

AN URBAN COMMUNITY CENTER AS AN INTEGRATING MEDIUM FOR THE
EMERGING NEIGHBORHOODS IN TIRANA

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ABSTRACT

AN URBAN COMMUNITY CENTER AS AN INTEGRATING MEDIUM FOR THE EMERGING NEIGHBORHOODS IN TIRANA

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Community centers are becoming common facilities in various part of the world and in general in those countries with well-developed social and economic backgrounds. Precedent cases indicate that they fulfill a variety of roles of different scales and importance for many communities, and those who would benefit from them the most are especially those emerging and in need for integration, such in developing countries. This project's focus is on the design of community center for the city of Tirana. A quantitative research, will try to answer the question "What type of community center and which programs does this city and its residents need?" - "Why does Tirana need a Community Center?"

New developments are emerging in Tirana and some of them above the previous informally developed neighborhoods. With the emerging of such new developments and the need for rehabilitating the existing informal developments in the city, the quest for city planners to develop not only housing, infrastructure and jobs, but also a smart, livable, sustainable and social city, is even faster in time and higher in importance

Studies and precedents show that Community Centers are very important for a healthy, vibrant community by providing opportunities for residents to participate in the community, self-improve, and to interact with other residents. They are common ground areas that are focused on inclusivity and integration while fostering a culture of health and wellbeing in the communities they serve. Therefore the study examined prior researches, interviews, observations and case studies to identify the question this research raises. This was achieved by reviews of relevant literature and contextual analysis. Case studies of relevant buildings and public facilities were undertaken. Finally an original design proposal was developed based on established models and useful standards acquired from the contextual and case studies.

Keywords: *Community Center, Social Architecture, Livable Cities, City Planning, Community Center Design*

ABSTRAKT

NJË QENDËR KOMUNITARE SI NJË MJET INTEGRUES PËR LAGJET NË ZHVILLIM TË TIRANËS

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Qendrat e Komunitare po kthehen në ambiente të zakonshme në pjesë të ndryshme të botës dhe në përgjithësi në vendet e zhvilluara nga ana sociale dhe ekonomike. Rastet e mëparshme dëshmojnë që ato përmbushin një larmi rolesh me nivele dhe rëndësi të ndryshme për shumë komunitete, dhe ata që do të përfitonin më shumë prej tyre janë veçanërisht ato komunitete në proces rritjeje dhe në nevojë për integrim, të tilla si në vendet në zhvillim. Fokusi i këtij projekti është në hartimin e një qendre komunitare për qytetin e Tiranës. Një hulumtim sasior, do të përpiqet të përgjigjet në pyetjen "Çfarë lloji Qendre Komunitare dhe për cilat programe kanë nevojë banorët e këtij qyteti?" - "Pse Tirana ka nevojë për një Qendër Komunitare?"

Zona zhvillimi të reja po formëzohen në Tiranë dhe disa prej tyre mbi lagjet e mëparshme, të zhvilluara në mënyrë informale gjatë tranzicionit. Me shfaqjen e këyre zonave të reja të zhvilluara lind natyrshëm si nevoja për rehabilitimin e lagjeve ekzistuese në qytet, ashtu edhe përgjegjësia për planifikuesit e qytetit për të projektuar zona jo vetëm për strehim, infrastrukturë dhe vende të reja pune, por edhe një qytet inteligjent, të jetueshëm, të qëndrueshëm dhe social. Kjo nevojë është edhe më e afërt

në kohë dhe shumë e rëndësishme për zhvillimin e mëtejshëm ekonomik e social të qytetit.

Studimet dhe rastet e mëparshme tregojnë se Qendrat për Komunitetin janë shumë të rëndësishme për një komunitet të shëndetshëm e të gjallëruar duke ofruar mundësi për banorët që të marrin pjesë në komunitet, të vetë-përmirësohen, integrohen, informohen, dhe të ndërveprojnë me banorët e tjerë. Ato janë zona të përbashkëta që janë të përqendruara në përfshirjen dhe integrimin e komunitetit ndërkohë që nxisin një kulturë pozitive të shëndetit dhe mirëqenies në komunitetet ku shërbejnë. Ky studim shqyrtoi kërkime të mëparshme, intervista, vëzhgime dhe raste studimore për të identifikuar pyetjen që ngre hulumtimi në këtë fushë. Kjo u arrit me anë të rishikimeve të literaturës dhe analizave kontekstuale, studimeve të rasteve të ndërtesave të ngjashme dhe objekteve publike të ngjashme. Në fund u realizua një projekt-propozim i një Qendre për Komunitetin, bazuar në modelet e vendosura dhe standardet e dobishme të marra nga studimet kontekstuale dhe rastet e mëparshme.

Fjalët kyçe: *Qendër Komunitare, Arkitektura Sociale, Qytete të Jetueshëm, Planifikim Qyteti, Projektim Qendre Komunitare,*

Dedicated to my Family,

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ABSTRAKT	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	ix
LIST OF TABLES	xii
LIST OF FIGURES	xiii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xix
CHAPTER 1	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Problem Statement	4
1.2 Object of Study.....	6
1.3 The aim of the study.....	7
1.4 Motivation and Purpose	8
1.5 Identification of the design question	9
1.6 Organization of the thesis.....	9
CHAPTER 2	11
LITERATURE REVIEW AND CASE STUDIES	11
2.1 Literature Review	11
2.2 Case Study of Community Centers in China	13
2.3 Case Study: Mount Pleasant Community Center, Vancouver	14
2.4 Community Centers in Albania.....	23
2.4.1 Demographics of Tirana.....	23

2.4.2	Community Terms in Albania	26
2.5	Case Study: Social Center Gonxhe Bojaxhiu Tirane	27
2.6	Importance of Community Center on overall Well-being and Health	33
2.6.1	Overview of urban Sustainability terms for Community Center Building 34	
2.6.2	How does a community center Enhance Neighborhoods or Communities?	35
2.7	Case Studies Analysis and Conclusions.....	38
CHAPTER 3		40
METHODOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROGRAM.....		40
3.1	Questionnaire Results and Conclusions	40
3.2	Program Selection	53
3.3	Design Guidelines for Community Centers	55
CHAPTER 4		57
PROJECT PROPOSAL		57
4.1	Urban Analysis	57
4.1.1	Site Context.....	57
4.1.2	Urban Plan for the Site.....	60
4.1.3	Site	65
4.2	Project Proposal and Concept	72
4.2.1	Project Intent.....	72
4.2.2	Development of the Program	72

4.2.3	Development of the Program Concept.....	76
4.3	Site and Floor Plans of the Proposed Model.....	83
4.4	Sections and Elevations.....	93
4.5	3D Visualizations.....	98
CHAPTER 5.....		109
DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS.....		109
5.1	Conclusions.....	109
REFERENCES.....		111
APPENDIX A.....		113
QUESTIONNAIRE.....		113
	(Albanian).....	113
APPENDIX B.....		117
QUESTIONNAIRE.....		117
	(English).....	117

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Distribution of population and its density in 2018. [10].....	24
Table 2. Demographic Growth of Tirana [10]	25
Table 3. Urban Systems Area and Predicted Growth of Population (web Referring to TR030).....	25

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Community Participation Sketch © [14]	2
Figure 2. Tirana 2030 Masterplan Vision [16].	4
Figure 3. Map Location Context	15
Figure 4. The Mount Pleasant Centre from Kingsway. The residential tower is to the left and the three-floors of community center to the right. © Martin Tessler.....	16
Figure 5. Mount Pleasant Exterior and Interior insights. © Perkins & Will Architects	17
Figure 6. The ground floor plan shows the integration of program elements: the lobby of the residential tower, the library, the community center and the independently operated bar.....	18
Figure 7. Second Floor Plan of Mount Pleasant CC	19
Figure 8. Third Floor Plan of Mount Pleasant CC	20
Figure 9. Building Section of Mount Pleasant CC	21
Figure 10. Located on the roof of the community center, the daycare play area is sheltered from street noise by the building. © Martin Tessler.....	22
Figure 11. Administrative Borders of Albanian Cities in Relation to the City of Tirana and then Administrative Unit of Tirana. [10]	23
Figure 12. Distance of Localities and Administrative Units of Tirana, from City's Center. [10]	24
Figure 13. Gonxhe Bojaxhiu Social Center Site Location.....	28

Figure 14. Gonxhe Bojaxhiu social center.....	29
Figure 15. Gonxhe Bojaxhiu Social Center, Entrance.....	30
Figure 16. Social Center Program Analysis.....	31
Figure 17. Pictured Activities of the Social Center Gonxhe Bojaxhiu.....	32
Figure 18. The Sites where the Questionnaires were conducted.	41
Figure 19. Comparative percentage of the gender of the interviewees.....	42
Figure 20. Group age the interviewed individuals belonged to.	43
Figure 21. Number of years living in their current neighborhood.....	43
Figure 22. Information about other community centers in their vicinity.....	44
Figure 23. Attendance of CC by the interviewed individuals.....	45
Figure 24. Attendance Percentage of CC by Age Group resulted by Q1 & Q4	46
Figure 25 Organizing experiences of the interviewed individuals	47
Figure 26. Occupation of the interviewed individuals.....	48
Figure 27. Interest for Engaging in the Community	49
Figure 28. Specific program interests arousing interest by the interviewed individuals.	50
Figure 29. Effect of the CC Programs on individual well-being.....	51
Figure 30. Effect of the CC Programs on community well-being.....	51
Figure 31. Readiness to change residence driven by the community’s social environment	52
Figure 32. Readiness to attend a Community Center	53

Figure 33. Community center as a social hub	54
Figure 34. The TR030 Northern Bulevard Vision [16].....	58
Figure 35. Orthophoto imagery of Tirana 1994.....	59
Figure 36. Ortophoto imagery of Tirana 2018.....	60
Figure 37. The Project Site in relation to urban Tirana, and Administrative Unit 9..	61
Figure 38. Proposed Building Heights and main public intervention areas with the Selected Site [16]	62
Figure 39. Proposed Land Use of the entire redevelopment area [16]	63
Figure 40. Proposed Infrastructure and new and existing Buildings	64
Figure 41. Chosen Site	65
Figure 42. Location of the Site in actual context- Birds eye View	66
Figure 43. Location of the site in actual and proposed contexts.....	67
Figure 44. Proposed Road Map.....	68
Figure 45. Proposed Land Use	68
Figure 46. Proposed Building Heights.....	69
Figure 47. Proposed Greenery	70
Figure 48. Site Location and Proposed Context elaborated by the Regulatory Plan.	70
Figure 49. View from the Filip Jano Street with the Site on the Right.....	71
Figure 50. View of the Site from the Sejdini Street.....	71
Figure 51. Community Center Program functional diagram	75

Figure 52. The 4 Main Building Program Components of the Urban Community Center.....	76
Figure 53. The Site as the Container of these Programs.....	76
Figure 54. Road Access and Circulation.....	77
Figure 55. Breaking up the Programs to create circulation paths and plazas	77
Figure 56. Spatial hierarchy defining the footprint of the building, main ground floor circulation and the Interconnection of the Programs.	78
Figure 57. By defining access, indoor circulation, spatial hierarchy and space relationships, a schematic program evolves around the edges of an indoor and continuous community street.	79
Figure 58. Vertical Layout and circulation of the buildings to host the programs accordingly.....	80
Figure 59. Preliminary Process of selecting the placement of the buildings.....	81
Figure 60. Preliminary Process of Organizing Programs into the Community Center	81
Figure 61. Preliminary Process of Concept and Design	82
Figure 62. Preliminary Concept of Making use of roof-tops for and interconnecting Programs, like the Childcare – Fitness and GYM in different levels	82
Figure 63. Site Plan of the proposed Building Project.....	84
Figure 64. Underground Level – Parking (- 4.30)	88
Figure 65. Ground Floor Plan, (±0.00)	89
Figure 66. Level 1 Floor plan (+5.30).....	90
Figure 67. Level 2 Floor Plan (+10.00)	91

Figure 68. Level 3 Floor Plan (+13.50)	92
Figure 69. Site Layout with Section Cuts	93
Figure 70. Section A-A, Section B-B, Section C.C	94
Figure 71. Section 1-1	95
Figure 72. Section 2-2	95
Figure 73. Section 3-3	95
Figure 74. Section 4-4	96
Figure 75. West Elevation.....	96
Figure 76. East Elevation	96
Figure 77. North Elevation	97
Figure 78. South Elevation	97
Figure 79. 3-D Street View Visualization South-West Façade	98
Figure 80. The Sports Court stands over the Underground Parking and opens to Community for multiple recreational uses on the ground floor.....	99
Figure 81. Interior Details of construction materials. Bronze Structural glazing combined with cast in place concrete create a modern setting	100
Figure 82. Main Entrance Lobby	101
Figure 83 Community Street in front of outdoor sport court area	102
Figure 84. Gym, Running track, Fitness and Climbing wall	103
Figure 85. Children's Playground and adjacent to the Childcare on the roof of the Gym	103

Figure 86. Roof Top Terrace above the multipurpose community room and Art Classes	104
Figure 87. Proposed Project of Urban Community Center in Context of the Emerging Neighborhood	104
Figure 88. Birds-eye View of the Project from South – East	105
Figure 89. Bird's eye view of the project from North-West	106
Figure 90. Bird's Eye view of the Project from North- East.....	106
Figure 91. Entrance from Pedestrian Street, South - East.....	107
Figure 92. Render of the Ground Floor with shadows and greenery	108

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CC	Community Center
MoT	Municipality of Tirana
MoUP	Ministry of Urban Planning
SBA	Stefano Boeri Architteti
UNLAB	Urban Planning Architecture Firm based in Neitherlands
IND	Inter.National.Design Architects based in Neitherlands
DBCC	Don Bosco Community Center
NGO	Non Governmental Organizations
SIPP	Social Inclusion Policy Paper
INSTAT	Institute of Statistics of Albania

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Two parents, to say nothing of one, cannot possibly satisfy all the needs of a family-household. A community is needed as well, for raising children, and also to keep adults reasonably sane and cheerful. A community is a complex organism with complicated resources that grow gradually and organically.” Jane Jacobs [7]

Unlike schools, roads, university campuses and hospitals; the Community Center is not the basic need of human beings but among other various facilities, community center is one of the prime civic facilities aiming to ease community interactions, participation, social inclusion, and build an efficient network of community servitude and thus contribute to community development and productivity with a direct effect on the society’s overall economic growth. Such practice has been available and successful in many countries which report a better social welfare state compared to Albania. Therefore, the approach of community development with provision of various civic facilities and amenities is widely adopted in the planning and development process of many countries. We live in a world where any change on economy, education and technology have an instant global impact, so do the social challenges. So finding ways to build sustainable and livable cities is an incentive which takes life from people’s quest in wanting to live better!

This research depicts a comprehensive picture of a community center for the city of Tirana. This interpretation would be a reliable base on setting the beginning of a series of improved prototypes to be used also in other regions of Albania, by defining an accustomed program, to the specific needs of each community.



Figure 1. Community Participation Sketch © [14]

The word “community” is derived from the Latin word of “*communitas*” which means “the same”. According to Merriam Webster Dictionary [9], community is an interacting population of various kinds of individuals in a common location and having common interests. Keeping consistency with the general meaning of community, also according to [9], community center (CC) means a building or group of buildings and facilities for a community's educational and recreational activities. They aim to provide activities that respond to local community needs, to be inclusive, accessible, and encourage active participation and involvement in the community. A community center provides spaces for people with similar interest but often vary from social, religious and political backgrounds who come to play, learn, or to work together for personal satisfaction and / or community improvements [9]. These facilities are called community centers and have been physically present, after cities became larger and larger, while the need for people to gather and socially interact and perform are known from their earliest place making and socializing evidences. According to Smithsonian Institution [15], sharing food, caring for infants, and building social networks helped our ancestors meet the daily challenges of their environments. Over time, early humans began to gather at hearths and shelters to eat and socialize. As brains became larger and more complex, growing up took longer—requiring more parental care and the protective environment of a home. Expanding social networks led, eventually, to the complex social lives of modern humans [15].

Tirana is the political, administrative and economic capital city of Albania. The population of Tirana's population is now about 912,190 registered residents, without counting seasonal workers and students, which in total is almost 32 % of all Albanian Population according to INSTAT [5]. This year marked the 100-th anniversary of Tirana as the Capitol of Albania, and this city is estimated to consolidate into a Metropolis of more than 1 million inhabitants very soon.

During the Cold War period, Albania experienced a harsh 50-year long totalitarian regime which ended only in the 1990s and entered Albania into a drastic process of change. The last 30 years have been characterized by a transition towards pluralism, democracy and market economy, involving mass urban migration and unregulated capitalism. This transition led to major economic and social problems for the country's population. Albania has been an underdeveloped country for many years now. These transitioning years for Albania, led also to mostly informal and unforeseen new developments. As a response Tirana, a city where many were seeking better opportunities, widened its territory hosting many new neighborhood which were established quickly and peripherically from the city's center, creating new poles of developments. Each of these neighborhoods have developed into self-sustained, mixed use communities and very often lacking a lot of public infrastructure and services available for their inhabitants. The quick emergence of these neighborhood together with the political and planning chaos, have deeply affected the quality of the life of Tirana's residents in many aspects, but the overall tendency is poorly led lifestyles, social insecurities, diminished sense of belonging and participation in the decision making of their communities and demographic movements.

The Municipality of Tirana is the accredited and legitimate local authority responsible for providing public community facilities to the population of the city of Tirana. The Municipality is currently working towards measurements for providing the basic facilities like schools, playgrounds, parks, health centers, roads, etc. A designated Masterplan for the city, called TR030 (*Figure 2*), *Figure 2. Tirana 2030 Masterplan Vision [16]*. sets the Vision of Tirana in the year 2030 and beyond. The General Local Plan was based on this vision and has been approved in 2018. This Masterplan was carefully designed by well-known architects and Urban Planners (Stefano Boeri Architetti, UNLAB and IND) in collaboration with the local authorities and encompasses the main aspects of the Regulatory Plan for the future growth of Tirana. This masterplan encompasses a new

metropolitan dimension of the city. To a great extent the vision is centered in preserving and promoting green space [16]. In the past it has been really difficult for the Municipality of Tirana to cope with the increasing demand for public infrastructure following the uncontrolled, high expansion rate of the city. Now the challenge is to repair the existing urban development and to properly design the new neighborhoods. In this context community participation might play a dominant role for developing integrated and thriving communities.



Figure 2. Tirana 2030 Masterplan Vision [16].

1.1 Problem Statement

During the totalitarian regime urban growth was strictly regulated and centrally planned by the Government. Private land ownership was not allowed and the term housing market, did not exist. All residential construction and infrastructure was publicly financed and distributed. In addition, the movement of population was controlled and managed

according to economic and political “needs”. In such terms, controlled was also the necessary infrastructure and other urban facilities needed to sustain the apparent growth. 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 decentralized 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. While many were emigrating abroad, most urban centers, and Tirana in particular, were confronted with a flood of internal migrants. State institutions were too fragile to manage the dramatic changes. People who moved to the cities, built their houses on rural agricultural land at the periphery of cities or simply squatted on publicly owned land and built homes and businesses there. Almost all buildings were residential and no infrastructure or services were considered - roads, water, sewage, electricity, education, health, leisure, community, wellbeing etc. Also social welfare, with all the problems arising from this transition, was and still is very vague and undisputable among communities and the population in general.

One of the challenges Albania is facing nowadays, apart from maintaining political and economic stability, its government is also working towards prioritizing measures for reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion and integration. As a result these measures will assist to unleash the unexploited considerable human potential in Albania and in reducing the repressive effect of inequality on economic growth. Referring to the Social Inclusion Policy Paper (SIPP) 2016-2020, social investments and improvement of the social welfare state comprise priority actions for the Albanian Government, prior to European Union Membership. Economic growth and development can be maximized upon mobilization of all human and physical resources of the society to engage in productive activities. The more attention is given to investing in the human capital, in developing the workforce skills through education and in improving productivity by means of a better access to healthcare services and nutrition, housing and social protection the more narrow the social exclusion domain will be.

A revitalized city Center and the Artificial Lake Park Area is a victorious evidence that the residents of Tirana want more public interaction facilities at their reach. The City’s

Center, Scanderbeg Square, has been highly frequented with or without programs and activities organized by the municipality all the time. The Artificial Lake Park not only is frequented but it is also an attracting site for homebuyers, and residential developers, even if that means lower living standards or tearing down hills with concrete just for the sake of being near the park.

It is the author's belief that social inclusion, and integration measures will work better when applied to the community as a whole. Incentives from work, observations and analysis conducted so far, show that by identifying small groups of the society, by age, by personal history, by race, by gender etc. and serving to them after, does not promote integration and inclusion in the society. Every member of the society, from those in need for possibilities to those with abundant possibilities, bears responsibilities and rights in the community. Thus in the quest for integration in different scales, from one individual's to the country's overall aim, community bonding and participation must be promoted in all population's strata, and the approaches to this problem should differ. Such is the context of the selected area where the community center is proposed by this research.

1.2 Object of Study

The recent administrative reforms in Tirana agglomerated surrounding villages and small towns to the capital city which has both the capacity and the vision for the urban integration of the present informal construction situation in its peripheries. This administrative centralization at the same time distances citizens in the periphery, promoting polycentric development poles, and offers an opportunity to repair the urban infrastructure and services in the new emerging neighborhoods. One of these developing poles is the area around the New Boulevard and one of the first emerging neighborhoods to be built by a detailed urban regulatory plan, envisioned to accommodate the future high density sprawl and foreseeing the appropriate public facilities and infrastructure, representing the image of Tirana of the 21st Century.

1.3 The aim of the study

The aim of this research is to show how a single project, oriented at building community bonds and involvement, helps not only on the integration and social wellbeing of its community, but also the productivity of the community towards economic growth. On this context the Urban Community Center in Tirana, aims to assume the role of a social mediator. By using architecture as an intervention, it aims to bring about social change in the community.

The intent of the project is as follows;

- To create an environment that fosters community engagement and participation, able to promote community ties.
- To create spaces and through them experiences, that inspire action and creativity and thus lead to self-growth at an individual level.
- To act as a social hub for the community, over which the members feel a sense of support and ownership.
- To balance the aspirations of the community with the environment that they are familiar with, by doing so a new environment that is suited to their needs.

The preliminary conclusion of this thesis project is that an architectural intervention of this nature, can indeed bring about social change and integration. Many successful precedent projects around the world have been studied, and the lessons learned from these projects have been implemented in the undertaken thesis project. To ground the project in reality, thought has also been given to how this project may be actually realized and a development model has been proposed.

The design evolved as new concept, constraints and conditions were factored into the design. Though seemingly simple, the program and space delivery proved challenging when trying to achieve all the objectives, some of which have intangible results. The following report documents the evolution of the thesis project and the final design proposal.

This is a quest for the proper facility that responds to the necessity of the city of Tirana, to provide services and public community bonding programs in the emerging

neighborhoods. By assisting the city's growth and integration into the urban fabric, we make sure that future growth and densification can be sustained. All of the above can be done while focusing on ensuring the wellbeing and quality of life for the residents and showing that Community Centers promote citizen involvement and accountability in the area where they live.

