigorously analyzed is 2.08 ha. Regulatory plans that will be considered for this analysis are: the regulatory plan of 1917, 1921, 1937, 1953, 1980, up to today (the existing situation of the city of Tirana).

The whole area will be analyzed including the typical road system; the typical structure of the dwellings, and the typical morphology of the area.

All dwellings will be filed, according to historical dating situation and the existing situation. Current local general (PPV) plan provides a radical intervention in this area which seriously damages historical heritage of the city of Tirana.

This article aims and focuses to a territorial development model recovering it and not damaging it, (in contradiction with current regulatory plan). The new model will be clearly detailed (up to level plans). The city of Tirana needs historical heritage and historical identity. How can one damage such treasure which the time took care so much to create and preserve? Such allusions are to be spoken out loudly!

KEYWORDS: historical preservation, recovery plan, urban tissue, urban morphology, dwellings typology

1 INTRODUCTION

Base city shape stands unconsciously or not in the manner how axes are placed on the district area. The proper position of the axes will turn an unknown area to an urban area. Then these axes will expand according the demands and requirements of the time, according to political social events and interrelationships to other parts of the city. In some cases these urban factors resist till our days, thus creating a protecting isolation of the identity trail [1].

Always in this context there is an urban collaboration between population spontaneous activities and urban factors.

Formerly, only a green area existed, which was unelaborated by human being. Once the humans decided to build their residences, the area took the shape of a commune made of several coils/rings. At the beginning the residence building was spontaneous in amateurish way, due to that was created a special road system which totally interferes with Cardo and Decumanos logic (two perpendiculars roads in the ancient Rome). These residences build spontaneously created a venous system to a certain extent a

labyrinth, which in many directions doesn't have way outs (characteristic of ottoman cities). As the population was growing even the number of the residences was growing and without having many options they will try to adapt to the existing road system with very few exceptions.

The urban area has a set of different typological characteristics which vary in time. From attributes of the vernacular character, to organic ones around XIX century then comes the masterly residences (beginning of XX century). After the 1920, various residences and buildings arise created by architects [2].

The area in subject is one of primeval area in Tirana. This area is positioned north-east of Tirana city centre and it covers a surface of 2.08 ha. It is included within her historical zone and is located approximately 1km straight away from Tirana city centre.

1.1 The systems of streets

The main streets of Tirana converge to the centre. Some of them were wide, some of them narrow, somewhere straight but more often broken and particularly curved. Some of them are blind ones. The network of roads of the town resemble to the ribs of a popular leaf. In general they would measure 2 to 12 metres in width and all of them were unpaved.

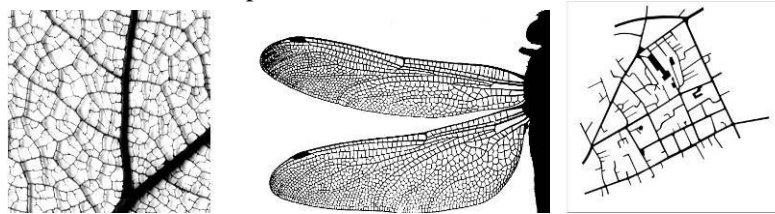


Figure 1: Left Networks of roads resembling to a leaf or butterfly wings (Web 1), right: extract of the map of Tirana (Doctorate group 2013 Tirana, Albania).

One can observe the resemblance of the network of roads with compared with actual urban situation of Tirana. The resemblance is very clear. The main arteries that are linked together form a good well defined zone , and the other roads some of them blind ones give character to the zone. Firstly it were created the main roads and after that were created the secondary roads branching from main streets, after that were created the tertiary roads some of them perpendicular to the secondary roads and at the end it was created a homogenous field.

1.2 The nucleus, general overview

This nucleus has its genesis in the XVIII century, in 1775 with the construction of ‘Zajmin’ mosque, which will be demolished for various planning reasons, related to the junction between ‘Dibra’ and ‘Thanas Ziko’ roads [2].



Figure 2: Left: Google earth (specification on roads designation). Right: Ortho photo of the area

The area benefits of traditional texture, but often this texture is erased from the construction between the years 60's, 80's or those after 90's. In some areas some villas has remain in the form of islands in high density urban areas, meanwhile in some areas there is a preserved urban texture. Evolutionary process of the area and the history that it carries is important not only as capital of Albania but also as evidence of the past. The long historical journey through maps was a very fruitful process in the exaction of the dates of some historic buildings of the area with the most important historical value that they carry out. Also the obtained information directly from residents in the area was very important to define the term "collective memory area".