1.4 Motivation and Purpose

The project's purpose was developed after researching and observing the social problems and the loosening of community ties and their immediate impact on the inhabitant's health and city's livability and growth. Tirana in context, is a city full of activities, in comparison to other cities of Albania, but has a very weak sense of community. As the capitol city, Tirana has many cultural centers, libraries, galleries, public parks etc., but in the realm of community involvement Tirana is lacking spaces, and facilities which promote connection, participation, placemaking and belonging in a community at a local level. The image of a community center, throughout the country, nowadays stands for multifunctional social facilities, often juxtaposed to the existing schools and health institutions and serving the marginalized communities only. I do strongly believe that community centers are not only social centers, operated by Local Government or Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), but they are social assets that can contribute to the integration and well-being of every individual of the community. A proposed building, such as an urban community center, would act as the "hub" for the community of a designated neighborhood encouraging engagement and benefiting the well-being and productivity of all its users.

The purpose is to introduce a socially inclusive facility that would offer a gathering place for many social, leisure, cultural and community activities outside of local schools, local churches, local mosques etc., in order to enhance social cohesion, placemaking, participation and engagement. Community Centers can do this by housing a variety of learning, engaging and community empowering programs. Throughout this research it is my understanding that a thriving community space can play a vital role in both the community and its resident's lives.

1.5 Identification of the design question

By analyzing contextual examples of communal and individual living patterns and urban formations, selected conclusions can be applied to the actual modern context of the country in order to follow up with the country's development reforms. The connection between social wellbeing and inclusion with livable cities and architecture was my concern when I researched the design question. Therefore the study examined prior international report, interviews, observations and case studies to identify and answer the question this research raises.

What is the type of Community Center that Tirana and her citizens need?

Why does Tirana need a Community Center?

This was achieved by reviews of relevant literature for contextual analysis. Case studies of relevant buildings and public facilities were undertaken. Finally an original design proposal was developed based on established paradigms and useful archetypes acquired from the contextual and case studies.

1.6 Organization of the thesis

This Thesis is divided in 6 Chapters. The organization is done as follows:

In Chapter 1, an introduction text is followed by the problem statement, the object of the study, the aim of the study, my motivation and purpose, the design question and the thesis objective is presented.

Chapter 2, includes the literature review and the Case Studies. The case Studies where chosen from abroad and award winning design studios, and case studies from Albania to depict the current situation and definition of a community center in Albania.

In Chapter 3, the methodology is explained followed by a questionnaire, where I identify the aim of conducting it, and the analysis of the questionnaire results and conclusion. Also on this chapter I explain how I made use of the analysis on selecting the program for the community center. In this chapter I try to mentions what are some basic design guidelines I intend to follow in my final design proposal.

Chapter 4, consists of the urban analysis of the site and the overall context to guide my project implementation and design.

In Chapter 5, I present the architectural project proposal with the site plan, the plans, sections, elevations and visualizations.

The Final Chapter, Chapter 6, the discussions and conclusions raised from this research are explained.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CASE STUDIES

2.1 Literature Review

The idea of architecture as catalyst for social or economic change is not new. Architecture is like most other things, a reflection of our society always trying to mirror society's aspiration and beliefs thus it has an immense potential to shape or change the context both local and global. Such projects are not just practical solutions to community needs but also aim at having a broader effect on communities in which they are applied, relying on the social and economic stewardship of architecture.

Desk research and analysis, case studies, literature, and a questionnaire were the tools of inquiry that helped me address the need for such a design project in Tirana and thus identify which programs will better help the community of this emerging neighborhood.

In a context where urbanization has been quick and cohesion has not followed, leisure, art and cultural events are means to go beyond the dissimilarities of others and to bring people together.

“Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody” [6].

In order to have inclusive neighborhoods, and even cities, the integration of participatory processes is essential because it allows the needs of the population to be clearly identified and solved.

There is no specific way to build a community center or what to include in it. The social effect of community living, participation and its effects on the society are explored at large by researchers.

It is quite a common sight to see community centers in use in various parts of the world. They have been fulfilling a variety of roles in many communities for a number of

years. According to Xu, Gao, and Yan [19], “Community services are widely accepted as effective solutions to social and economic problems in the society. Furthermore, the community center has become the backbone of service delivery in the community”. This is also illustrated by the amount of literature on how to build communities and the programs which are found within these centers. Xu, Gao and Yan [19], do not give specifics as to how the building itself provides this backbone.

Parks and recreation facilities provide a variety of individual, community, and environmental benefits. Specific to the context of human health, park and recreation resources in a community are increasingly recognized as a component of the healthcare system [1], because of their contributions to positive outcomes in terms of physical, mental, and overall wellbeing of their users. These health benefits may increase for individuals and communities because of the role that parks and other recreation facilities play as features of the built environment, where they provide proper settings for healthy behaviors and subsequent health outcomes.

Community centers serve as places that helps the citizens of a neighborhood in which the community center is located to realize their ideas and initiatives. They are gathering places for social activities but also places of guidance for citizens who are in need of help [11] and community centers in disadvantaged neighborhoods are likely to be more used than centers in areas that are better off [4]. They also tend to play a large role in the lives of their users since they are a venue for social interaction and networking, and as such, community centers can help with improving the social cohesion in the neighborhood or community of its location.

The intent of this thesis is to explore how architecture can be used to revitalize the community by encouraging participation in the community. Proper architectural inputs are a reflection of the needs of the community in their ability to bring people together by defining and allocating space for activity. Though there are many factors to the process of creating a sense of community, architecture and the proper use of the given environment can act as a tool for drawing people together and encouraging interaction between them.

2.2 Case Study of Community Centers in China

During the 1980s, China developed a program to establish community centers [19]. The community center model was promoted and established under a government program as an attempt to address the social issues following the economic reform program implemented in the 1980s. Transitioning from a socialist-based model to a free market model created a significant social and economic chaos in big cities of China. Because the socialist system welfare was guaranteed by lifelong employment in state owned enterprises, the system reassured health, housing, education, and retirement benefits. The rapid pace of the free-market economic reforms, weakened this safety net, and created social problems such as high levels of unemployment, mass movements of people into cities, urban poverty, loss of identity, etc. [19]. A government program of social reform was instituted in the 1980s to address these social problems through a centralized community development policy framework which included infrastructure and administration decentralized to the local geographic community level [19]. The aim of community development policy in China was to build a sense of community by ‘encouraging community participation in service delivery, and increasing the quality of people’s wellbeing and their community life’ [19]. The focus was on creating geographical urban communities responsible for the funding, planning and delivery of services within the community. Community centers, providing community-based services, were considered to be the solution for resolving increasing social problems, and they have become ‘the backbone of service delivery in the community’ [19]. Many welfare services, such as re-employment programs, services for the elderly and retirees, childcare, housing and medical care, were entrusted to the local community level and semi-government organizations. Some of the above mentioned services were provided free, and others were fee-for-service and profit-generating for the centers.

The study that was conducted by Xu *et al.* [19], involved the community centers in the city of Jinan, capital of Shandong province in China and is it identified many challenges for community centers in delivering social services. Community centers are entitled with providing social welfare in order to support the pace and impact of economic reform. Other than their benefits, they are also vulnerable to the increase of social problems, confusion about the meaning of community, lack of resources – human and financial – and unclear or inadequate government guidelines [19].

The Chinese government, has applied many programs, some ongoing, to make community centers part of their social welfare, by promoting voluntarism and participation because of their left political ideologies, but overviewed by Western analyzers and authors, they serve their purposes well to their communities.

2.3 Case Study: Mount Pleasant Community Center, Vancouver

Architects:	Perkins & Will Architects, Vancouver Studio
Area:	12,591 m ²
Location:	Mount Pleasant, Vancouver, BC, Canada
Completion Year:	2009
Sustainability:	LEED Gold®

The Mount Pleasant Community Center is located in the City of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. It was designed by Perkins & Will Canada, a well-known Architectural Studio in the field of civic and recreational projects worldwide. The context in which this facility stands and the professionalism of the architects, was the reason I studied its programs and their approach to the community.



Figure 3. Map Location Context

The Centre is a combination of a variety of services and programs — housing, childcare, library and recreational facilities. The growing urban neighborhood context, on which this Community Center was located, was the reason this case study was studied over. The area of the project is located at the heart of the historic Uptown District, and at the intersection of several main transit routes. The site offers potential access from pedestrian roads to bicycles paths and vehicular and transit roads.

Community Centre Program offers: Children’s Classes, Library, Climbing Wall, Teen Activities, Fitness Centre, Adult Programs, Community Events facilities, and Parent & Children Gym



Figure 4. The Mount Pleasant Centre from Kingsway. The residential tower is to the left and the three-floors of community center to the right. © Martin Tessler

The Community Center is already used at full capacity due to the rapid growth of the surrounding areas. Thoughtful planning has resulted in a number of multi-functional spaces offering good storage and expandability, two large commercial kitchens, and a rooftop child-care center. The facility offers an on-site bar, an outdoor plaza area, several sport and recreational facilities, a library and work spaces, and plenty of open areas on the second floor. By the designers of this building it was described as:

“A groundbreaking and sustainable building tailored to the wide range of uses.” - Perkins & Will Architects



Figure 5. Mount Pleasant Exterior and Interior insights. © Perkins & Will Architects

The contextual modernism is created by the appearance of the red brick, large glazed windows and angular forms of the facades. The building offers also an innovative combination of public programs within the building.

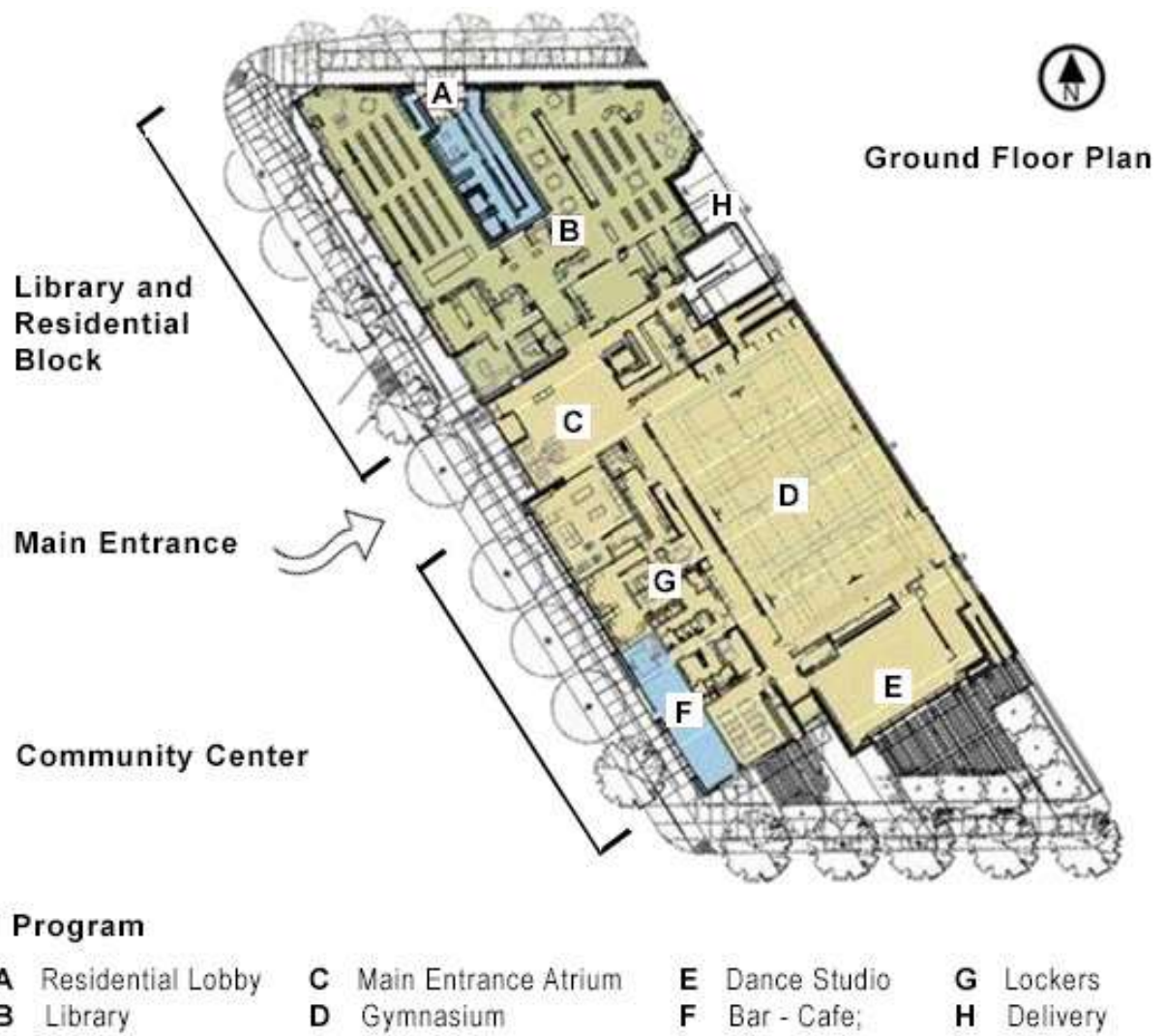
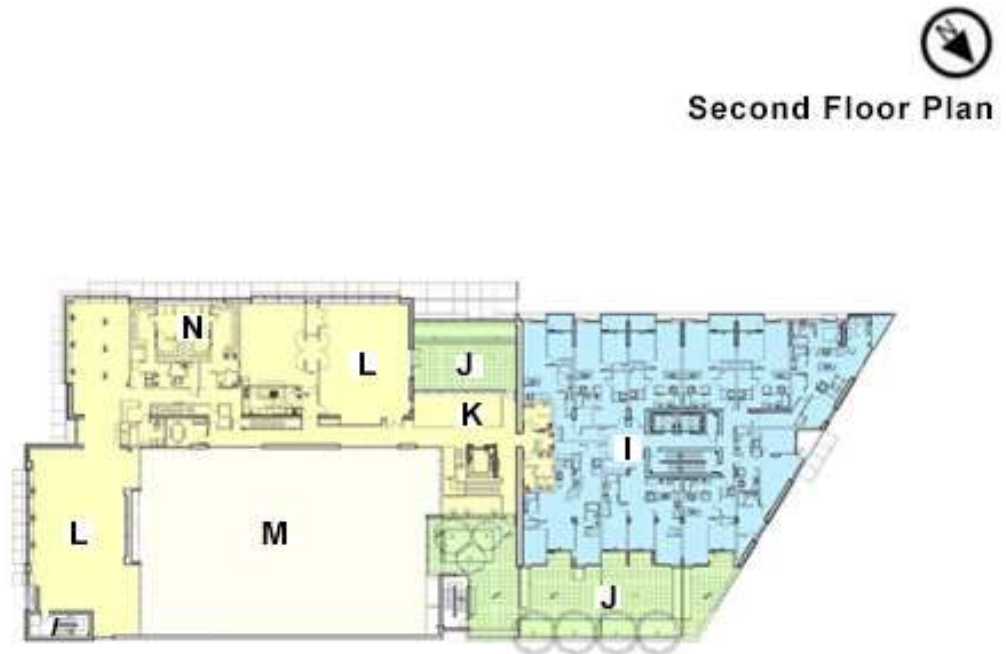


Figure 6. The ground floor plan shows the integration of program elements: the lobby of the residential tower, the library, the community center and the independently operated bar.

The main entrance is oriented on Kingsway and gives access to all community facilities. To the left of the entrance, is the Library which wraps around the residential circulation core, yet still manages to be an attractive place to linger. The study areas are distributed on the west-facing the road side and benefiting from plenty of natural light. To the right is the community center, which wraps around the gymnasium on two levels, with large windows allowing both views and generous amounts of light into the activity space.

Also on the Ground Floor the delivery and services entrances together with emergency exits are placed opposed to the Main Entrance.



Program

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| I Rental Housing Units | K Lobby 2nd Floor | M Gymnasium Open to Below |
| J Green Roof Terraces | L Multipurpose Room | N Locker Rooms 2 |

Figure 7. Second Floor Plan of Mount Pleasant CC

On the Second Floor of the Community Center accessed from the main entrance Lobby, there are 2 different size Community Rooms, one large multipurpose community rooms for social activities, and outdoor Terraces offering relax and satisfaction. The rental housing units are accessed separately even though they share the same floor.



Third Floor Plan



Program

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| O Child Care | R Rental Housing Units |
| P Playground Terraces | S Lobby 3 |

Figure 8. Third Floor Plan of Mount Pleasant CC

The 3rd Floor the Community Center is dedicated to the Children's Day Care, offered to 3 different age groups which share a secured outdoor and indoor playground laying on the roof of the gym. The residential units are also found on this floor but physically disconnected by the Community center unit.

Together the program components add up to 13.000 m², of which about 8.000 m² rental apartments, with the remainder 5.000 m² dedicated to the community center, a branch library, childcare center and an independently operated coffee shop.

Project section

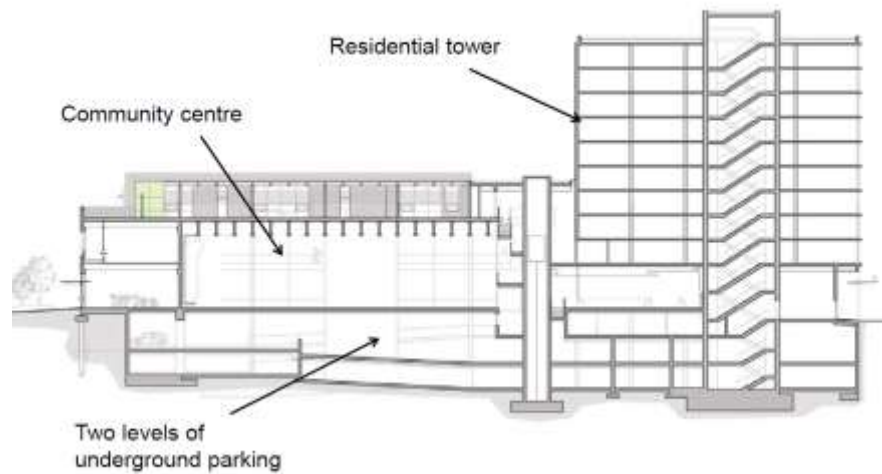


Figure 9. Building Section of Mount Pleasant CC

In addition to the Civic duty of Community Center this building also offers rental housing as a response to the growing request for housing in this area. The programs of community center and housing are separated by different entrances at ground level. 2 levels of Parking spaces were placed underground while all public facilities were placed at street level and above. This building was also accredited a LEED Gold® certificate for its Sustainability

The Mount Pleasant Centre sets a precedent, being the first truly multi-service urban community center in Vancouver [17]. The integrated program came about through a combination of good luck and good judgement that represents an encouraging move away from the traditional thinking of municipal governance to a more synergetic model [17].

Architecturally the building is divided into two masses separated by a central lobby facing Kingsway. The vertical mass to the north contains the library on the ground floor and eight floors of apartments above, while the horizontal three-floor block to the south contains the remainder of the program. The residential component of the complex has its own entrance to the north, while the community facilities share an entrance on Kingsway.



Figure 10. Located on the roof of the community center, the daycare play area is sheltered from street noise by the building. © Martin Tessler

The popularity of the facility has exceeded at large the City's expectations according to author Jim Taggart as he writes about the Mount Pleasant CC observations for his book, "The Architecture of Engagement," [17]. The building is operating at capacity with the exception of the parking garage which, despite being designed to the minimum permissible standard, is rarely more than half full. The building also harvests rainwater, diverting it to a tank for re-use and irrigating the green roofs, including that adjacent to the childcare center on the third level. Given the very urban nature of the site, the preservation of mature trees, and the careful massing of the building to block street noise, makes the childcare play area a remarkably tranquil place [17].

Beyond its urban qualities and environmental virtues, the success of the building is measured by its popularity. It is so popular that it might seem appropriate for the building program to have to expand into the underused parking garage. Building location has proven yet again to be the foundation of success and contributes as much to the overall sustainability equation as the performance of the building systems [17].

2.4 Community Centers in Albania

2.4.1 Demographics of Tirana

The Community Center is the product of a given number of interested users, and in order to understand the programs and the size of the Community Center certain demographic data should be stated beforehand. The demographics in our community are changing in such a way that a facility like this one are going to be essential.

Albania is a small country of barely 2.8 million residents according to (INSTAT, 2021) and almost 1/3rd of the population lives and works in Tirana (Figure 11). As mentioned above Tirana is a growing city and offers more opportunities for better living. Tirana has never hosted so many residents before and the ongoing emergence and development translate into more to come.

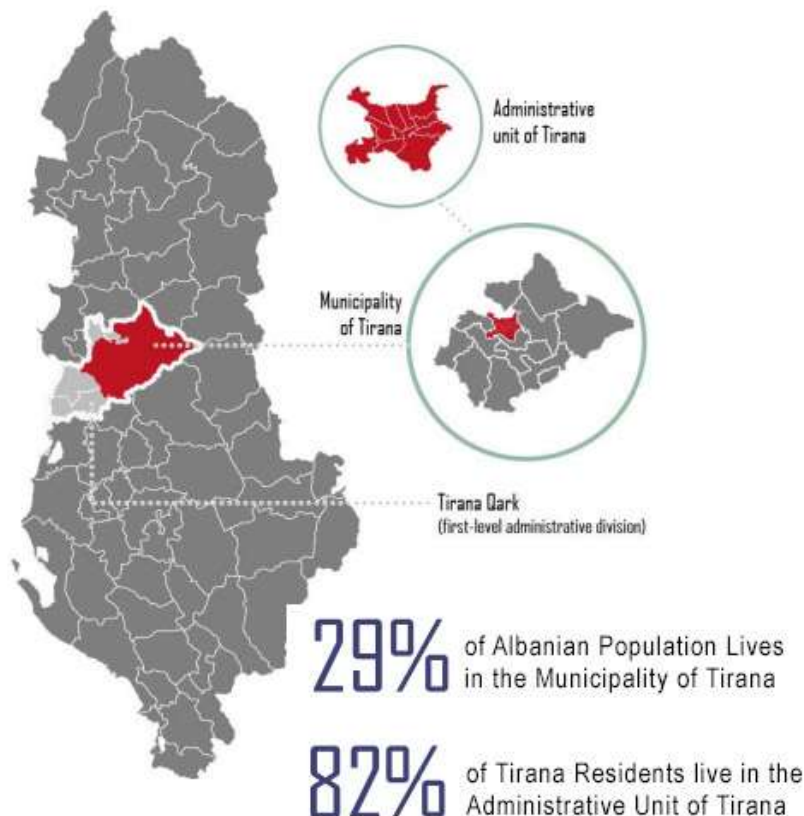


Figure 11. Administrative Borders of Albanian Cities in Relation to the City of Tirana and then Administrative Unit of Tirana. [10]

Tirana is extremely compact, with most of its administrative subdivisions or units concentrated within a circle of only 3 km (Figure 12). Apart from the Great Park of Tirana and its artificial lake, the rest of the main administrative area is completely urbanized.

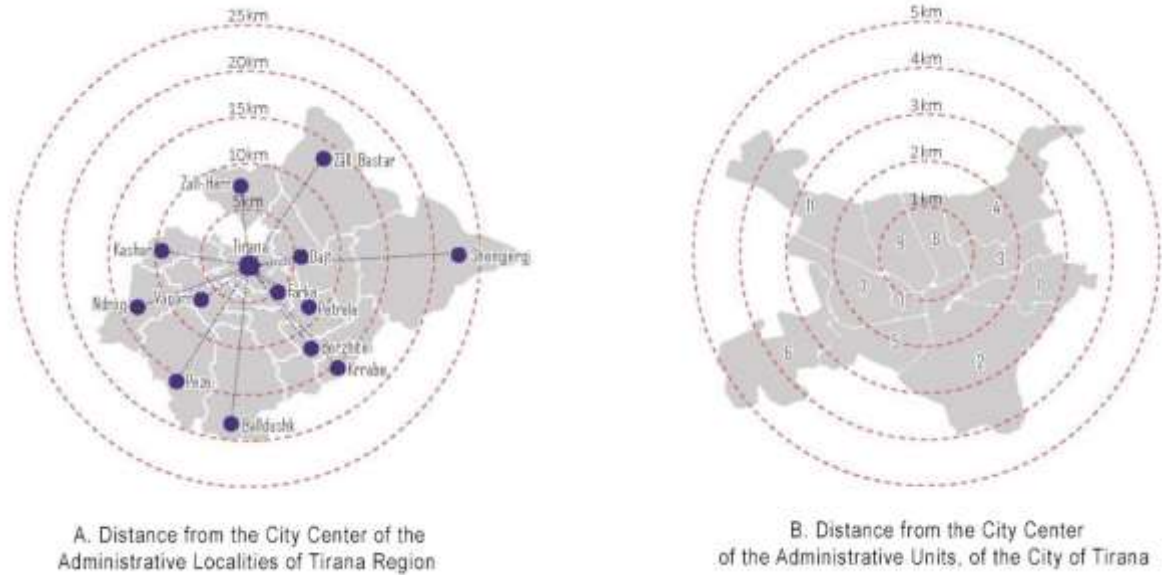


Figure 12. Distance of Localities and Administrative Units from City's Center. [10]

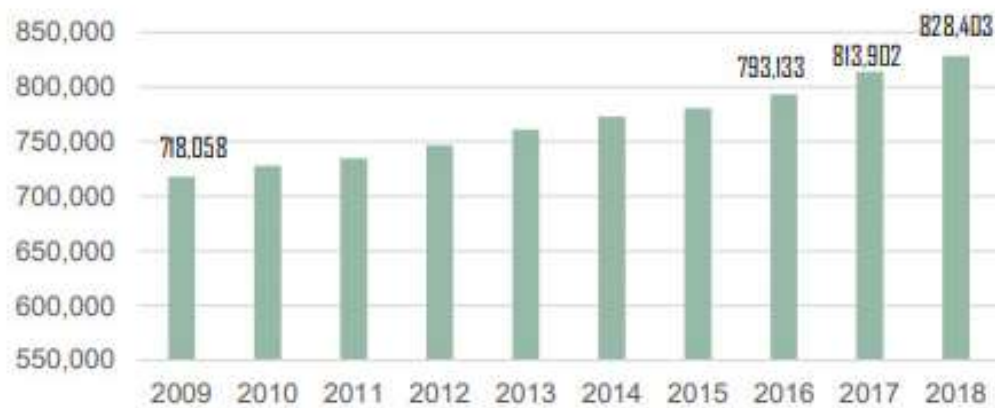
Urban density varies between administrative units, with the main area of Tirana that records a significantly higher value of almost 17,000 residents / km². Figures at the local unit level show also higher density values in some South-Western and Central neighborhoods (Administrative Units 10, 5 and 7)

Table 1. Distribution of population and its density in 2018. [10]

Administrative Units of Tirana	Population (2018)	Area (m ²)	Density (residents/km ²)
A. U. nr 1	51 769	3.06	16 920
A. U. nr 2	82 229	9.58	8 585
A. U. nr 3	44 728	2.01	22 258
A. U. nr 4	64 733	4.92	13 158
A. U. nr 5	86 800	2.87	30 297
A. U. nr 6	77 504	5.48	14 152
A. U. nr 7	74 034	3.06	24 220
A. U. nr 8	41 689	1.95	21 407
A. U. nr 9	63 124	2.82	22 363
A. U. nr 10	27 965	0.77	36 331
A. U. nr 11	65 468	5.21	12 577

During the last 10 years, the urban center of Tirana has experienced a demographic increase of 10%. Numbers increased from 611 877 residents in 2009 in 680,043 inhabitants in 2018, while the entire Municipality has registered a growth rate of 13.3% (passing from 718 058 residents in 2009 to 828 403 residents in 2018). According to the latest predictions from the National Institute of Statistics, this upward trend will continue over the upcoming 10 years.

Table 2. Demographic Growth of Tirana [10]



This section of research was intended to show that the community center will be well-matched to the high population density of the city of Tirana and its predicted growth in the near future.

Table 3. Urban Systems Area and Predicted Growth of Population (Referring to TR030)

URBAN SYSTEM	2031
Urban Territory Area	100,2 km ²
Infrastructure Area	1263,1 km ²
Population 2016	811.649 residents
Population 2031	1.600.000 residents

2.4.2 Community Terms in Albania

In Albanian Society, the community center is not very popular as a facility. Albania is a small country and its society still bearing the economic, political and social issues of being a “third world county” for very long. Only in the past 20 years reforms are ongoing for joining the European Union Family, which for Albanians other than being a political achievement, it also means that tests have passed and thus we are on the right tracks for further development in many aspects. In this context, integration, emancipation and new healthier lifestyles must be promoted. Unfortunately, as an underdeveloped and isolated country for a very long time, there are some setbacks in the society and lifestyles, still prevalent, as there are also things about the nature of Albanians to be promoted and passed on to generations. Integration and emancipation takes time but with the right means of interventions by local actors as well as from within the community they live in, this time can be shorter.

Successful urban regeneration, like economic growth, takes time and careful planning. In order to achieve this, it is proposed that interventions would at first be derived from the toolkit of temporary or pop-up urbanism, providing quick, low-cost and high engagement activities that would revitalize urban space and increase connectivity and engagement in the community. Once these practices can demonstrate increased interest and community engagement and attract the attention of the actors in public investors, more permanent interventions and improvements of the urban fabric can take place.

Even though the term community center as an all-in-one or multi-purpose facility, is very new for the residents of Tirana, that does not mean that the programs it offers have been absent in the community. This activities, such as cultural centers for youth, senior day-homes, social centers etc. are available to residents of Tirana and are also frequented highly frequented when available. Tirana residents nurture a passion for social events, participation, engagement and participation but a sense of a designated “third place”, made accessible to a local community, has been absent.

One of these Centers is The Cultural Center "Tirana", which is a public institution composed by the Metropole Theater, the Folk Ensemble "Tirana", the City Band, the TEN Center, the "Agimi" and "Lapraka" Cinemas. The focus of this Cultural Center is to offer the whole city with quality and diverse artistic experiences, creating the necessary spaces for artists of all generations, encouraging and supporting the creation, realization and

interpretation of quality Albanian works. The users and performers come from the entire city and maybe the entire nation upon interest and calendar of events.

In all its activity The Cultural Center of Tirana supports the values of national culture and art, as well as the best values of world culture and art, to provide education and entertainment for all strata and age groups of society.

2.5 Case Study: Social Center Gonxhe Bojaxhiu Tirane

Site Area: 1600 m²

Building Area: 610 m² + 310 m² = 920 m² Total Building Area

Architect: N/A

Construction Year: 2018

The Social Center for the Community was funded by the European Union in collaboration with the Municipality of Tirana and the Albanian Development Funds. This Social Center is located in Selaudin Bekteshi Street, in Allias neighborhood by the riverbanks of River Tirana and close to Ardian Klosi Elementary School. Together with the school, these facilities are operating for less than 3 years in the Area of Allias. The neighborhood of Allias in Tirana is known as the largest informal sprawl development, bearing within many social problems and missing infrastructure. These facilities are one of the interventions the municipality is introducing in this community in the framework of integration and relieving the social and economic problems the people in this area are faced with.



Figure 13. Gonxhe Bojaxhiu Social Center Site Location

The Social Center is part of a complex comprised by the elementary school and a childcare facility which operate separately. The Social Center is a 900 m² facility that was built by the Municipality of Tirana in 2018, as an intervention for the re-integration of the area by identifying the social needs and thus resolving them through guidance by the social workers. This social center brings together every day approximately 40 kids and 50 adults from the community. They divide into age and interest groups and led by the social care assistants fulfill several activities daily.



Figure 14. Gonxhe Bojaxhiu social center

The users of this Social Center come from families with economic and social difficulties, some of them even abandoned from their families. For them this center offers daily shelter, and different activities like games, dance classes, painting etc. which will elaborate by the pictured program. This Center offers also professional courses, dance classes, arts and sports classes, internet classrooms, english classes, excursions, after-school programs, support classes, day clinic, physiotherapy, and developmental therapy without charge so they can find jobs in Tirana's market and thus helping them to integrate by self-improving.



Figure 15. Gonxhe Bojaxhiu Social Center, Entrance

The Above mentioned programs are very welcomed and embraced by the community. They show their interest by frequenting the offered programs and services every day. The design is simple and it is operated with great professionalism and success by the Social Care workers that are employed by the Municipality of Tirana here. Success is also shown with the feedback they get and the measured integration levels of the frequenting users.

The building offers many rooms of different sizes and the flexible to accommodate all the above mentioned activities for all age groups, in its two stories and 920 m². The building offers 3 different entrances. The main entrance gives access to all the classrooms, administration and kitchen. The second Entrance is only available for one multipurpose room offering Day Care and activities to the adult users of the community. The third Entrance is for service and deliveries next to the kitchen. On the second floor are the administration offices.



Figure 16. Social Center Program Analysis

In Figure below (*Figure 17*), many of the Activities developed by this center with the aid of the social workers, and the community itself are pictured. They make use not only of the spaces inside the social center but their activities extend outdoors and door to door to members of the community in need.



Figure 17. Pictured Activities of the Social Center Gonxhe Bojaxhiu

2.6 Importance of Community Center on overall Well-being and Health

Developing countries are experiencing high levels of mental and physical illness associated with long term health conditions, unhealthy lifestyles and an ageing population. These are interrelated issues: for example cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, and drug and alcohol use are connected with common mental health problems such as anxiety and depression and, in some cases, severe mental health conditions [13]. Also these issues disproportionately affect lower socio-economic groups, and significantly contribute to the widening gap in health imbalances [18].

Community centers are entitled to promote a positive mental health environment which is associated with enhanced psycho-social functioning, improved learning and academic achievement, increased participation in community life, reduced sickness absence, improved productivity, reduced risk-taking behavior, improved physical health, reduced mortality, reduced health inequality as well as recovery from mental illness, and therefore it has relevance to a range of physical health issues [13].

A study conducted by Jones, *et. al.* [8], found that group-based activities in community centers are associated with improvements in the health and wellbeing of adults who experience poor health and other forms of social disadvantage. Although other relevant work exists on the behavioral effects of primary healthcare interventions and comprehensive area-based initiatives in community settings, previous research has not made community center schemes the focus for enquiry. Their subject of study, the South West Well-being program, which is a Big Lottery funded program delivered by a group of community-based voluntary sector organizations from across the region, and illustrates an initiative that tried to deliver a community focus on promoting capacity for personal and social well-being, as opposed to the management of ill-health and disease. That reflected a reorientation towards promoting healthy behaviors and well-being, and pro-active investment to avoid future illnesses costs to the South West of England, Great Britain. [8].

The study specifies the need for a more strategic approach to the delivery of community center programs and services in the studied area. The study stated that, although local benefits can be achieved in the short- to medium-term, its greater benefits can come from comprehensive and coordinated commissioning of community-based well-being services [8].

2.6.1 Overview of urban Sustainability terms for Community Center Building

Global challenges, impact all of us individually. Peter Calthorpe, a well-known architect and urban planner has focused all his work in designing better sustainable cities and his works are living proof of successful interventions from street level impact to global impact. I chose to research his works and refer to them in this thesis because global challenges impact all of us individually and because the city of Tirana is starting to walk along the paces of larger urban cities with all their benefits and setbacks. Learning from other cities issues, might help in preventing them from replicating in the emerging phase context of Tirana. To prevent is better than to repair. According to Calthorpe [2], a lot depends on how we shape our cities: Growing cities don't impact only the environment, but also our social well-being, our economic vitality, and our sense of community and connectedness. And so getting it right from the beginning, can help us build better cities. City sprawl, can happen anywhere when densifying and things might get out of hand. Such densifications segregate people into economic enclaves and land use enclaves. It separates them from nature and thus suffocates the interaction that make cities great places and that makes society and communities thrive. He talks about cities at large scale but the focus is starting on individual's well-being which impacts the community, which then impacts the city and so on.

Sustainability is about the quality of life and the celebration of nature's vast resources, and always pushes for community involvement in the architectural projects to bring people together and generate collective ownership while honoring the standard abundant natural resources that the earth has provided for us.

I mentioned sustainability because the community center must not only have a social effect on the community but also make use of sustainable building design principles from which would benefit not only its users but also the community in the urban context.

Sustainable design principles, to follow when designing any architectural project, include the ability to design buildings that:

- Optimize Site Potential;
- Minimize Non-Renewable Energy Consumption;

- Use Environmentally Friendly Materials;
- Protect and conserve water;
- Enhance Indoor environmental quality; and.
- Consider Natural Light and Ventilation
- Optimize operational and maintenance practices.
- How does community center Enhance Neighborhoods?

2.6.2 How does a community center Enhance Neighborhoods or Communities?

For the children of public schools in Tirana with working parents, there's a gap in time between when the school program ends and when the whole family gathers home. A lot can happen within that time frame and if there isn't a place to go to participate in organized activities, or even do homework, the possible dangers hiding in its urban neighborhoods mean a possible threat to them. The same problem is with seniors, especially those left alone at home for long time, with nowhere to go, no one to visit and talk, etc.

Places that serve the local community's citizens, referred to as "the third places", other than work place and homes, don't exist everywhere or those that exist are very few and unmanaged and inaccessible. Whether it's an apartment's courtyard, other trusted family available, a meeting place, a sports facility, or a public park, there aren't central places in Tirana where people from all generations, can recess, create, socialize or study other than those private.

A community and recreation center is a valuable asset to anyone in the community. A well-run community center serves as a thriving hub of activity for youth, families, senior citizens, civic organizations, parks and recreation departments, cultural departments and much more. Unfortunately, in Tirana, no such community center currently exists.

Understanding the critical importance of community center, through this work and research, I've listed four major benefits of having an urban community center in the city of Tirana.

- ***Community Centers have a positive impact on community youth***

A lively community center can have a stabilizing effect on the lives of young people. For young children the day-care, sensory play-grounds, library corners, health and developmental consultations made available to them on daily bases or even occasionally don't only benefit them directly but also their parents. For kids and youth by providing safe and adequately equipped spaces for physical activities like dance studios, martial arts, yoga, indoor and outdoor multisport courts, fitness, community centers teach discipline, healthy exercise habits, and teamwork. Cultural activities discover and nourish talents and social interactions make them responsible residents of the future.

Community centers create the perfect venue for local mentorship programs, providing guidance and leadership progress for the youth of the community. The role of community centers is especially crucial for communities that lack the necessary facilities to keep their children in safe environments. Daily after-school programs provide a shelter for at-risk youth, helping to reduce crime rates, court costs, and other costs to the community. A report published by The University of Chicago [3], links after-school programs, which can be found in many community and recreation centers throughout USA, with reduced drug usage in teens.

Ensuring that the youth of the community have a healthy option for their creativity and energy is an important step towards long-term community improvement because discipline, self-esteem, and leadership are all qualities that are fostered in youth-focused programs.

■ ***Community Centers have a generative impact on the ageing community***

Mixed-use facilities as such offer meeting spaces for local civic groups, business groups and individuals as well as an information and care center. This allows working residents to place senior parents in the care of the center during the day, and pick them up and resume family care after work. In a unique way, it is also a positive interaction and mutual benefit between these two generational cohorts.

The ageing community in the city of Tirana is the most excluded part of society from decision making and participation. Families are sizing down and every year more seniors find themselves lonely and without daily care or emancipation. As important as young children's care, senior groups can make use of the community in many ways. Their life experiences are of value on any field in community bonding. These activities, like helping

in the kitchen, in the library, in the day-care with young children, playing games with peers, creating art, teaching traditional crafts, taking care and company to each other all foster happiness and generative health-related effects not only to them, but also the younger members of the community.

■ ***Community Centers Provide an opportunity for Learning***

Considering them public facilities, community centers provide a place for children to extend their learning beyond the class room. Programs assisted by social workers and volunteers (or even better senior volunteers), provide kids with help with homework, tutoring for standardized testing, and a variety of activities, including music classes and book clubs.

There are no boundaries in educational opportunities in children. Adult learners can also benefit from the community center which can provide programs or space for learning or enhancing a skill and provides critical services such as job training or even a resume review or computer aid.

Places for people to meet, relax and play are not only essential to the psychological and physical wellbeing of people -they also serve as forums for building community and participation.

■ ***Community centers promote an active and healthy community***

Maintaining and conducting an active lifestyle is foundational to a happy and healthy lifestyle for all ages. Community centers don't exclusively cater to young people. Sport Clubs, fitness programs, athletic opportunities, arts and crafts classes, music and folk classes, and various cultural activities are made available to those of all ages at the premises of a community center. A recreation facility helps the users of the community center to develop a culture of physical wellbeing, better mental health, and nutritional education.

With intelligent programming and effective community outreach, a community recreation center can be a fundamental component to enact positive change at the community level.

■ ***Community Centers Increase the values of the properties in their neighborhood***

By providing a popular destination for cultural, social, fitness and athletic activities, efficiently operated community centers make the areas that surround them more attractive. An observation of the Artificial Lake Park area shows that because of the public park the area is highly requested and properties are among the most expensive in the market, and small businesses among the most flourishing in the city. The beneficiary aspect of this is that such property values can lead to increases in tax revenues for the local community.

Community centers can be the piece that makes communities whole. They provide a place where devoted coaches, teachers, social workers, artists, volunteers, freelancers and staff members create an environment of growth and learning for young people and senior people. A community recreation center can foster community pride, set good examples, and bring people together. It can also provide opportunities for multi-generational interaction, social inclusivity, and community learning as well as contribute to economic development.

2.7 Case Studies Analysis and Conclusions

The Literature review and case studies depict that every community is different, so the community centers must be tailored to the needs and exigencies of each specific community. Useful insights were gained through this research's responsive design approach methods when coming up with a community center program and design. This methodology considers in general the social environment and physical environment and their effect in the lives of the users. The case studies and the surveys helped structure this research and shape the design and program of the Community Center for Tirana in the following chapters.

The tools used for inquiry involved existing residents, a review of current meeting and social places, needs and wants for current and future buildings judging on research. Each of these subject areas provides a complete framework in which to base the type of community center that is both needed and wanted for this urban area.

Studies and experiences show that Community Centers are very important for a healthy, vibrant community by providing opportunities for residents to participate in the community, self-improve, and to interact with other residents. They are common ground areas that are focused on inclusivity and integration while fostering a culture of health and wellbeing in the communities they serve. Therefore the study examined prior researches, interviews, observations and case studies to identify the question this research raises. This

was achieved by reviews of relevant literature and contextual analysis. Case studies of relevant buildings and public facilities were undertaken. At the end an original design proposal was developed based on established models and useful standards acquired from the contextual and case studies and observations.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROGRAM

Qualitative research was conducted to identify, select, and analyze information about the Community Center Design and its program. Information was gathered from questionnaires, interviews, observations, case studies research, and record keeping.

3.1 Questionnaire Results and Conclusions

After the observation and desk research analysis phase, it was considered to undertake a participatory process and feedback. Questionnaires were drafted based on information gathered during the observatory and desk research phases, with the aim of acquiring significant information and input from the participants, targeted to choose residents of different social background and age group, in order to contemplate the problem of understanding the typology and program for proposing a community center for the users.

These questionnaires were handed out to people manually during surveys developed in the nearby areas. This research was handed out at chosen public and semi-public sites and the individuals that were making use of such areas and passer's by, were asked to have a conversation about what they think of the places available for their recreational and social interaction in the city. After the interview they were asked to fill the questionnaire. The first set of 31 questionnaires results were taken the first day, at a public plaza at the intersection of the new Northern Boulevard and the Zog the I-st Boulevard. The second set of the questionnaire was conducted at the Gener 2 Residential Complex's semi-public plazas, highly frequented by the residents of the neighborhood due to its urban park, safe play areas for kids, bars and urban features. The third set of questionnaires was also conducted on the new Northern Boulevard close to the site, where an undeveloped area is set to become one

of the emerging high-rise development neighborhoods in Tirana. A total of 76 questionnaires were filled voluntarily in three days.



Figure 18. The Sites where the Questionnaires were conducted.

The interviewed group of people were chosen to be diverse, picked by physical features depicting their age group only, and the fact that they lived in the city or preferably in the area. Not every targeted person agreed to take time to fill the questionnaire, but the ones who agreed represent a diverse group, of interest to social life in their neighborhood and thus their feedback was highly valued.

Following with the analysis, the interviewees were mostly female (*Figure 19*). The existing residents in the area, belong of different age groups, and interests. It is to be mentioned that the neighborhood chosen in this survey is undergoing through the process of

redeveloping into a new neighborhood, and a high demographic growth is predicted in this area. The existing residents might or might not be the future residents of the area. Relevant answers of this questionnaire are purposed at understanding only the current overall understanding of the individuals about community centers and social life in the Albanian context.

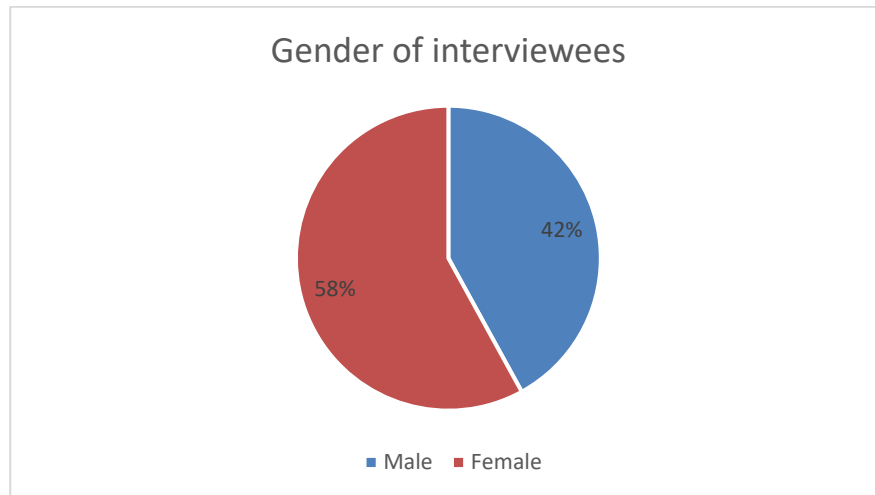


Figure 19. Comparative percentage of the gender of the interviewees

The first question of the questionnaire asked about the age group of the interviewees. Most of the interviewed individuals belonged to the age 17-20 Years and 21-35 Years. The lowest number of participants in this process is from the + 70 years age group (*Figure 20*).