The traditional techniques of realizing buildings, materials used, and the evidence of a particular architectural language are the subject of this paper. An additional reason for this study is the understanding of the vulnerability of certain buildings to be destroyed or transformed which depends on several factors such as: resident's income, the position in relation to the road, the mix use of businesses on the ground floor, number of floors, construction method, property disputes etc.

It is important to underline that the building area is treated with traditional handcraft but also with authentic architectural projects. This architecture was later prepared by the architect and engineer educated and characterized by an unstable social and historical development in certain stages, especially in that between the two world wars. Local architects and engineers have not yet establish a national physiognomy especially in their infancy. They still carried the impacts of schools where they were formed. This historical urban area has a variety of characters and different typologies. Initially the dwellings were very organic and vernacular (during the nineteenth century), then the dwellings were made by handcrafts (the beginning of the twentieth century and later) and mainly after 20 years, the dwellings were made by architects.

Small rectangular plots are mainly filled of villas overlooking the front façade facing to the street. The architectural facades and even of the back gates and the yard, the dwelling wall contrast technique, and the surrounding walls have managed to break the monotonous rhythm and the repetition of the same motive. The way how the building were plastered and decorated had a very important role determining the role of the façade. The plaster almost did not apply to the vernacular part of buildings, which were built with earth bricks. Over time they started to build new types of buildings, brick building, and then they established a broad field of application in plaster decorative elements (Bushati, 2012).

2 HISTORICAL EVOLUTION AMONG YEARS

Her graphical genesis dates since 1891, the date in which flourished the first bases of quarry on the area in subject. According to authentic historical analyses which took place resulted that her bases has its roots earlier then the dates on the documentation that are available being closely related to the characteristics of ottoman cities, with ending roads (dead end) and grounds formed by road junctions. According to the deeper analyses in 1917, the area in subject existed also a water fountain which was setup so that millings could function since that time (Bushati, 2012).

Referring to the milling, it is one of the elements that are re-called in memory mapping and also in the intervention strategy. In the map of 1917 are clearly noticeable these elements. In this map also are noticed the first tendencies for a central orientation. The network of street is directing to the centre of the area. The buildings are positioned at the perimeter contour of the ground, having a direct connection with the network of streets.

Referring to both maps (1917's; 1921's) it is noticeable a minimal transformation mainly at the residence and less at the road system. In regards to the road system one can observe a tendency for creating undefined grounds from the urban point of view. It is noticed a tendency that opposes the logic of ottoman roads system (roads which are linked up with each other). The residence has a tendency to be stretched therefore appending to each other and creating the basis of the logic for the individual residences using common roof, meanwhile the quadratic system of property start to show up. The element of panorama (the spring) becomes an integral part of the residential complex.

In the 1937 it is noticed an intensification of the residences, penetrating also in her heartland. The ownership lines are evidently clear and the residences are clearly defined. Analyses show a clear evolution in the property. The property is more parcelled which shows that over it are made economical transactions such as: buying and selling, or selling by dividing the property in smaller assets. In the map of this year one can observe clearly the dating of the residences, where on dark colour are the once which are more primeval. An interesting role still plays the stream flow. The road system is more flexible, which according to the map of 1937 tends to be unified by creating a central ground. The ramifications of the roads give the opportunity for development deeply in the area. There are tendencies to create alleys with ottoman characteristics (dead or blind ends).