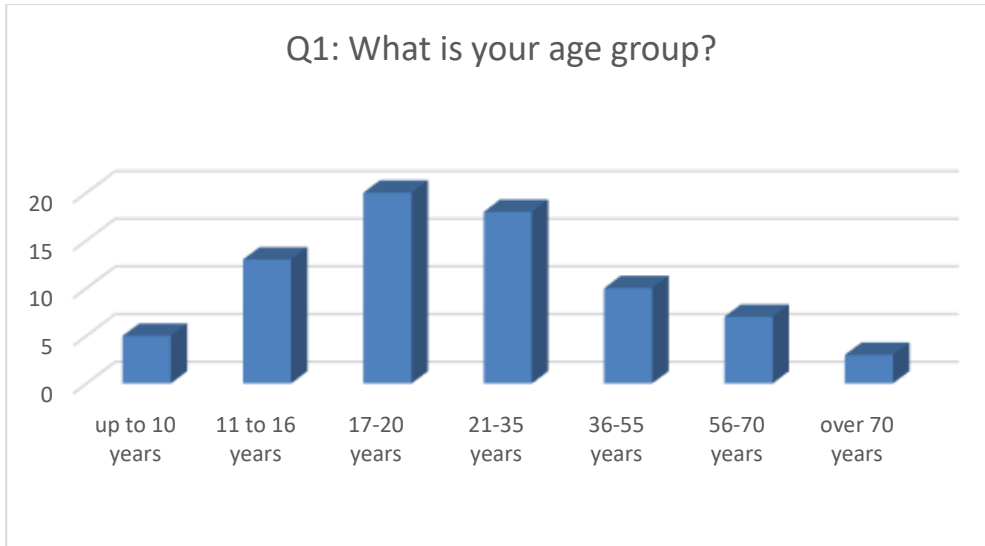


Figure 20. Group age the interviewed individuals belonged to.

When asked about the time spent living in this neighborhood (*Figure 21*) the interviewee's answers were very diverse but the dominant answer was 10-20 Years, depicting a relatively new neighborhood.

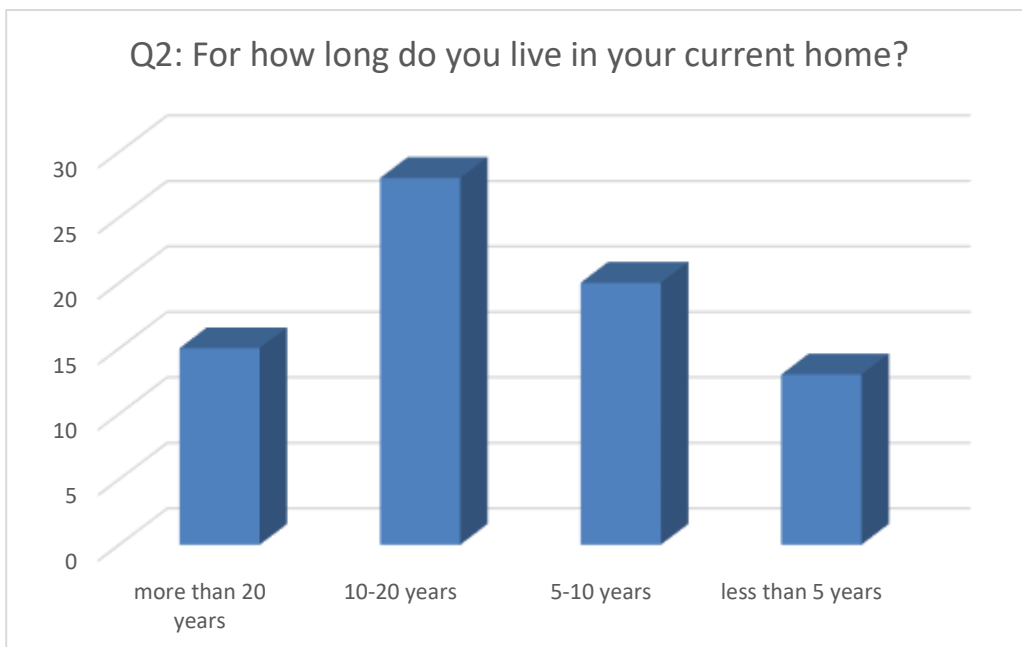


Figure 21. Number of years living in their current neighborhood

After gathering demographic inputs from the participants in this questionnaire, the following questions asked were framed to gather an understanding of how the residents of this area perceive the idea of a community center and their social behavior regarding these facilities that were explained to them.

A considerable percentage of the participants, 67%, were uninformed of other community centers in Tirana (*Figure 22*). The other 33% that mentioned to know any, depicted some community centers and mentioned they were addressed to specific groups of the community, like the marginalized groups of our society, only to young children, different religious groups, special needs groups, etc. The overall picture of for the community centers in the Albanian society is very indefinite and mostly addressed to health and recovery facilities as well as religious organizations.

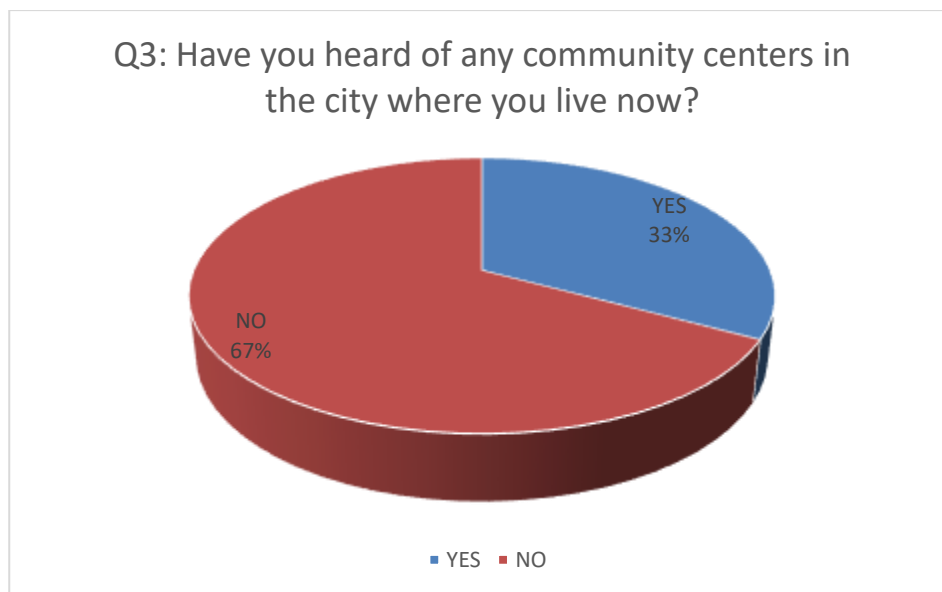


Figure 22. Information about other community centers in their vicinity

A very small number of the participants, only 16 % of the interviewees (*Figure 23*) claimed to have attended a CC before or that make use of its premises. 84% of the participants including those who had heard of community centers, declared to not have frequented any. Those who have frequented CC were asked if they could mention them. The

area when this questionnaire was targeted is also home to other CC like the Don Bosco Catholic Social Center, accredited the name of a CC because of the programs, which offer a variety of activities for the area and is almost the most frequented among the youth of the area, despite their religious belief. Other CC were also mentioned. Like the Elderly Day Care Center near the City Center which offered assistance and daily activities for the elderly in the community. The CC mentioned by the participants were small facilities, offering social service and activities for the communities isolated in time, in interests, in needs, or in religious beliefs.

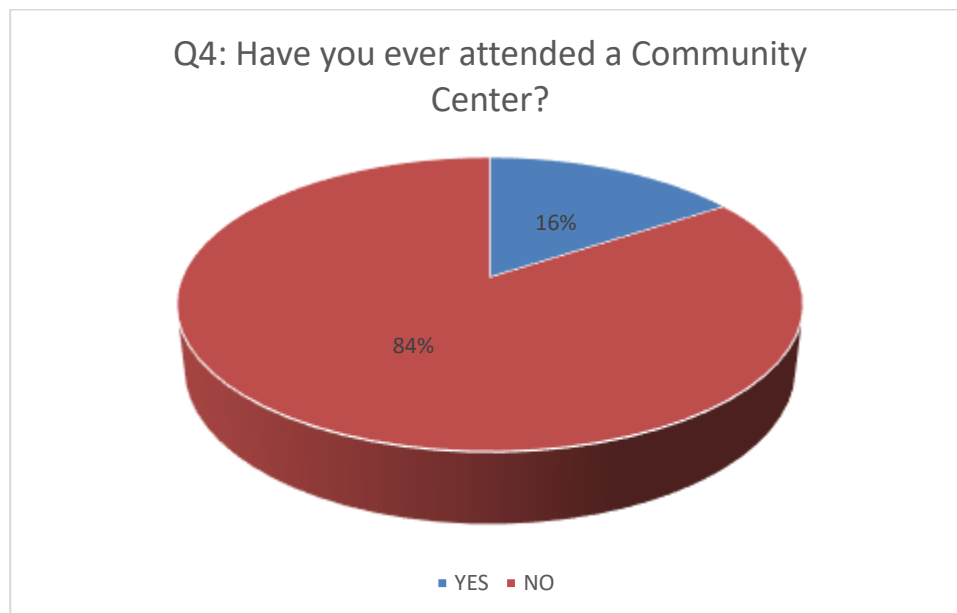


Figure 23. Attendance of CC by the interviewed individuals

When analyzed in respect with the group age of the interviewees (*Figure 20*) who attended any community centers on (*Figure 23*), belonged mainly to the group age of 11-16 years old and 17-20 years old, as shown in (*Figure 24*). The young age of the group that attended CC, portrays a changing era in the social understanding of community centers.

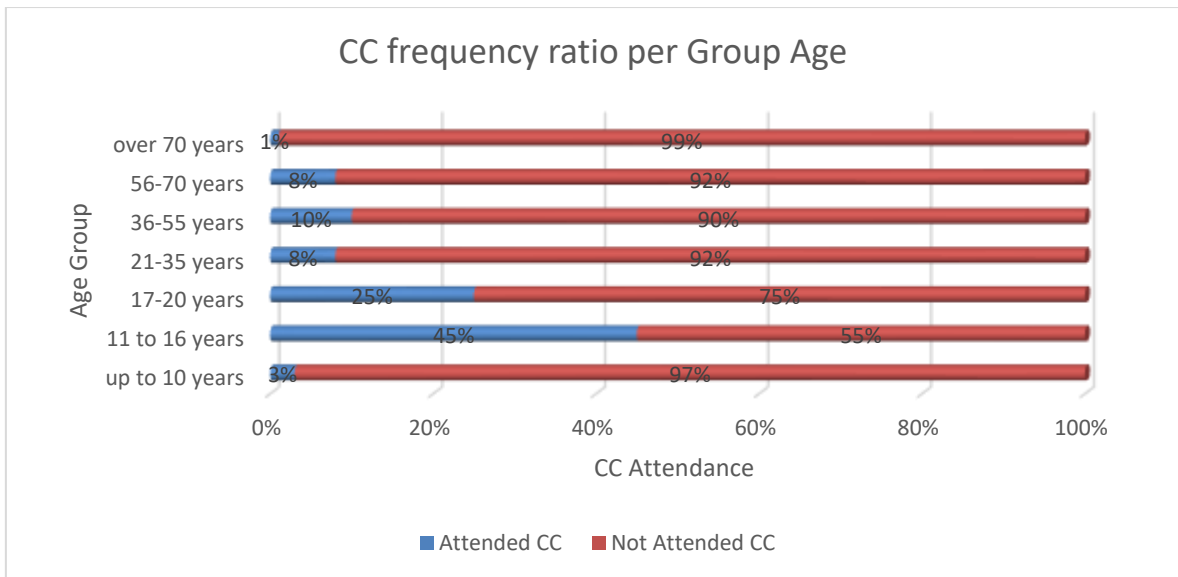


Figure 24. Attendance Percentage of CC by Age Group resulted by Q1 & Q4

The participants were asked if they self-organized and gathered together in groups of same age or same interest to hang-out or achieve anything (Figure 25). They declared to infrequently self-organize and group orient each other in attending local facilities in their communities addressed to their specific interest and group ages. They made use of playgrounds for kids when available, daily walks in the streets, coffee shops, small residential parks in the area, school courtyards when open, etc. Many declared that most of the time they have to move out of the neighborhood in search for interesting activities to pursue and connect with friends, and family who are not part of the community. For the participants who were in schools, the institution played the main role for organizing and leading purposeful meetings and interesting activities close to their communities.

Most of the participants believe that there is a missing link in knowing, connecting, trusting, belonging to the community where they live. So their gatherings were mainly day to day hang-out whenever and wherever possible, but not community oriented.

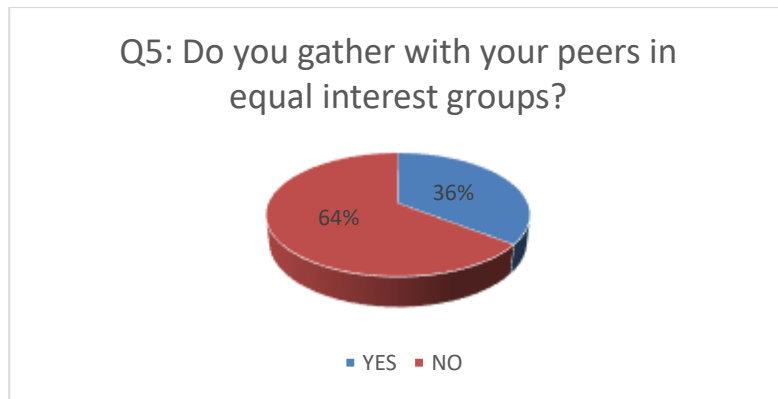


Figure 25 Organizing experiences of the interviewed individuals

The following questions ask the participant of their main actual role in the city (*Figure 26*). These questions were asked to understand the relation of answers from other questions of the questionnaire and the impact it has in their results. 43 % of the participants in the questionnaire were students from primary school up to higher education, followed by those who were actively working in the city. Both of this groups, are not only the most active part of the society, but are also the main decision making group concerning the community participation and the city where they live.

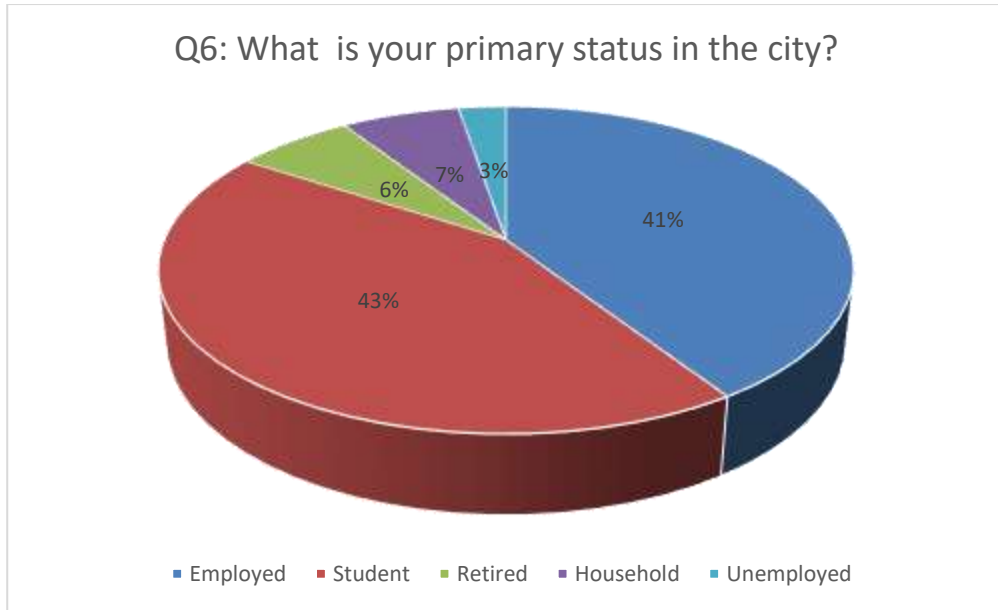


Figure 26. Occupation of the interviewed individuals

The following question (*Figure 27*) asked the participants if they were interested in engaging in the life of their community by socializing, empowering themselves, listening to other community members, volunteering, communicating their ideas and therefore participating in the decision making of not only their home, but also of the community they live in. 3 out of 4 participants answered that they were interested.

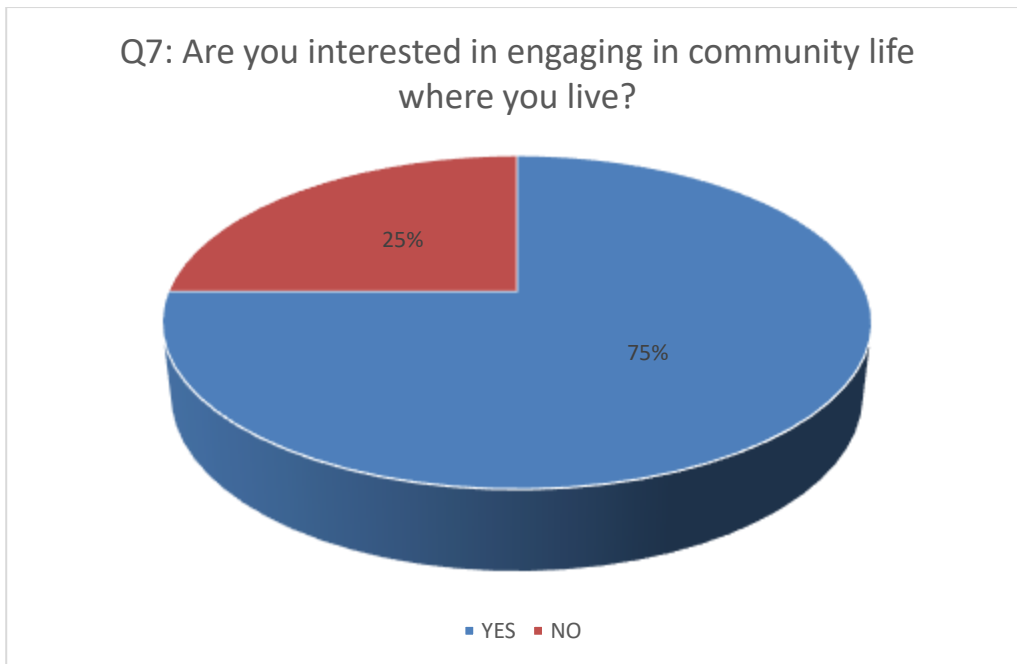


Figure 27. Interest for Engaging in the Community

To take inputs on the program of the community center, and also to acknowledge the participants with the possibilities that these kind of facilities can offer to the community, on the following question (*Figure 28*), I listed some of the activities that were of personal and community building interest. The participants were asked to circle all that arose their interest in attending.

Almost all of the participants chose more than 3 areas of interest and some were eager to circle them all. This resulted in a very balanced distribution of interested activities. Given the diverse group of individuals that took the questionnaire, these results affirm their need for such facilities in their community. The value of percentage for each activity in the question asked, defined also the order of importance in the community center program of each activity, from the most important interest to the least important not counting the age group of the participants. As illustrated in the chart in (*Figure 28*) the most selected program by the participants was that regarding landscape, nature, parks and relax areas. In the urban context of Tirana this is a general concern among all residents in Tirana. The limited access to public urban parks and nature in their vicinities!

Q8: Which of the following options would arouse your interest in attending, if it were part of your community?

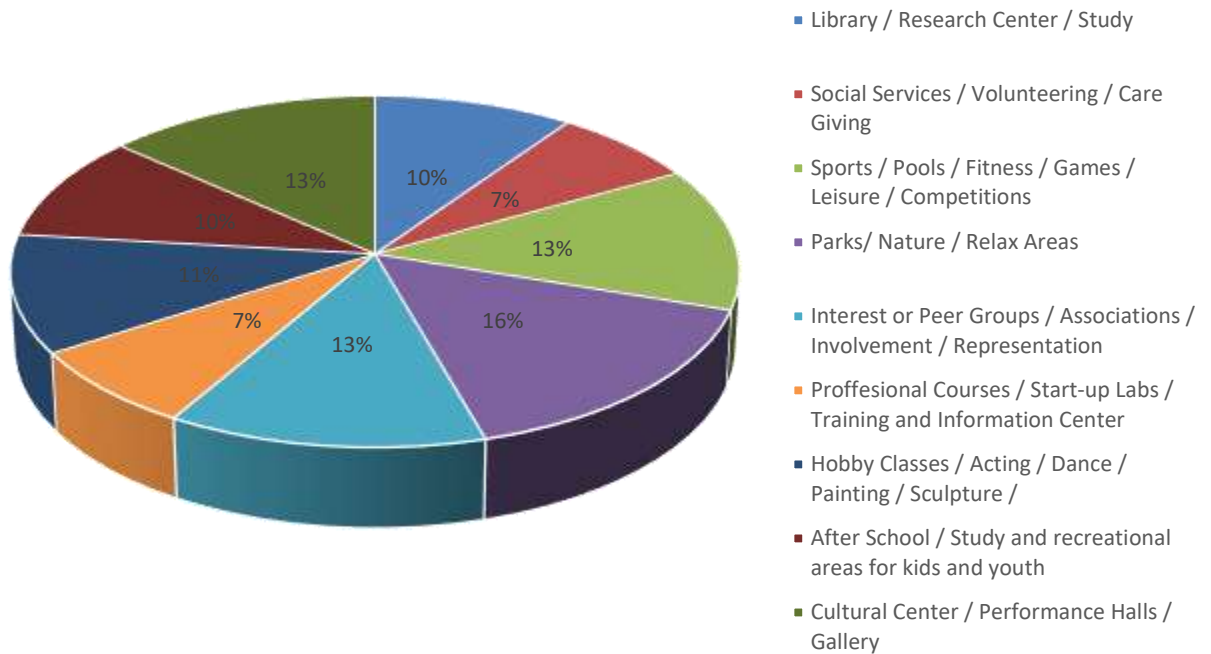


Figure 28. Specific program interests arousing interest by the interviewed individuals.

The following two questions (*Figure 29*) and (*Figure 30*) of the questionnaire, investigated the participant’s awareness on the impact and benefits that these facilities, and programs could have in their life and also the life of other community members. The question auto-suggests that these program and activities offer a series of beneficial traits to the well-being of the individual and the community that they serve. This benefits include better lifestyles, increased productivity, engagement, better mental-health and increased trust in the community. On average, more than 70% of the participants agreed that the programs depicted in (*Figure 28*), introduced to the neighborhood they live in, would better shape and influence not only themselves but also the community they belong to.

Q9: Do you think that the availability of the environments you selected above would effect your social and mental well-being and consequently your productivity as an individual?

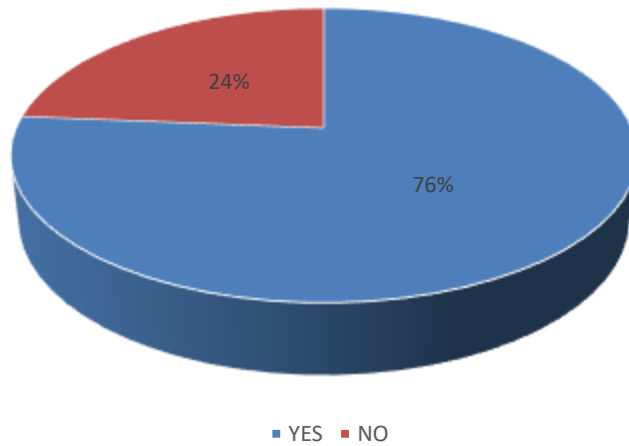


Figure 29. Effect of the CC Programs on individual well-being

Q10: Do you think that the availability of the facilities you selected above would also effect the well-being and trust of the community around you?

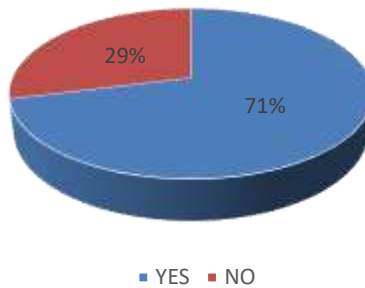


Figure 30. Effect of the CC Programs on community well-being

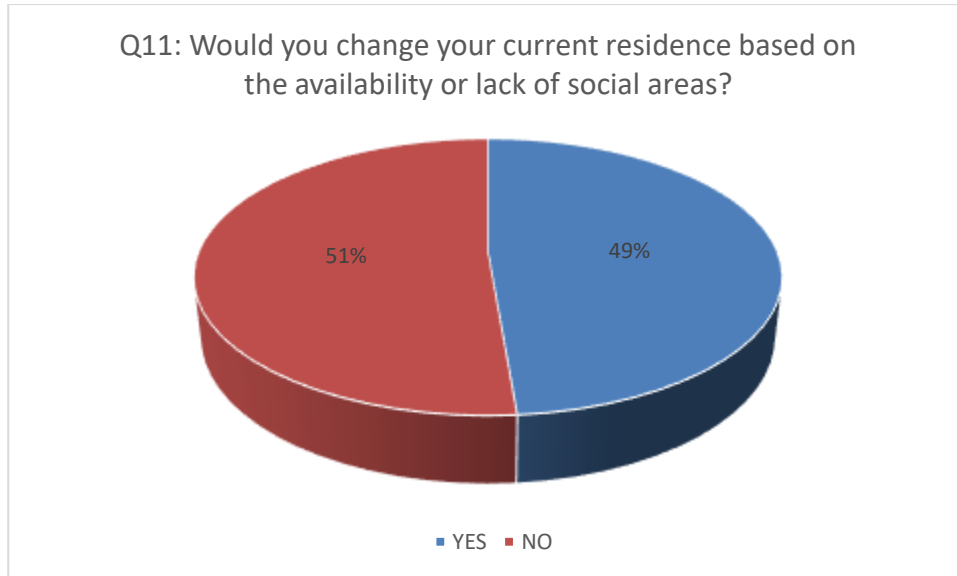


Figure 31. *Readiness to change residence driven by the community's social environment*

Global tendencies reflect people's readiness to move and change place of residence according to their specific needs and likelihoods more freely and easily than in previous times. In question 11 (*Figure 31*), the interviewees were asked if they would take the decision of moving and changing residency, if such a decision was important for their social wellbeing and environment. The answers were very closely near. 51% answered No, and mentioning they were attached not only physically but also emotionally to a place, even if it lacked a lot. Those who answered Yes, 41%, were willing to change place of residence if that meant a better community and a better lifestyle change for them, mentioning that they understood the importance of the environment in their wellbeing.

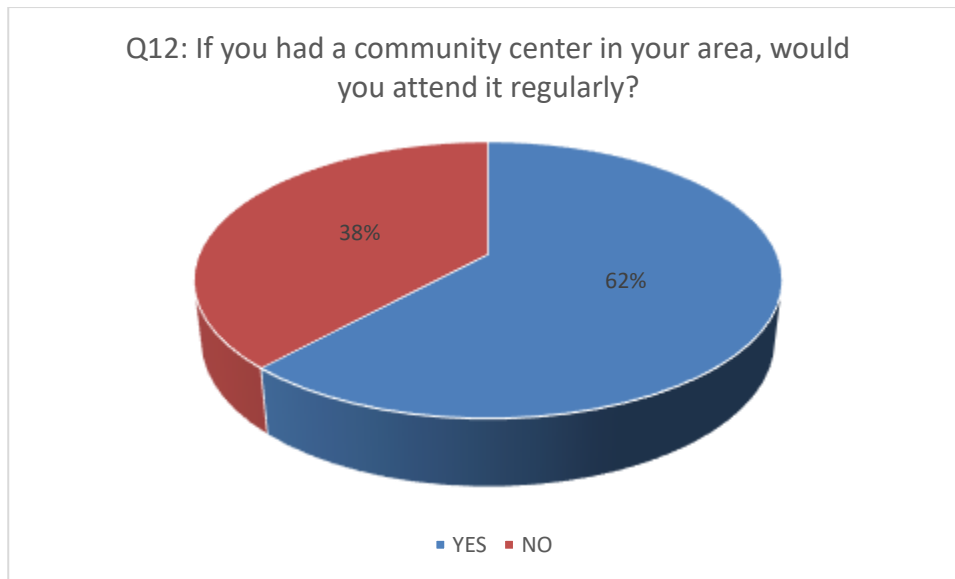


Figure 32. *Readiness to attend a Community Center*

In the last question (Figure 32), the participants were asked if they were willing to attend a community center, if it was available in their respective communities. After explaining shortly the kind of programs, a community center generally hosts and why it is important for the community bonding, 62% of the participants, from different age-groups, agreed that they would make use of such premises regularly.

3.2 Program Selection

There is no specific way to build a community center or what programs or facilities to include in it. That is why a quantitative research must be conducted prior to designing such public facilities and offering them to specific communities. Every community is different. Factors that apply to this differentiation are to mention some, the social factors, the demographical factors, the geographical factors, the cultural factors, the economic and political factors and so on.

During my research above, I studied community centers from different sides of the globe geographically, but also from different political and economic growth, with all their different approaches and impact to designing these architectural facilities in their belonging communities. I noticed that the each of the factors mentioned in the previews paragraph helped shape the community center, but the main factor, that of human wellbeing, was the

motivator of many such interventions, studies and researches, globally. So when selecting the program the urban community in Tirana needed the inputs were extracted from selected literature, case studies, precedent designs of such facilities and the feedback they were having in their users and communities. The community center is designed around the human well-being and integration, shown in (Figure 33) schematically.

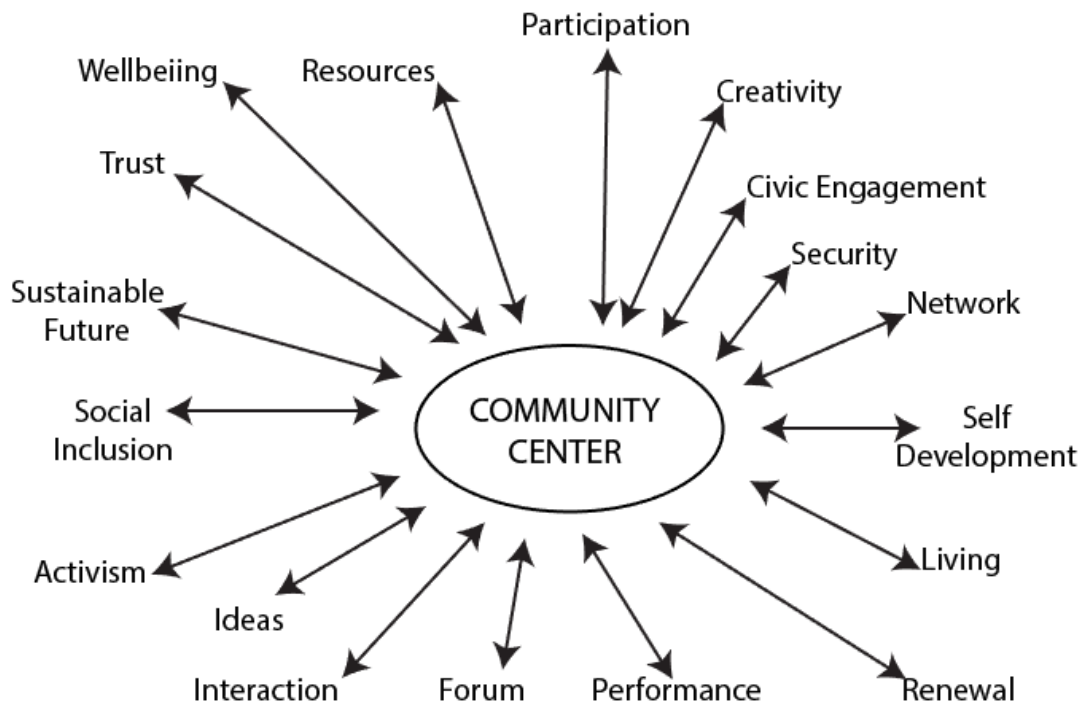


Figure 33. Community center as a social hub

Modern and Urban Community Centers tend to be social hubs; they are centrally located in the community, hosting a variety of events and programs and are staffed by people of the same community. People visited the studied facilities as much to socialize with other community members as to utilize the services housed within them. Multiple examples benefitted from being located adjacent to local schools but most of them were placed independently in areas that offered proper access. Latest designed or reconstructed facilities also tent to benefit from energy efficient design or improvements to minimize utilities and

keep operational costs down, and form a moderately-sized flexible building design that allows facility uses to change over time in response to community needs.

3.3 Design Guidelines for Community Centers

Community Centers provide places where people from a range of backgrounds and interests can socially interact, learn and self-improve, recreate, be supported and grow. In many areas, they are the focus of socially sustainable communities, and even livable and sustainable cities. When designing a Community Center, it is important to think creatively about these centers to ensure we as architects, develop innovative facilities that properly reflect our changing lifestyles, context and most importantly the community's needs. Local city planners and architects, in close collaboration with the community, must explore new ideas and ways of delivering programs, services and activities which are essential to community members on their daily lives. They must identify together the local social needs and the desired outcome.

Despite the numerous models and diversity of uses, the essence of community centers is that they support the development of socially sustainable communities by providing physical and recreational spaces to help address the local social needs and achieve the desired outcome.

The notion of placemaking is explored below in an effort to ensure the creation of meaningful spaces that own shared interest and respect amongst their intended users. These concepts materialize into a series of programmatic and design schemes, in order to frame these various concepts into the proposal of a design decision.

Placemaking gained traction in the 1960s, when well know activist and urbanist, Jane Jacobs and William Whyte introduced groundbreaking ideas about "...designing cities for people, not just cars and shopping centers" [12]. Their work focuses on the social and cultural importance of lively neighborhoods and inviting public spaces: Jacobs, encouraged everyday citizens to take ownership of streets and plazas made available to them, through the now-famous idea of "eyes on the street," while Whyte outlined key elements for creating vibrant social life in public spaces [12].

According to Jacobs, a great public space cannot be measured by its physical attributes alone; it must also serve people as a vital community resource in which function always surpasses form. “When people of all ages, abilities, and socio-economic backgrounds can not only access and enjoy a place, but also play a key role in its identity, creation, and maintenance, that is when we see genuine placemaking in action” [12].

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT PROPOSAL

4.1 Urban Analysis

4.1.1 Site Context

The City of Tirana, is very close to earning the character of a true Metropolis. Already 100 years as the Capitol city of Albania, Tirana has known lately a very fast, ongoing, development and growth both demographically and physically. The Vision for Tirana 2030 and beyond, has been set and the General Local Plan of Tirana has been approved by the Municipality of Tirana in 2018. This lack of vision, together with the chaos generated by the country's transitioning from a totalitarian regime to a democratic regime for as long as 30 years, led to poorly planned infrastructure and building typologies throughout the country. The area near the New Boulevard, which was until now an informal settlement, is prone to new developments following the cities growth and densification. The area is planned for redevelopment, and new high-rise residential towers are beginning to emerge on both sides of the New Boulevard.

The Urban Community Center is proposed in the context of a future high rise development plan, approved by the Municipality of Tirana in 2018. The General Detailed Plan of the Area was designed by SBA, UNLAB and IND Architects and Urban Planners in collaboration with the Municipality of Tirana and other important authorities and Institutions of Albania.



Figure 34. The TR030 Northern Bulevard Vision [16].

This new plan was developed as a response to the future expansion of Tirana at the edge of the Northern Bulevard, which is itself an extension of the Dëshmoret e Kombit Bulevard considered the main backbone shaping the city of Tirana. The selected project site is part of the Administrative Unit 9 of the city of Tirana. Formerly, this area was one of the most informally developed neighborhood following the chaotic transition of the city after the year 1990. The residents of the area consist of both old traditional families and also a large number of new residents fleeing in Tirana from all cities of Albania.

The two pictures below (*Figure 35*) and (*Figure 36*), visualize the growth of the city the last 30 years. Tirana is growing both horizontally and vertically.



Figure 35. Orthophoto imagery of Tirana 1994

The two pictures (*Figure 35*) up and (*Figure 36*) below, visualize the growth of the city the last 30 years. Tirana is growing both horizontally and vertically. What is noted is the backbone of the boulevard that starts from South, near the Artificial Lake Park, and ends North by Tirana River. At the edges the Boulevard the main institutions, governmental and administrative offices, public plazas and hotels are found. From the city's center, which is the Scanderbeg's Square in this Boulevard, Tirana's neighborhoods spread radially.

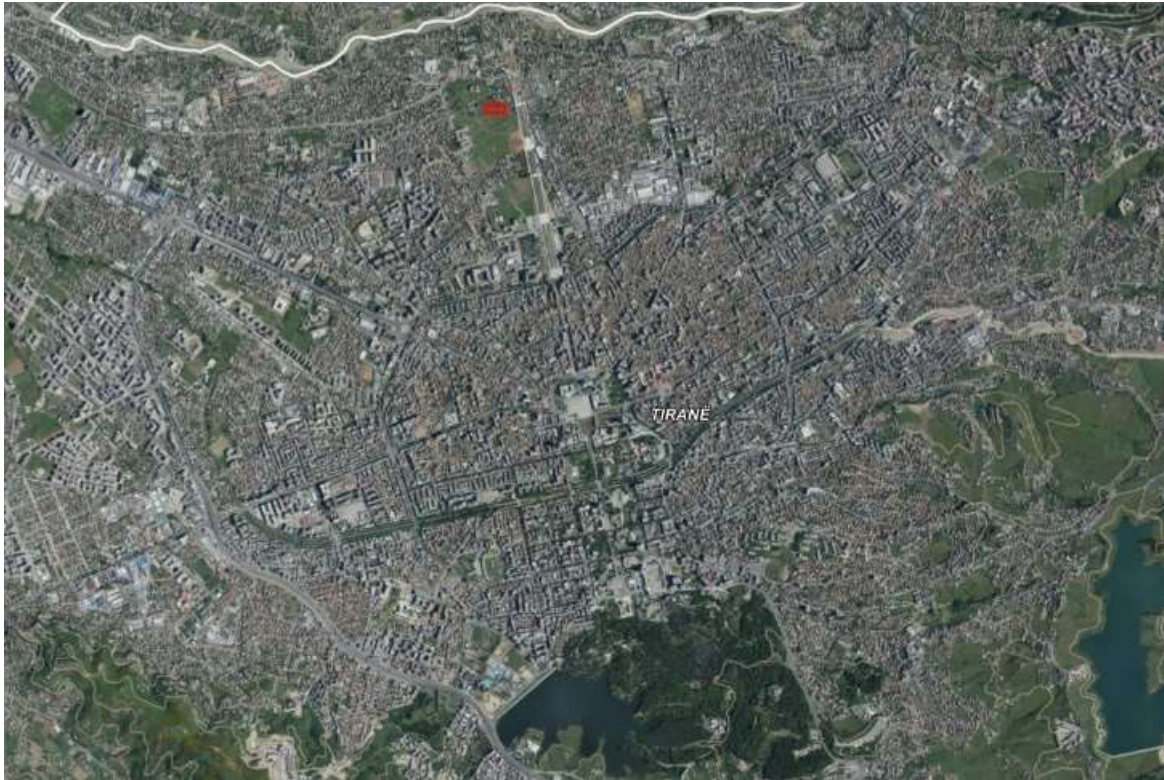


Figure 36. Ortophoto imagery of Tirana 2018

4.1.2 Urban Plan for the Emergent Neighborhood

The Site is part of the Administrative Unit No. 9 of the Municipality of Tirana (*Figure 37*) and is located in the heart of the city of Tirana. It is composed of the oldest autochthonous neighborhoods in Tirana center wise, and also rapidly prospering northward, it is set to become the futuristic image of Tirana of the 21st Century. This unit borders are from the City's Center, The Scanderbeg's Square in the South, to the Tirana River in the North. The inhabitants are mainly autochthonous Tirana, part coming after 1944 and the rest coming after 1990. From the demographic influx after 1990 the population increased by about 28% and the geographical extent of the Unit expanded with the formation of new informal areas in the east of "Don Bosko" street, on both sides of "Jordan Misja" street, as well as along the Tirana River Bank.

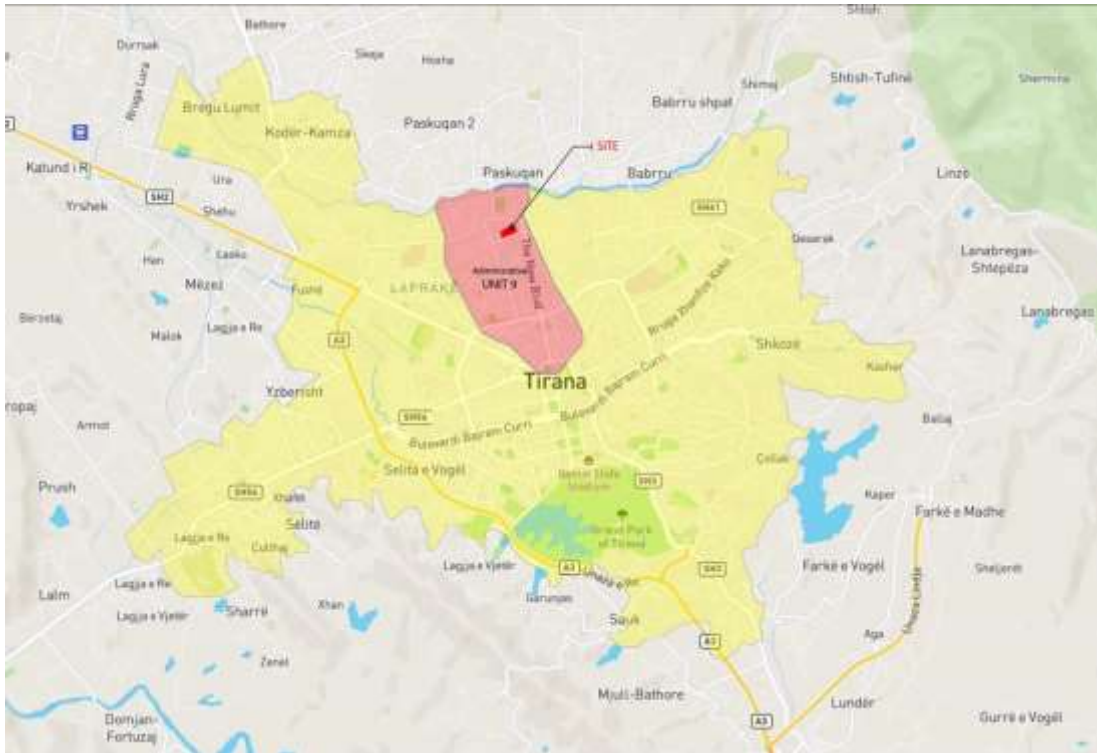


Figure 37. The Project Site in relation to urban Tirana, and Administrative Unit 9.

The population registered until 2019 in this unit is 64014 inhabitants of which 32359 are women and there are about 24296 families. The average age of the inhabitants is 38 years old.

Under the General Local Plan and the Stefano Boeri Architects Plan for the redevelopment of the Northern Boulevard, the area of the chosen site is depicted as an area for redevelopment and regeneration. Buildings will be laid out according to LDP 2 Proposals, which will take into consideration the improvement of public infrastructure for each sub-unit. Also according to this regulatory plan (*Figure 38*) the heights of the building in this area are planned, accordingly to the street types that the regulatory plan has offered for the area. The chosen site is bounded by 3 different road types but the main typologies for residential use are from 2 to 11 stories high. Also as defined by this plan commercial floor is min 4 and max 5 meters floor to ceiling. This is when used for residential purposes. Our facility is categorized as a public and recreation facility and derogation rules are made and proposed by the municipality in such interventions.

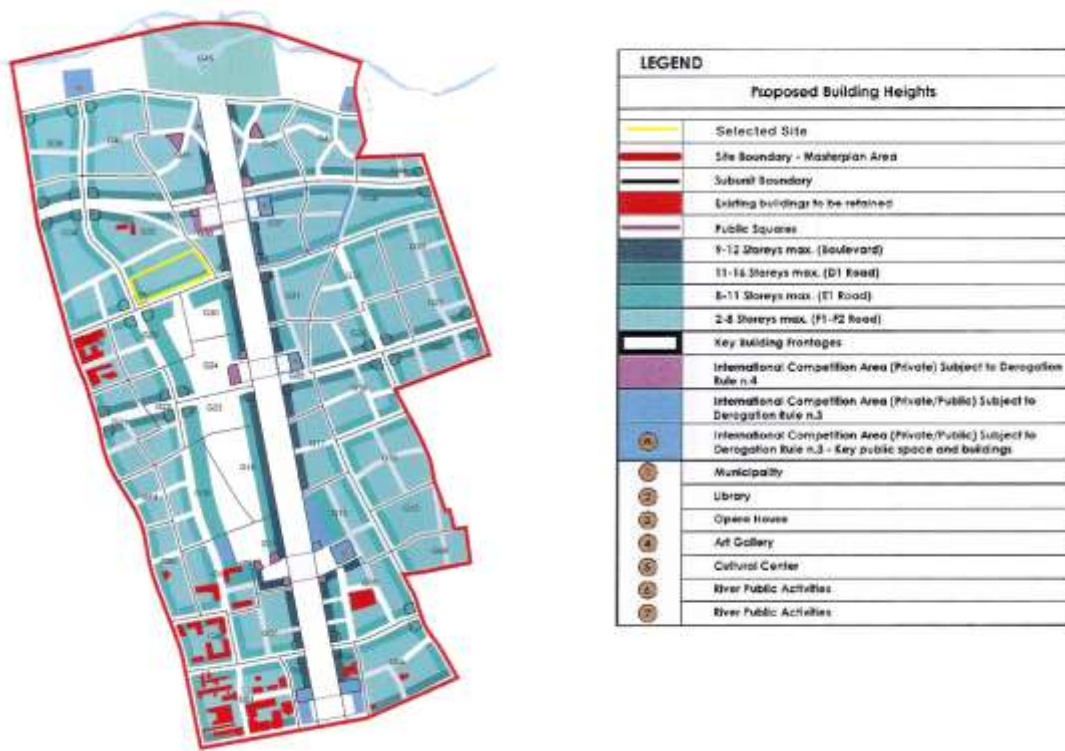


Figure 38. Proposed Building Heights and main public intervention areas with the Selected Site [16]

Land Use type is Residential, Educational, and Social Activities as shown in (Figure 39) and the construction intensity for the site is FAR 2.70. Character area and land use: Mixed use- typical residential developments are permitted within the following subcategories only. Residential 80% - commercial 0 – Education 20-institution 0-

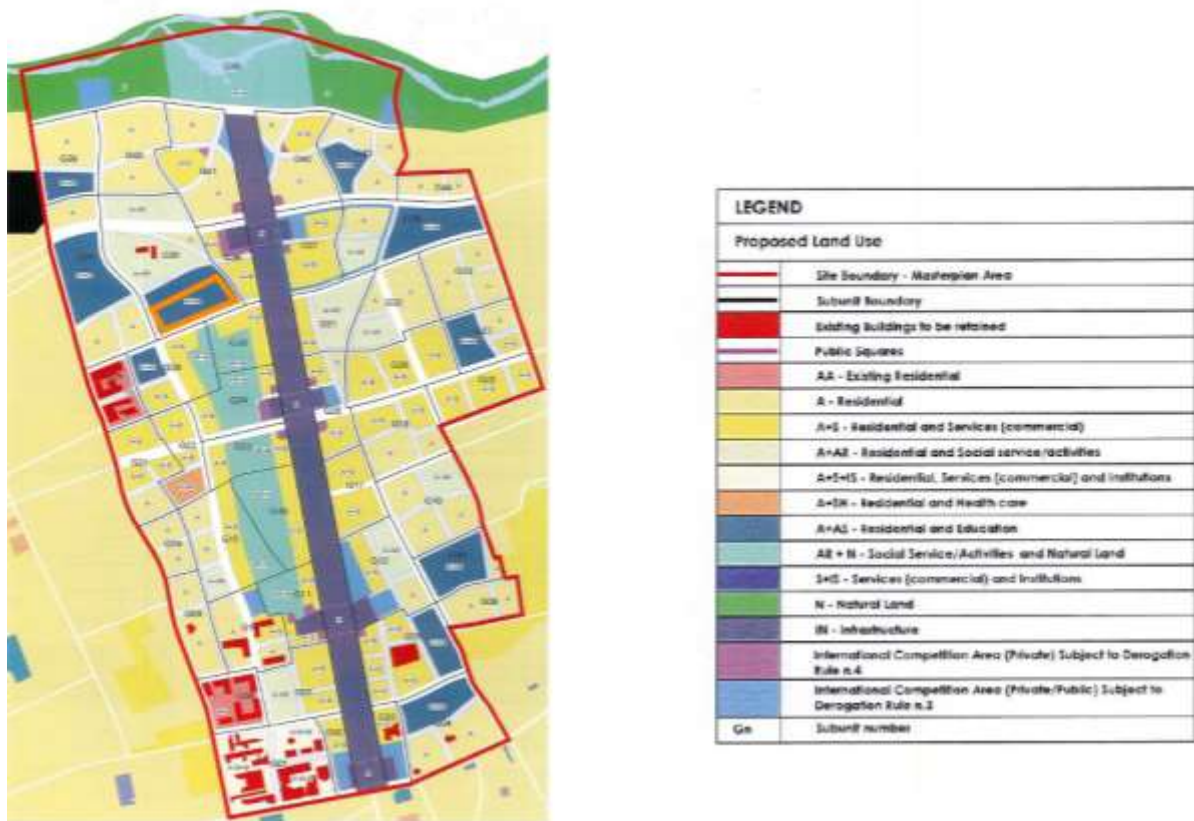


Figure 39. Proposed Land Use of the entire redevelopment area [16]

In conclusion to this analysis, I am assuming a derogation rule, by the municipality for my proposal. The selected area is chosen based on proximity to the community it is serving, accessibility and projected nearby developments of interest along the boulevard and also the whole neighborhood it will affect.