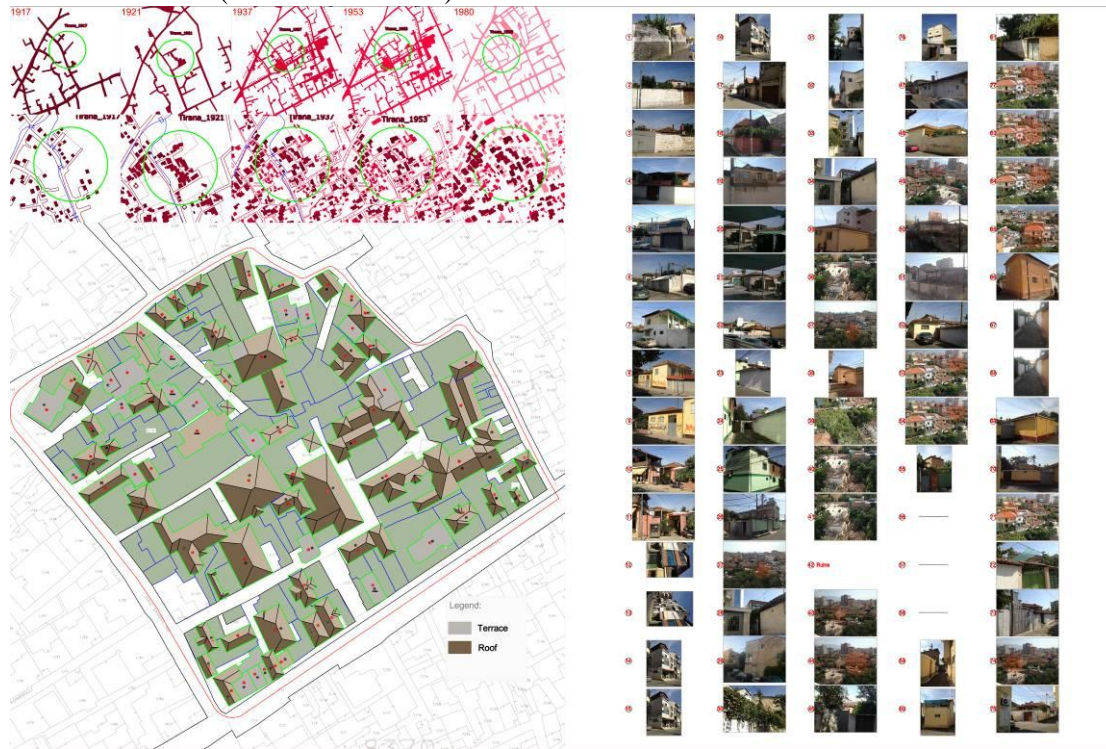


Figure 3: Historical development among years and present situation, (K. Xhexhi 2013)

In the 1953 it is noticed the preservation of the same approach on road characteristics, more or less same urban morphology and new sporadic buildings which respects very well the height of the area, meanwhile in terms of district mostly the new building have replaced old ones. The interventions on it during these years result to be minimal. The central square has more a transit character. Anyway is evident that the traces of it are being transported from the past exactly in the intersection of some main roads of the area. It could be noticed easily that the character is determined by the properties (the roads are mainly established between two properties), leaving those intact and stretched up to the walls of the properties.

The authenticity of the area consists in non-infringing her historical values at least till this period. In continuance of this idea in this block should be intervened with a restoring and conservative logic in order to preserve its unique values. New buildings are an integral part of a single property respecting this way the rights on the property. In this map the signs of the spring are still evident as an integral part of the block. In ratio to the map of 1937 it is not notice any changes in regards to the properties. This is due to the communism system where even though in map extract are defined the property borders, in reality the concept of private property no longer existed.

In 1980, the concept of private property brought necessarily consequences even in the urban morphology of the city and of the area in subject. It is noticed that the way is being built doesn't absolutely consider the private property which continues to be denied in these years of communism system. The slogan of that

time was just two words: standardization and characterization. The aim was to reduce the cost of the dwellings.

There are cases when the state buildings are being constructed even across the borders between two or three properties, without taking into account the borders of the properties, but anyway aligned with the main streets. The logic of the design (socialist logic) was the confrontation of the building directly to the sidewalk, so the sidewalk could profit from symbioses relations to be revitalized.

In the residences it is noticed a tendency to be as close as possible to each other. This is also reflected in a series of existing building, mainly profiting from an existing object façade/side, so they could reduce the cost of the dwelling. Generally these dwellings have a common roof covering type, respecting the character of the area.

3 CURRENT SITUATION

Nowadays, the historical centre of the town is in a shocking condition. Financial difficulties that residents are facing play a negative role in the restoration of these dwellings, leading them toward seductive offers from construction companies which compensate them with new apartments. Against a signed contract, residents provide their legitimate land for construction of new buildings. In some cases the demolition of old buildings did not happen due to discrepancy and irregularity in property documentations. From the historical point of view this obstacle results to be positive. The area is risking to change from a zone with ground floor buildings to tall (multi floor) one. We can truly say that this living quarter is one of the few remaining from old Tirana town reflecting a reality of our past, proud for its values and witness of habitat evolution.