My proposal for an urban community center in this area takes into consideration the accessibility of the site, the various public and private services projected in the emerging area (such as schools, offices, workplaces, infrastructure, parks and plazas etc.)

As shown in Figure 40, where the actual Context is overlapping the proposed infrastructure and the above mentioned detailed plan of the area, the neighborhood is emerging. The existing buildings, shown in brown color are set for demolition. With the extension of the Northern Boulevard, major infrastructure is introduced in the area, as a necessity to properly link the new planned urban developments.

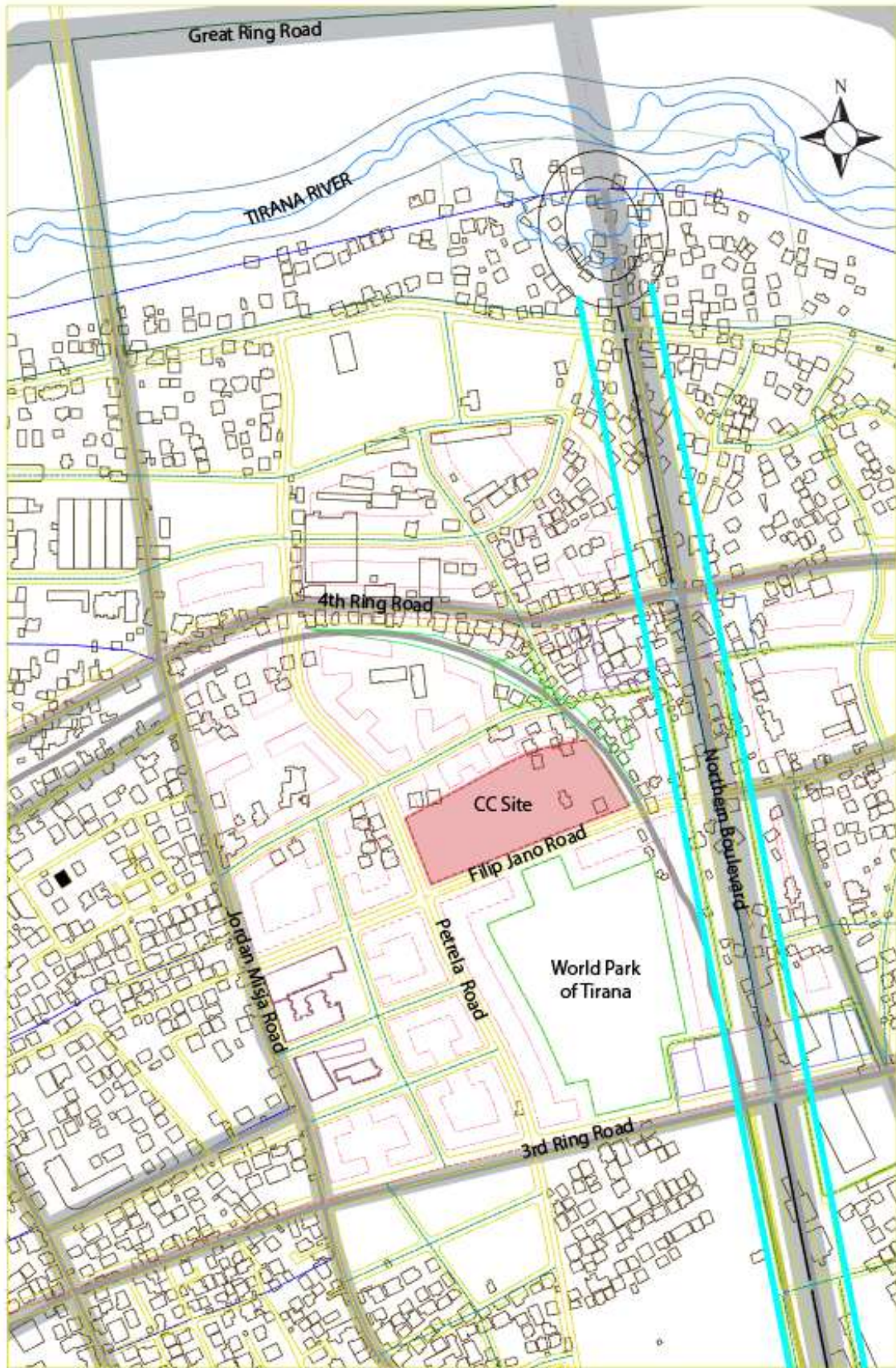


Figure 40. Proposed Infrastructure and new and existing Buildings

4.1.3 Selected Site

The chosen site is part of the New Boulevard redevelopment area of the Administrative Unit 9. Its selected area for the designated program is 14.750 m².

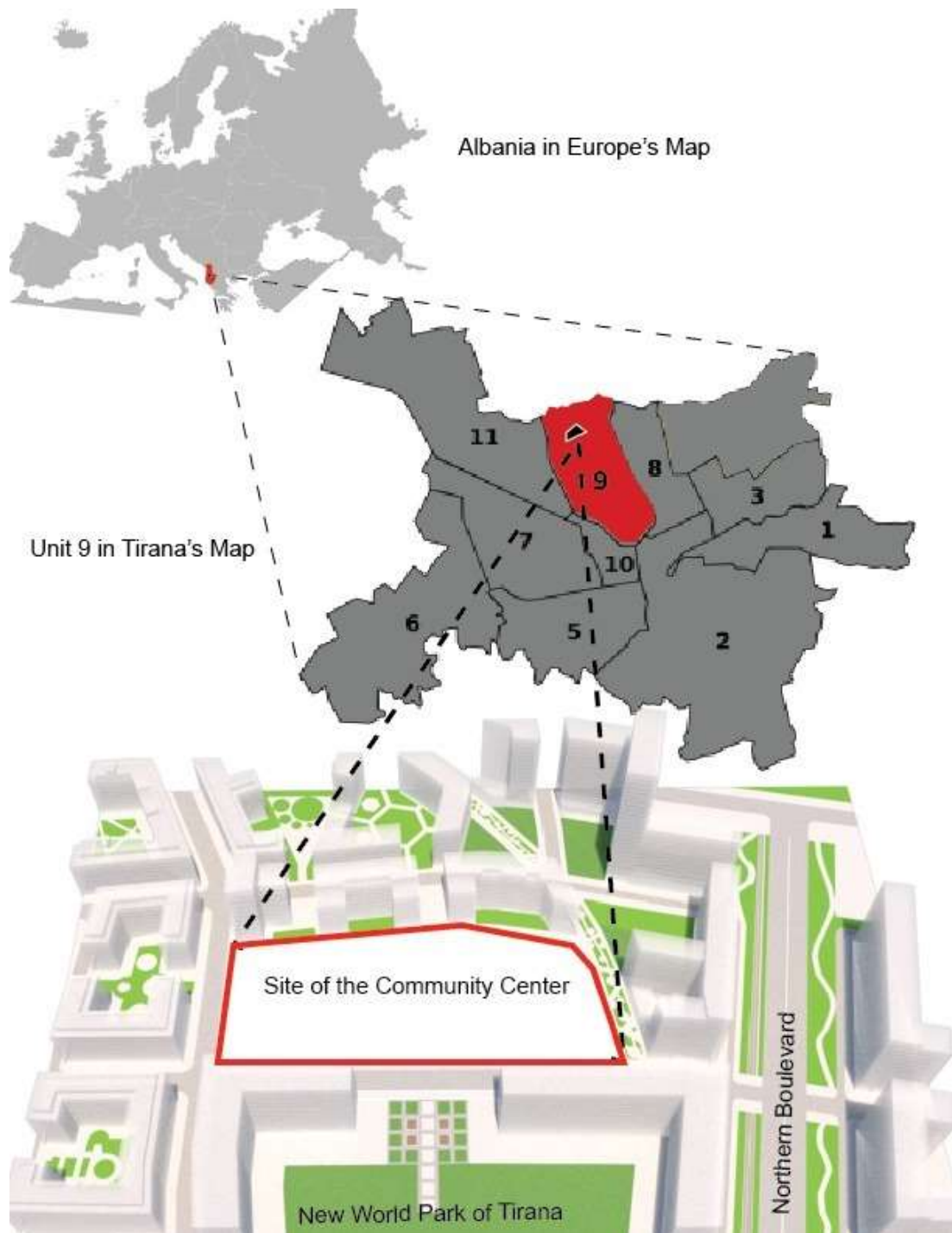


Figure 41. Chosen Site



Figure 42. Location of the Site in actual context- Birds eye View

The New Northern Boulevard Extension is only the beginning of this urban redevelopment. The Urban ring roads and the residential and public developments have already started to invade the area. The Power Station noted on the left of (*Figure 42*) is on the way of being reconfigured underground giving space to new future developments. The interruption of greenery in the new boulevard depicts where the linked roads will connect to it. Main Administrative and Public institution are set to be developed along the boulevard, while most of the area is of residential character.

The chosen site as shown in (*Figure 43*), is of longitudinal shape stretching from East to West. North is on the Pedestrian and residential site border, while the facades oriented by the urban roads offer plenty of light during winter and summer, as they are oriented South and West. The orientation of the site together with the access analysis affect the layout of the programs and, volumetric design and facades, the building techniques and materials of the community center.

Tirana, located on the northern hemisphere, is characterized by a typically Mediterranean climate. All four seasons are present, with cold winters where temperatures vary from -2° to 15° , and hot summers with temperatures that vary from 20° to 35° .



Figure 43. Location of the site in actual and proposed contexts.

The chosen site is bounded by 3 typologies of street with different usage and hierarchy (Figure 44). The Filip Jano Street, on the South, and the Petrela Road on the West, are both primary urban roads (E1 Category), offering 5 m wide pedestrian sidewalks, public transport lanes, bicycle lanes and a double vehicle lane with the according green shading areas and crosswalks in a 22 m wide footprint. The Pedestrian Street or the Ex-Railway tracks, on the East of the Site, is categorized as a secondary urban road (F2 Category), offering up to 14 m wide pedestrian streets with limited to no vehicle lanes, and bicycle lanes. On the North it is confined by the Residential area. Sharing public and services areas with the residential complexes. The Proximity with the New Boulevard and the proposed

World Park of Tirana, a large planned urban public park, and other pocket parks planned on the Eastern side of the site, were also important features when choosing the Site. Such features extend the usage flow of the area.



Figure 44. Proposed Road Map



Figure 45. Proposed Land Use

The proposed Land Use is Residential and Education, but the public facility make an exclusion. In our case the proximate land use is of great importance. The community center’s location is close to a mixed use urban area, like future parks, residential, tourism, infrastructure, and education sites.

The Proposed Building Heights (*Figure 46*) of the site is 2-11 stories high. Because this is a public Intervention the function and the program will depict the building heights. The current regulatory plan imposes that this is a high rise residential area. According to the research done above the program of the community center will be hosted following the concept of the functions for better serving the community. Thus the Height of the community center building will vary.



Figure 46. Proposed Building Heights

A great emphasis on the regulatory plan, is given also to the public greenery and parks of the area. The plan suggests the creation of many pocket and urban parks as part of the future redevelopment aiming to increase green public areas in the city.



Figure 47. Proposed Greenery

SITE IN PROPOSED CONTEXT



Figure 48. Site Location and Proposed Context elaborated by the Regulatory Plan

The Topography of the Site is almost flat and the current infrastructure footprint is not finished but the main vehicular roads are leveled with the site.



Figure 49. View from the Filip Jano Street with the Site on the Right



Figure 50. View of the Site from the Sejdini Street

4.2 Project Proposal and Concept

4.2.1 Project Intent

The intended project is an Urban Community Center for the Emerging city of Tirana. This Center will be an environment, part of the urban community, which by designing the appropriate space and facilities to host its program, will improve the quality of life of its users and further integrate the growing community of Tirana.

Thus the goal of the project is:

- 1 – To strengthen community ties, and by doing so improving the community life as a whole
- 2 – The project focuses on providing spaces that focus on an active and vital lifestyle for all members of the community, from all group ages and interests.
- 3 – To act as a social hub for the community, for which the members feel a sense of responsibility and ownership, as well as to raise common aspirations for their community, and create an environment suited to their needs.

4.2.2 Development of the Program

The Development of the Program was very important when chosen the selected thesis project. Each programmatic component has been identified after the research conducted and the known and lived socio-economic issues by the city's inhabitants. The data from Censuses and INSTAT as well as political and economic growth factors were studied and adopted to understand the population that the project will aim to serve.

Spaces as well as their functional relationships were solved during the conceptual phase. The main components of the Program and its sub-activities are listed below.

- **The Cultural Center**
 - Theater and Concert Hall
 - Community Library
 - Art Gallery

- Painting Studios and Classrooms
- Ballet, Dancing and Folk Studios
- Indoor and Outdoor Areas for performance and projection
- Heritage Corner
- Rehearsal and Dressing Rooms
- **The Sport and Recreational Center**
 - Indoor Multipurpose Gym
 - Climbing Wall
 - Fitness Gym
 - Outdoor Multipurpose Courts
 - Children's Playground
- **The Social Center**
 - Multipurpose community event room
 - Children's daycare
 - Kid's and youth after school programs
 - Adult and senior daycare
 - Kitchen and dining areas
 - Day clinic, infirmary room, health consultant
 - Courtyards and mix-aged playgrounds
 - Multicultural Clubs
 - Skill Building and Education Center
 - Lounging and social areas
- **The Administration**
 - Administration oOffices and meeting rooms
 - Maintenance rooms
 - Storage

- Rentable offices, workstations, for people of the community and NGO's.
- Technical and services and delivery areas
- Volunteer's offices and rooms.

The reason for choosing these four main components, and the subsequent activities, to serve the community in one building is that of the integration part and the relationship between the community members of different interests and backgrounds.

Further break down of each activity is comprised as follows:

Skill Building and Education – is important for especially young members of the community. This activities can as well belong to one building apart, but when available in a facility that offers more, it will be more successful. The activities and spaces that this issue addresses, need classrooms, laboratories, library, work spaces and events (like fairs) for creating hiring networks and gathering information on the jobs markets.

Adult and Senior Daycare – is addressed to members of the community which at a certain age, or disability need counseling, company, care and recreation which is conducted by social care workers. They can also make use of other facilities like Yoga and Fitness Classes, meditation, acting, painting, cooking, taking care of children or teach new life skills to young community members at their pace. By keeping active they slow their ageing degenerative ability.

Children Day Care – Children of different age groups, from 1 to 12 years of age are cared for and egaged in both educational and recreational activities. They can make use of Library, theaters, dance and sport activities in groups or alone.

Sports and Recreation Facilities – A multipurpose indoor Gymnasium will offer a variety of recreational and educational activities to the center. Such activities are sports made possible by the courts size and flexibility, (basketball, Volleyball, table games, running tracks, climbing wall, game events and matches, etc.) Outdoor Multipurpose courts, extend the outdoor recreational games and sport activities. Dance Rooms, Fitness Room, Yoga Room, Climbing Wall, Running tracks, Dressing and washing rooms are some other activities than can be hosted in the community center.

Cultural Center – The cultural Center will be composed of the Theater and performing Hall, The Gallery, the Library, Art Classes and Studios.

Community Multipurpose Room – this will be a room for hosting community gatherings and events, fairs, dances, smaller concerts, different holiday festivities etc.

The Kitchen and Dining Facility – One kitchen close to the social center will be available for daily users and staff and also at the service of the multipurpose community room on certain events.

Administration – One Information Center will be available at the main entrance of the facility for the members of the community and also visitors. Offices for administration and staff, meeting rooms, rentable offices for members of the community as well as for NGO’s working in the community.

Parking – Day parking for the users and the staff is thought to be available at site. Given the urban location, the parking is to occupy underground levels for the masses, but also space for delivery and services must be available at the community center.

Day Clinic – This facility is needed given the wide program of the community center. It will consist of a nurse office with emergency beds and also offer counseling and information to those in need for further assistance out of the Center.

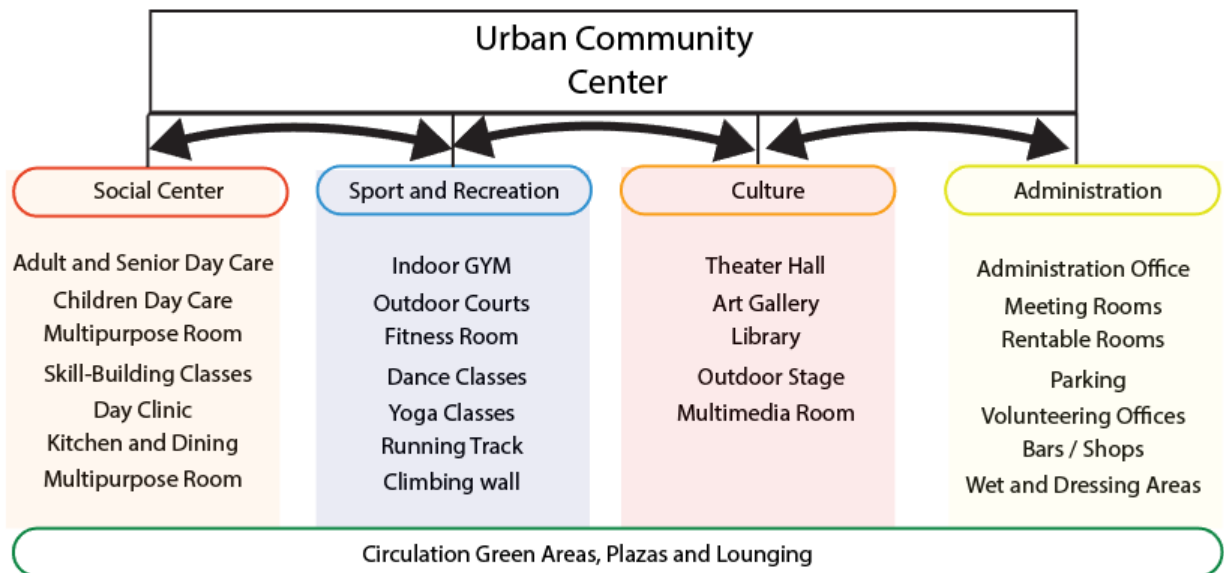


Figure 51. Community Center Program functional diagram

For the community center to be thriving, all of the activities are Inter-related and so must be inter-connected in the community center. It is very important to calculate the space needed for each activity as well as the relation of that space in the context of all other activities in the urban community center.