High walls surrounding ground floor buildings, give to this area an intimacy and less accessibility from the street. The monotony is broken by the characteristic pavement and traditional, artisan doors. Isolated yards inside surroundings, rich in orchards and vineyards are present in the whole area. Building orientation toward to the main street is either by direct access to the main street or through a carrel or a porch. Occasionally these yards are surrounded by low walls with fences on top. These gardens full of orchards and colourful flowers have a decorative and relaxing purpose. The entrance usually it is covered by tiles giving the proper importance to it and proper protection toward atmospheric agents.

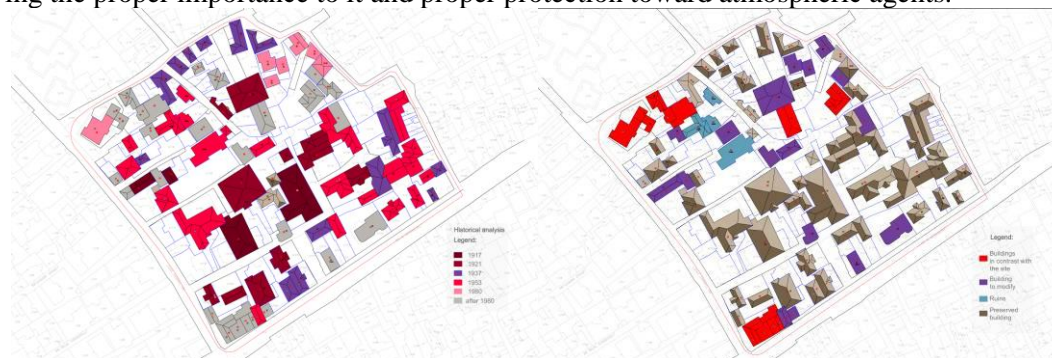


Figure 4: Existing situation, Left: Historical analysis of the dwellings, Right: Classification of construction, (K.Xhexhi 2013)

Area technical data: Total area 2.08ha, Coefficient of utilization of the territory 37%, the buildings intensity 1.8, Total population 440 inhabitants, Density 220 inhabitants/ha.

The map above is a historical synthesis and an information mapping as regards to all buildings in the area. It is also important to mention that the dominant parts of the dwellings are covered in roofs, which gives character to the area. The vines themes upon the terrace are also noticeable. The second map defines a method of classification of the buildings based on the three following criteria: buildings which are in contrast with the construction site, modifiable buildings and historical buildings which are preserved for their values. There is also the category of ruined buildings, which become an internal part of the area.

From the aerial view we can clearly notice the different heights of the building, along with the squaring of the properties with surrounding walls. The high buildings were built mainly after 80s or 90s, damaging the harmony of the area. They are considered foreign structures in the current urban context. This is one of the main reasons which revolve all mechanisms in order to eliminate them. Regarding the compositional aspect, they are rectangular and most of them have flat roofs. There are also have isolated cases in which, regardless of the area height, flat roofs are used as cover.

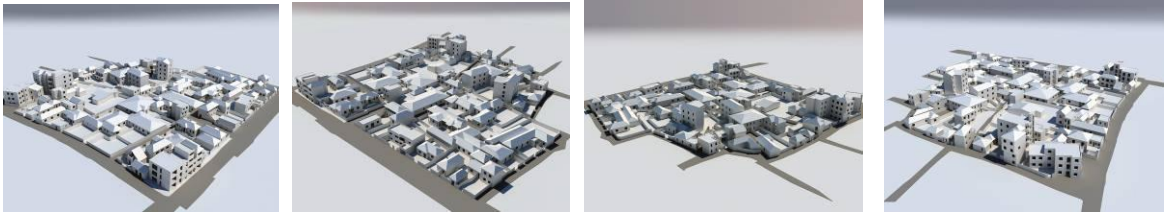


Figure 5: Existing situation, S-W angle; S-E angle; N-E angle; N-W angle;(K. Xhexhi 2013)



Figure 6: Existing situation, panoramic view of the area; (K. Xhexhi 2013)

The trend for new buildings in the existing area character can be easily noticed. This is due to the sole reason of deterioration of the existing buildings and of the logic of profiting from new luxurious apartments in the area. This is one of the main reasons of the lack of investment and maintenance of the historical buildings, bringing them towards their full degradation.