4.2.3 Development of the Program Concept

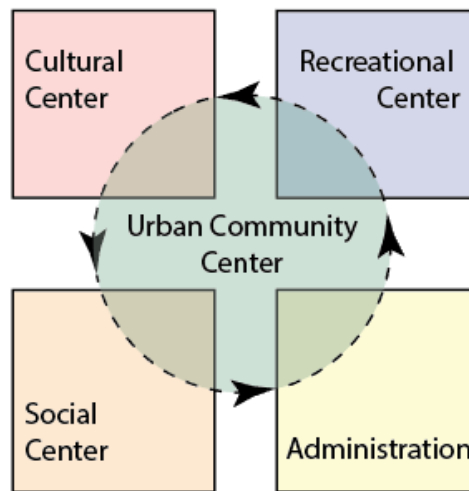


Figure 52. The 4 Main Building Program Components of the Urban Community Center

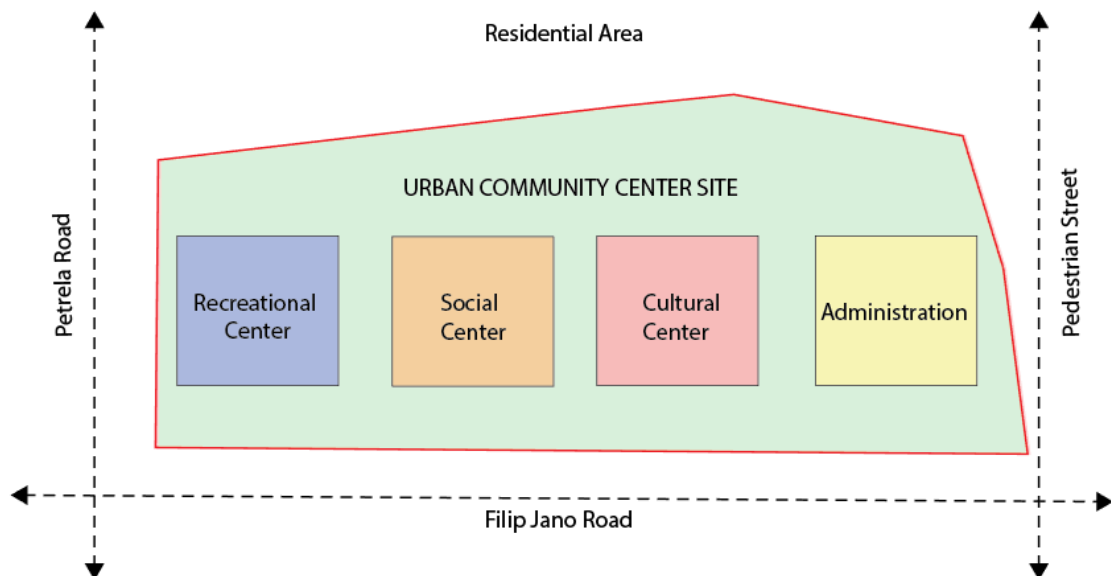


Figure 53. The Site as the Container of these Programs

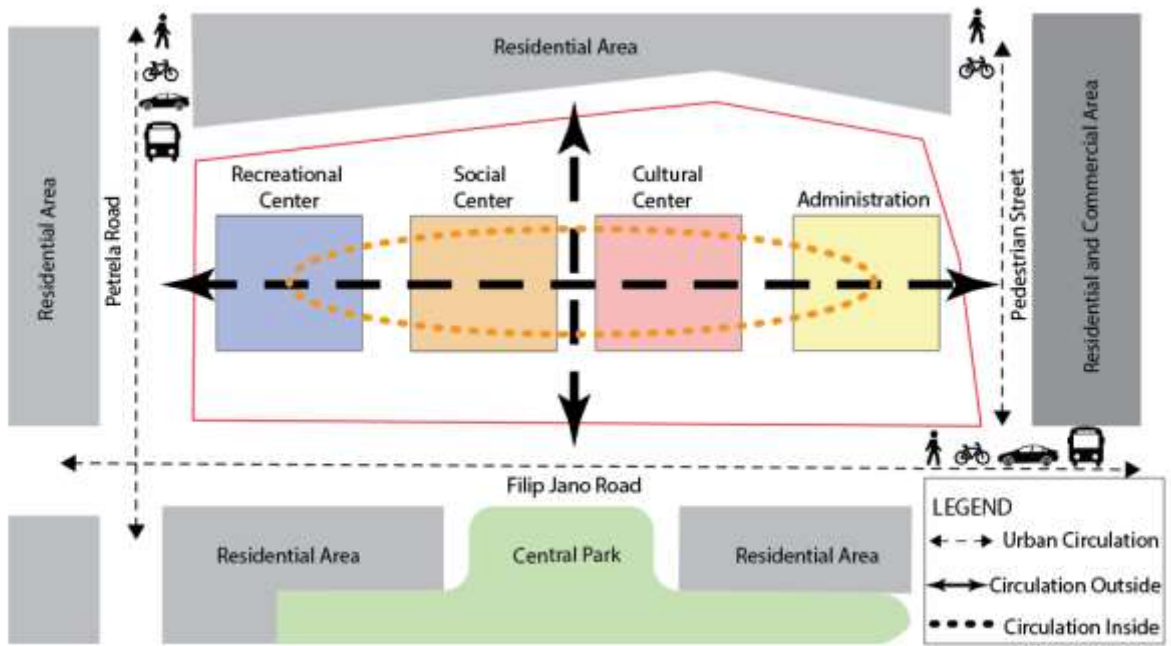


Figure 54. Road Access and Circulation

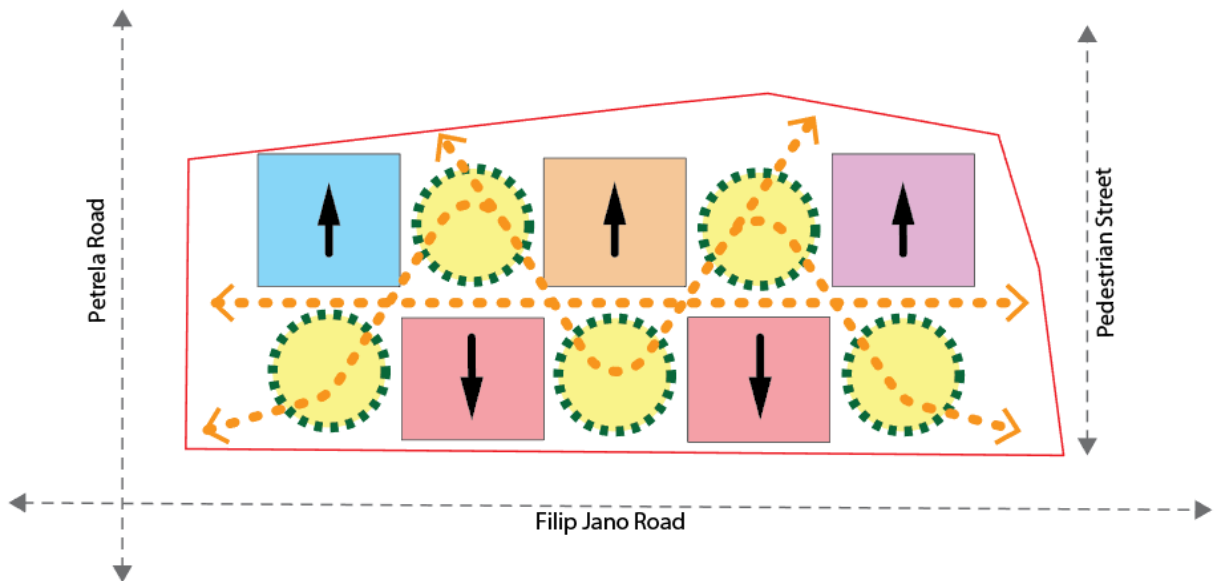


Figure 55. Breaking up the Programs to create circulation paths and plazas

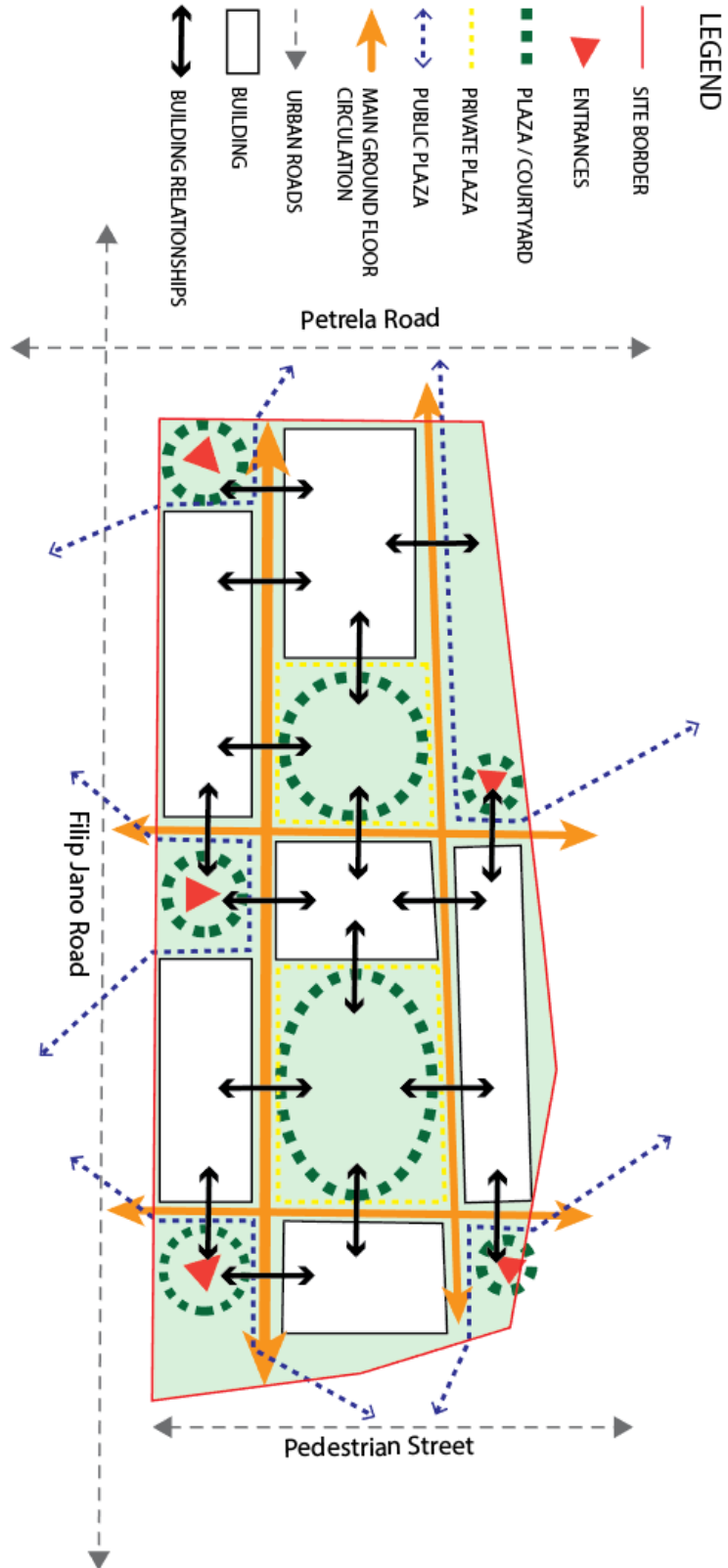


Figure 56. Spatial hierarchy defining the footprint of the building, main ground floor circulation and the Interconnection of the Programs.

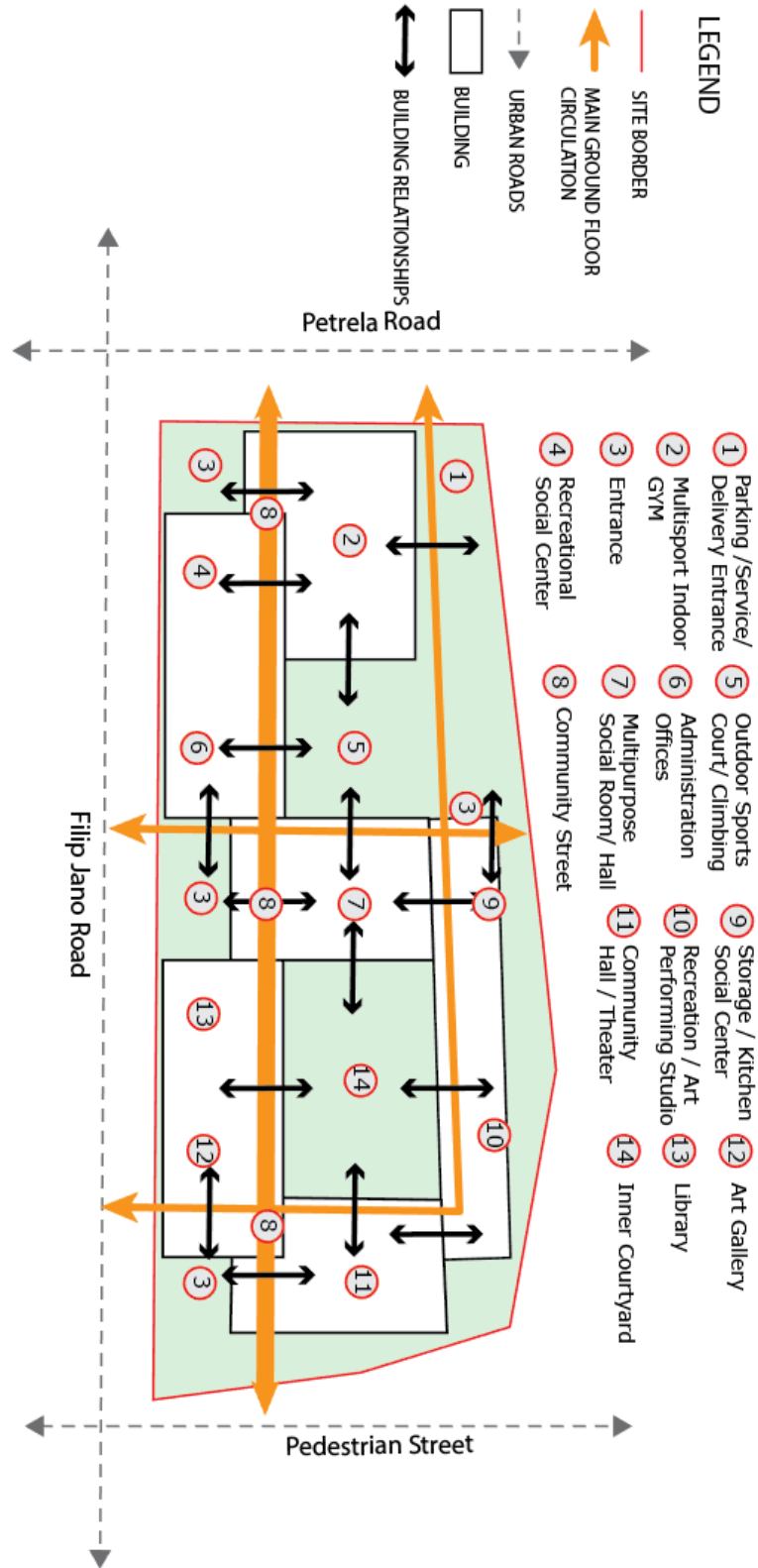


Figure 57. By defining access, indoor circulation, spatial hierarchy and space relationships, a schematic program evolves around the edges of an indoor and continuous community street.

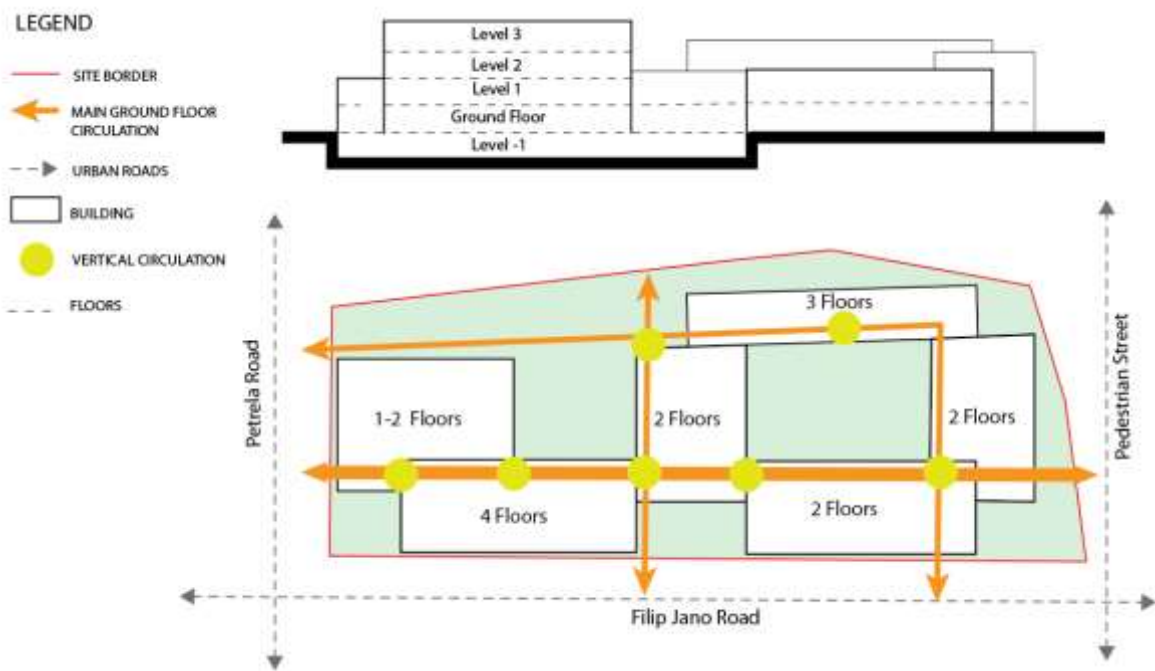


Figure 58. Vertical Layout and circulation of the buildings to host the programs accordingly

Vertical distribution of the program is needed in the context of the Urban Community center. By analyzing the concept and the approximate area needed for each program. The building is set to operate as one building but with the different programs and the different spatial needs for each of the program the buildings are exploded as shown in the concept diagrams.



Figure 59. Preliminary Process of selecting the placement of the buildings

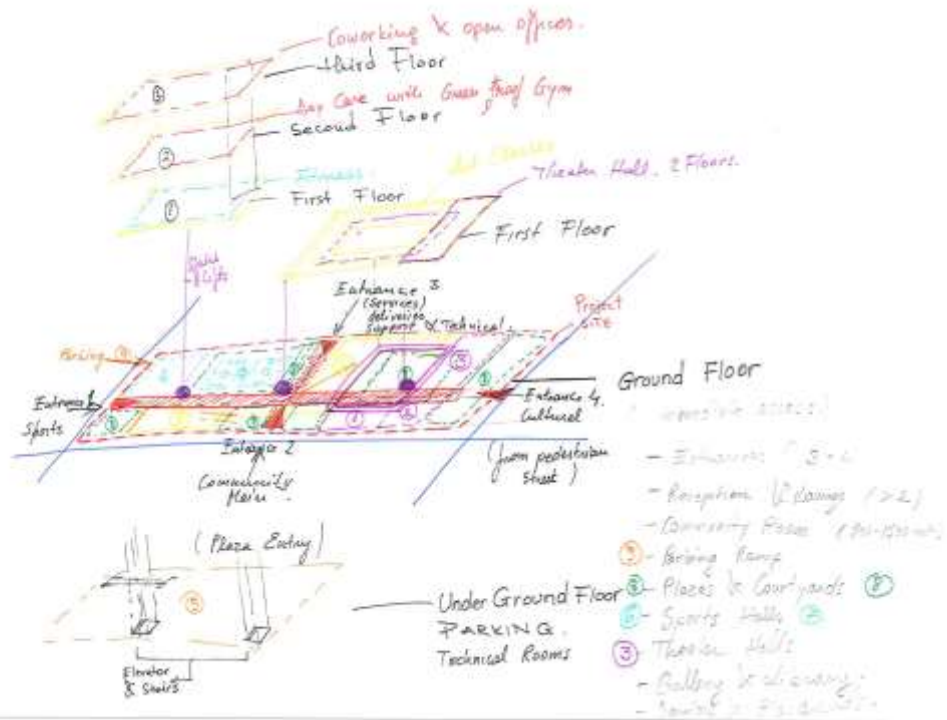


Figure 60. Preliminary Process of Organizing Programs into the Community Center

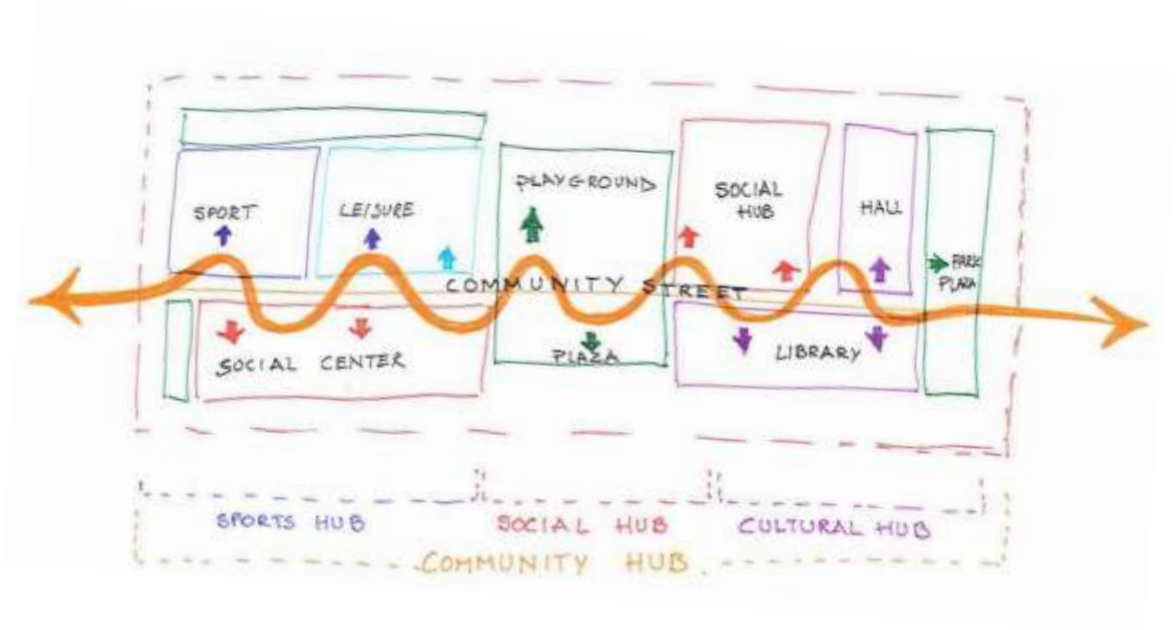


Figure 61. Preliminary Process of Concept and Design

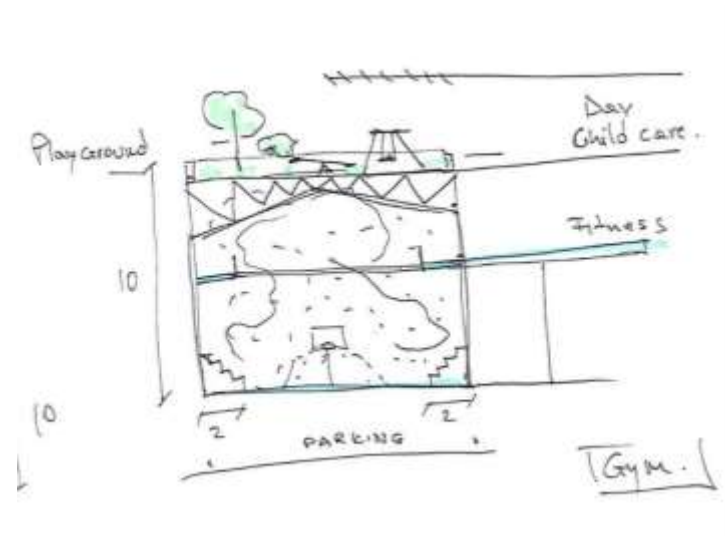


Figure 62. Preliminary Concept of Making use of roof-tops for and interconnecting Programs, like the Childcare – Fitness and GYM in different levels

4.3 Site and Floor Plans of the Proposed Model

The Following images show the proposed project model outcome. The Programs were aligned taking into consideration the Urban Analysis above and their inter-relation.

The public facility offers pedestrian access from all its sides, creating an inviting presence for the surrounding community. Pedestrian access and circulation is of high importance in this facility and for that purpose and indoor community street was created, connecting the three main entrances, and in each of the entrances, plazas that accommodate gathering, lounging and restoration were formed. Given the urban context and the city's car dependability, the vehicular access is taken into consideration with a quick drop-off, take-in from the main street, the underground parking lot for longer stays, and the services and delivery access for maintenance and support take's little space from the site's area.

The main components that form the urban community center can easily claim each a side of the community center, not to offer chaos and distraction, but the various spaces in between, such as the courtyard, the plazas, the entrance's lobbies, the courts etc. that are formed along the community street offer a variety of eye and social perception.

As noted in the Site Plan in (*Figure 63*), the building tries to make minimal concrete impact in the urban footprint. The building's facades were intentionally drawn away from the sidewalks, to offer space and widen the passengers and pedestrian's eyesight, breaking the linear continuity that usually is built in city's high-rise developments. Such spaces can also accommodate unexpected activities from the users in the future.

The site's access defines the kind of entrances and also the vertical circulation in the building. It defines how large these entrances are and the programs around them.



Figure 63. *Site Plan of the proposed Building Project*

By the Petrela Road, a secondary urban road, it is offered access to parking and services. Underground parking shown in (Figure 64). It offers Vehicular parking for up to 190 cars and bicycles too. Technical support rooms and also storage can be managed in this

floor level. From the parking lift and stairs are offered for vertical circulation to two main entrances and what is more important, the recreational center, administration, child care and the social center.