4 THE LOGIC OF INTERVENTION

The logic of the intervention carried on in the area clearly defines the buildings which shall be demolished and the buildings which shall be modified. Respectively, the red building shall be demolished and the violet ones shall be modified, while the rest shall be restored and maintained.



Figure 7: Intervention classification and existing situation plan (K. Xhexhi, 2013)

Their modification shall be handled basically in various methods:

- Interventions concerning only the roof configuration (alternation from flat roofs to angled roofs, in accordance with the character of the area).

- Interventions concerning demolition or extension of the buildings, which is translated as minimal transformation, in order to create better urban conditions.

-Interventions concerning the reduction of a maximum of 2 floors and construction of angled roofs in the respective buildings.

-Interventions of restoration nature by demolishing the new buildings (lacking historical values) which have damaged the integrity of the historical buildings by bringing the missing parts back from the past in order to become part of the urban reality again.

5 PROPOSED INTERVENTION

The method of intervention in these areas is relatively difficult. The area should immediately reclaim its equilibrium. This can only be achieved through the conservation and assessment of historical urban assets and pursuant to this, the Municipality of Tirana should modify the forecast on this historical area. We may say that the study area is one of the best preserved compared to the entire neighbourhood, and the newly built buildings are not many. Following this logic, the area should be curate with the recovery techniques and the contrasting buildings should definitely be demolished.



Figure 8: Proposed intervention (K. Xhexhi 2013)

As cultural heritage, this area is one of the few valuable areas of Tirana, which shows the organizational method of old street systems (spontaneous) that suit the development of the city. It also is an indicator of the old Tirana building typology. During the city evolution, some of the buildings have lost their previous function; they have been transformed or have remained as empty and abandoned spaces, thus losing their previous vitality. Also, these buildings have not received the proper attention due to the various economic, political and social factors occurring through the years. Nevertheless, the inhabitants do not let their houses fall apart due to the passing of time (Bushati, 2012).

The logic of intervention is easy. The buildings in contrast to the area shall be demolished. A part of them shall be modified and transformed and a part shall be newly built with the aim to achieve an acceptable building intensity and a considerable amount of compensation for the inhabitants who lose their homes due to demolition. The new buildings shall be built mainly in the south-eastern and north-eastern side, where there shall be more demolished houses. The use of certain type units which are repeated to provide a faster pace to the intervention makes the area more readable architectonically-wise, by creating more urban corridors. According to the new proposed intervention scheme, the technical-urban parameters have a slight difference. The territory exploitation coefficient is reduced to 35%, the building intensity to 1% and the density is also reduced to approximately 200 inhabitants/ha, which makes the area pleasant in many aspects.

In the north-western side was used the logic of the reflection of the buildings towards the main road axis which makes the scheme more interesting by respecting the existing boundary of the property. Meanwhile, in the south-western side, the 4-floor building is demolished and replaced with a 2-floor building which is identical with a group of existing buildings in the same parcel dating back from 1937. This block of buildings serves as a copy for another block of buildings on the other side of the road towards a well-defined symmetrical axis.



Figure 9: Proposed intervention; S-W angle; S-N angle; N-W angle (K.Xhexhi 2013)

The spaces designated for parking are mainly private and non-public. The cars should adapt to the historical urban context and not vice-versa. Another important element of the new planning proposal is the water source that reappears. Its documented history dates back from 1917. It is also read in the 1921, 1937 and 1953 maps, and then the information disappears. It is easily understood that the return of this water source in the memory of the citizens would be of much value. The water source weaves mainly in the north-western part of the area, almost tangential to it. The space in both sides of the water source is dedicated again to the pedestrians.



Figure 10: Existing panoramic view (K Xhexhi 2013)



Figure 11: Proposal panoramic view (K. Xhexhi 2013)

Analyzing the existing situation of the panoramic view compared to the proposed view, one undoubtedly sees a great change. In the second view, the area calmness is evident. The buildings do not exceed the maximum number of two floors and the silhouette is unchanged. On the other hand, in the first view we have an interruption of this calmness due to the multi-floor buildings.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Completely contrary to the 2012 GAP which approves a large intensification with different intervention schemes and various building typologies (linear, L-shaped, chain placement, U-shaped) (Municipality of Tirana 2012), (K.Leka plus et al) this exercise makes us reflect on the really great values borne by these walls in all these years. How can one damage such treasure which the time took care so much to create and preserve? Such allusions are to be spoken out loudly!

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