On the side of the pedestrian road, the cultural center is accessed through a wide public plaza that extends the activity of the pedestrian street. Public outdoor events such as small concerts, performances, fairs, bazaars, holiday festivities, etc. can be performed both in the plaza and continue to the indoor plaza, and into the courtyard as shown in the Ground Floor Plan in (*Figure 65*). This entrance gives access to the theater hall on both its levels. Next to the entrance a bar and resting place can offer meeting places and restoration for the users and visitors. The round staircase breaks the overall design of the building with its many corners and rectangular elements to place a statement of individuality to the two floor lobby that connects the outdoor plaza and the indoor plaza.

Also on the ground floor is the Library, thought to make a welcoming impact from the street. Libraries importance with the digitalization era has gone down but authors cannot be put in silence and this can be a library that embraces the multimedia and digital era and at the same time host events for authors and readers to meet and greet and discuss. Library's program stands on two levels and is connected through inner staircases.

The main entrance is designed facing the New World Park of Tirana on the Filip Jano Road, a main urban road. The community's users can extend their programs also in the park to fulfill their outdoor necessities. One next to the drop-off office for the information and reception is placed on this entrance together with the staircases to the first level. It is in the middle of the community center and connects the courtyard with the sport's court and the cultural center with the recreational center and administration. Its main activity is extended by the multipurpose community room. This room is thought to have a flexible layout of chair and table set up. It is also thought to be extendable into the courtyard, hosting a variety of events for the community (from annual dances, to political hearings, or charity events). This room is also backed up by the vicinity with the kitchen and the services entrance. The kitchen is thought to offer daily service to staff, social center frequenters (like the seniors, the children) and also in times of events make use of the multipurpose room. Next to the Kitchen the seniors play room and an outdoor playground and green areas next to the court yard and the stairs that go up to the second floor where the youth and senior day care and roof top gardens are.

The Recreational and sports center is on the left of the main entrance (*Figure 65*). On the ground floor two different size dance studios are placed with their storage and dressing requirements. The entrance from Petrela Road offers direct access to the indoor Gym. The lobby is smaller than the other two on this floor, but the community street is wider offering place for lounging and hand games along it. The outdoor sports court, placed on top of the parking lot, offers access to a lot of ball games but also other community games as two standard sizes sports courts are placed closely. Next to them is the climbing wall which is used both indoors and outdoors separately making use of the structure of the gym both ways.

On the 1st level, (*Figure 66*) above the Ground Floor, the community “street” is still continuous and interconnecting all the programs of the community center on this level. The Theater Hall can better be accessed from this level by using the round staircases. The lobby on this floor can be used entirely for showcasing community’s art and artifacts produced by the art ateliers, children’s, youth and seniors that frequent it. The Library is not accessed from this level offering wall space continuity to the gallery connecting the first lobby with the second lobby above the main entrance where the art classes are placed above the multipurpose room on this level.

Also on this Level the youth center is placed. This open spaces can be used for a variety of activities, mainly educational, informational, and skill building. Sharing the staircases and the building with the senior areas was purposely. Such placement can generate positive reflections and intra-generational dialogues in the benefit of both age groups.

On the recreational Side, the 1st level hosts the fitness rooms. They are open to the gym and making use of a running track on the second floor of the gym and open to below. On this level there is also an open office workspace with daily rentable workstations in the profit of the community center.

On the Second level, (*Figure 67*) above the fitness is the Childcare unit. This unit makes use of the staircases that go down to the parking level directly, and of the gym’s rooftop which is used for a private children’s playground connected directly with the childcare areas. This areas are comprised of big classrooms and also a small dressing and dining unit. Next to the childcare on the same hall there is 2 classrooms for multiple purposes and with direct access to the open terrace gardens on the rooftop of the art center. Access to this terrace and pathways gardens is given also to the senior center on the second floor of the social center.

On the 3rd and last floor, (*Figure 68*), the administration offices are placed. A large meeting room for the community is placed on this floor. Proper administration is very necessary for a thriving community and not only paid actors but also the community must come together and raise voice and action on different issues and problem solving. Also Volunteer participation is key to the success of such programs.

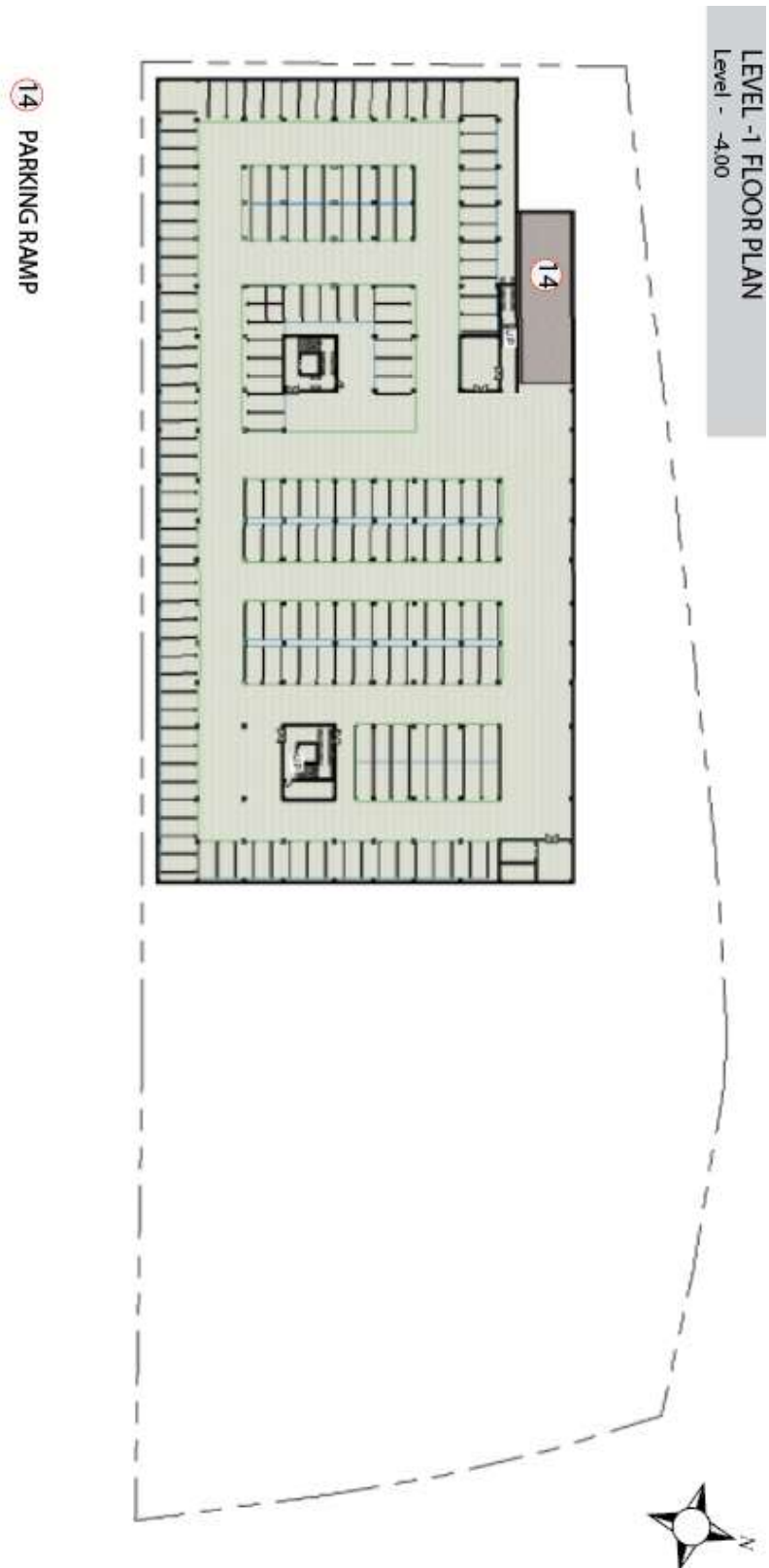


Figure 64. *Underground Level – Parking (- 4.30)*

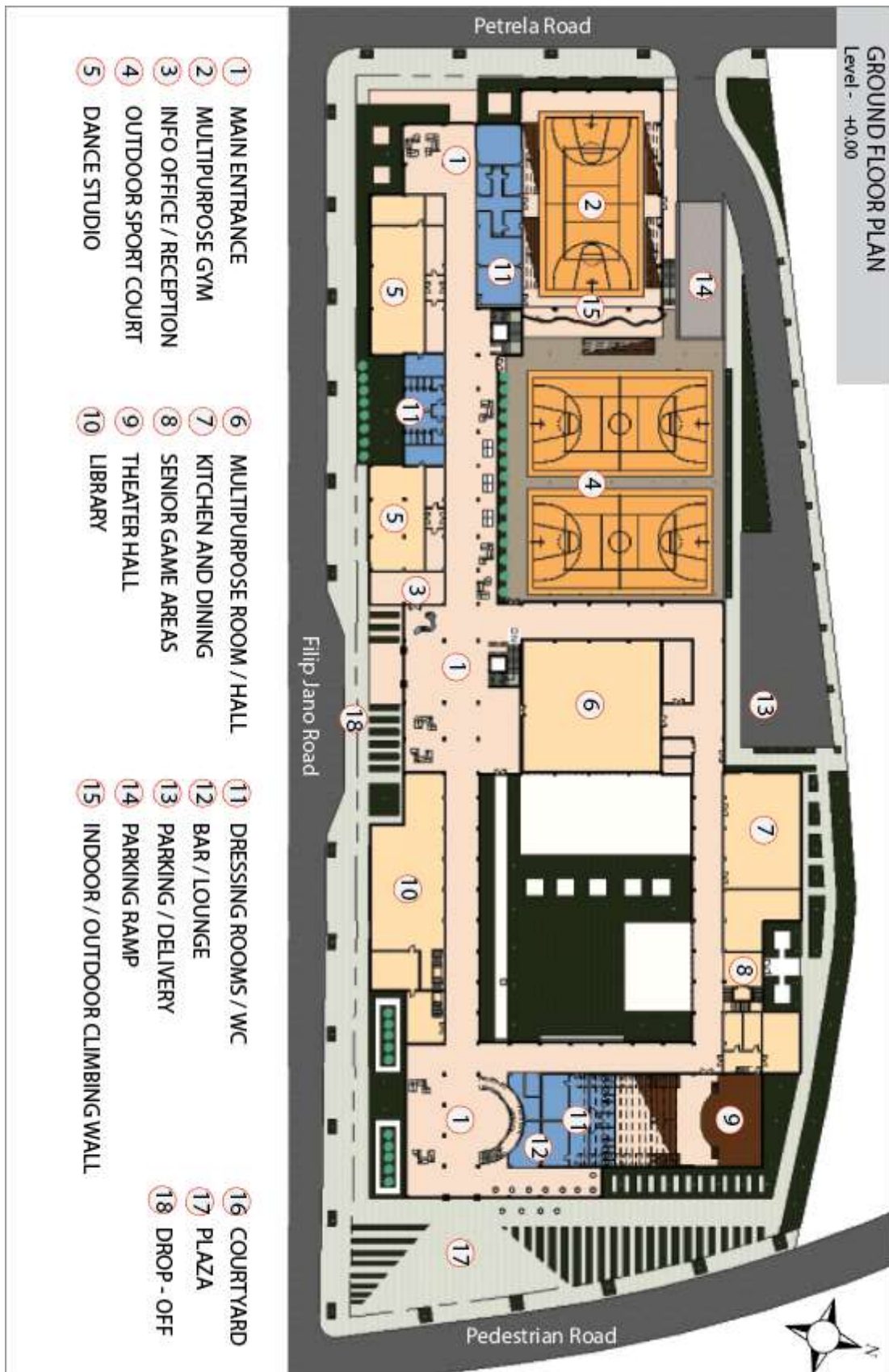


Figure 65. Ground Floor Plan, (± 0.00)

LEVEL 1 FLOOR PLAN
Level - +5.30

- 19 FITNESS / GYM
- 20 RUNNING TRACK
- 21 OPEN SPACE OFFICES
- 22 ART STUDIO / CLASSES / ATELIER
- 23 YOUTH CENTER / START UP LABS
- 24 GALLERY / EXIBITION HALL
- 9 THEATER HALL
- 10 LIBRARY
- 11 DRESSING ROOMS / WC
- 15 INDOOR / OUTDOOR CLIMBING WALL

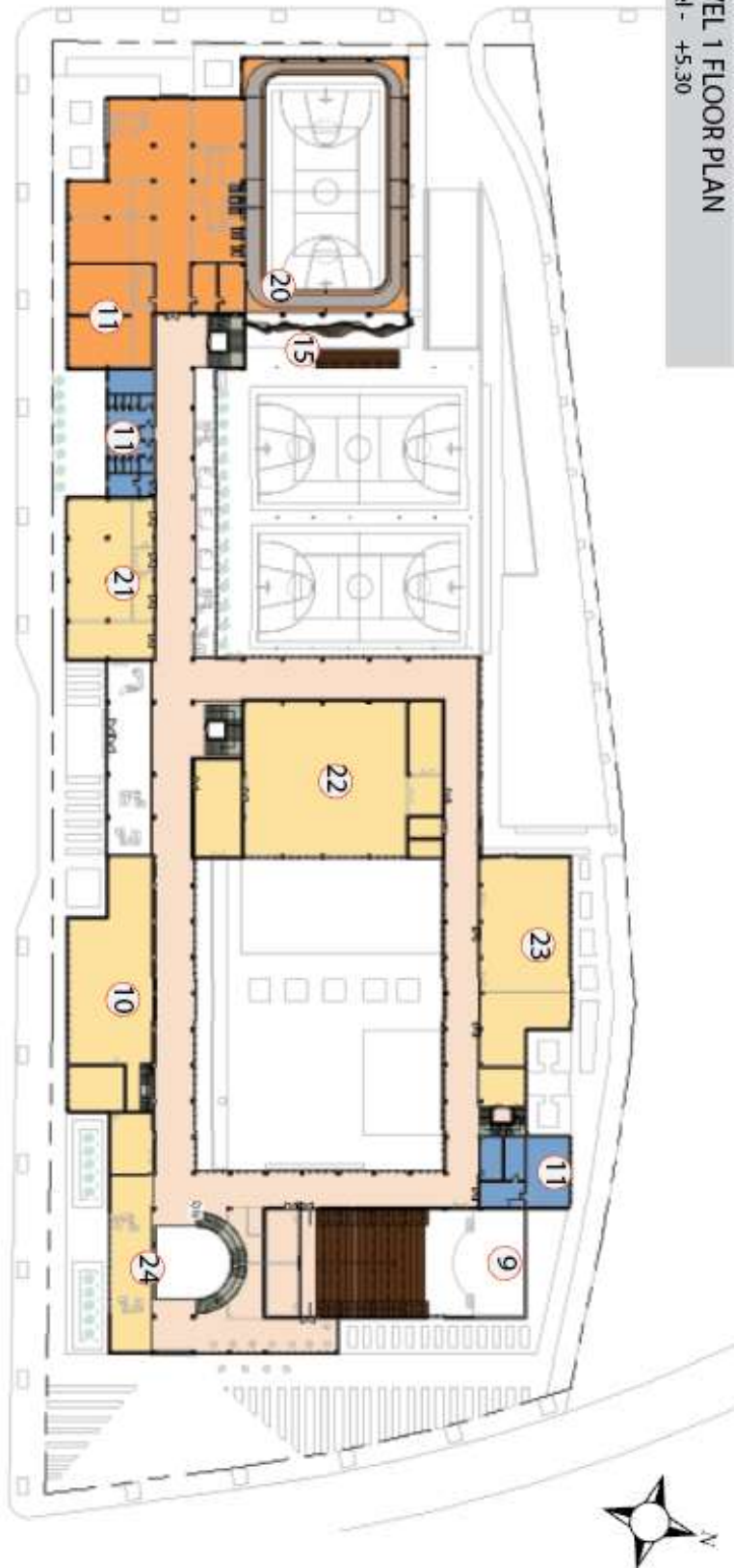


Figure 66. Level 1 Floor plan (+5.30)

LEVEL 2 FLOOR PLAN
Level - +10.00

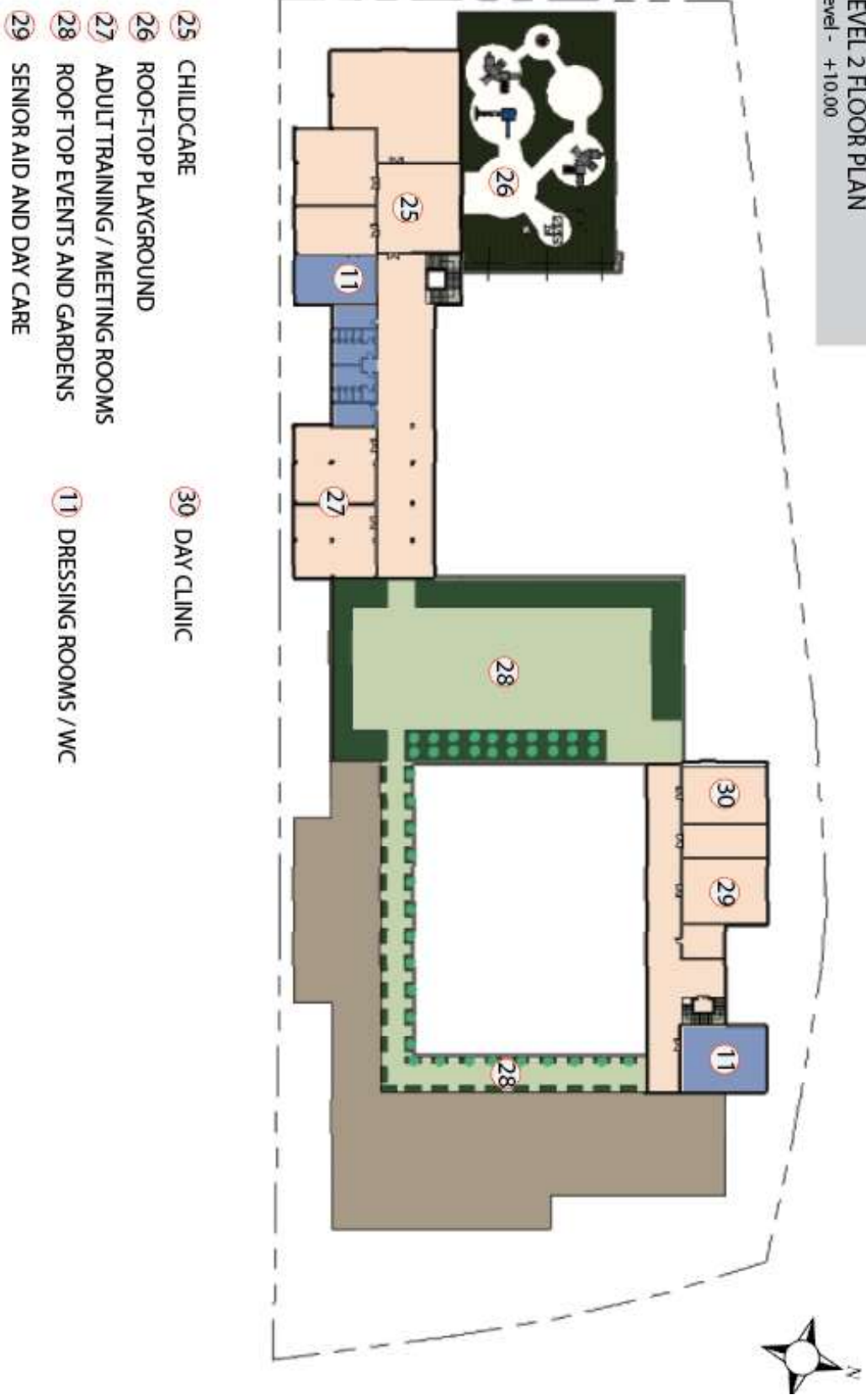
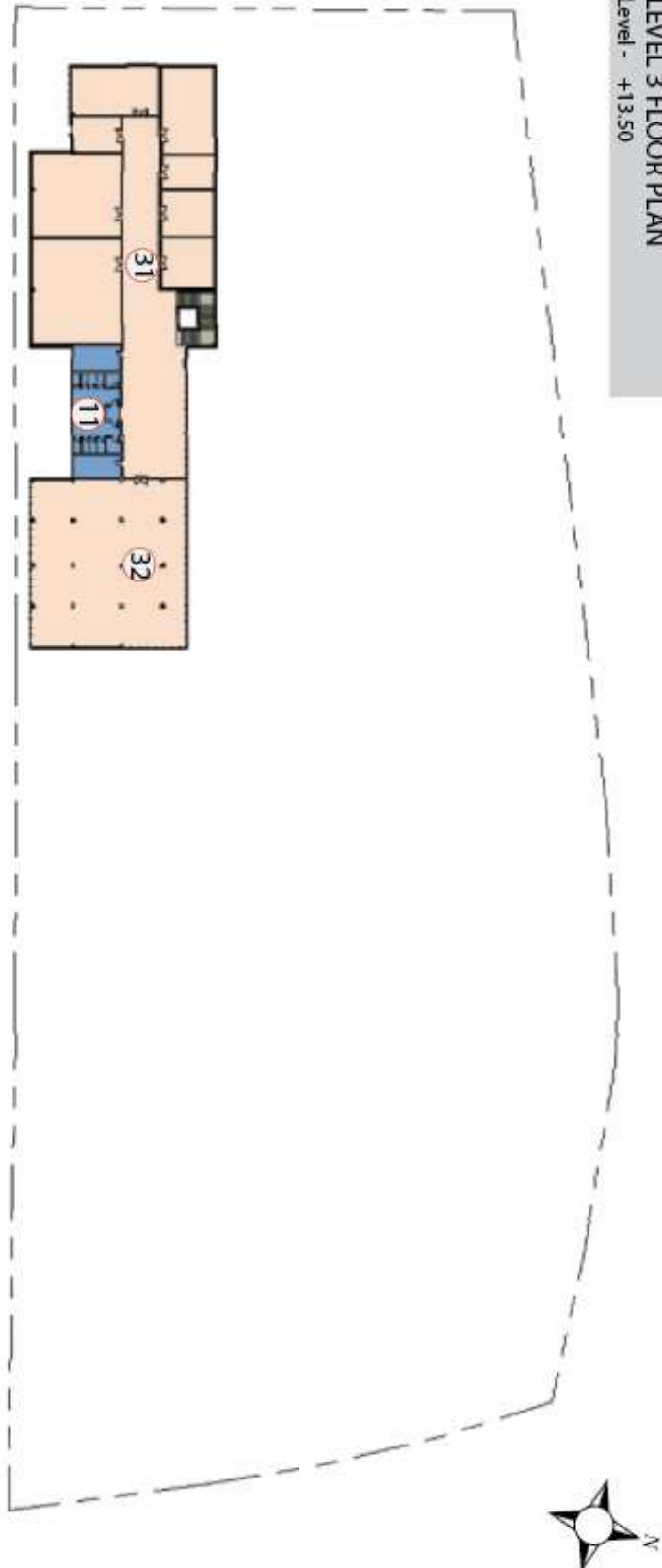


Figure 67. Level 2 Floor Plan (+10.00)

LEVEL 3 FLOOR PLAN
Level - +13.50



- 31 ADMINISTRATION OFFICES
- 32 LARGE MEETING ROOM FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS
- 11 DRESSING ROOMS / WC

Figure 68. Level 3 Floor Plan (+13.50)

4.4 Sections and Elevations

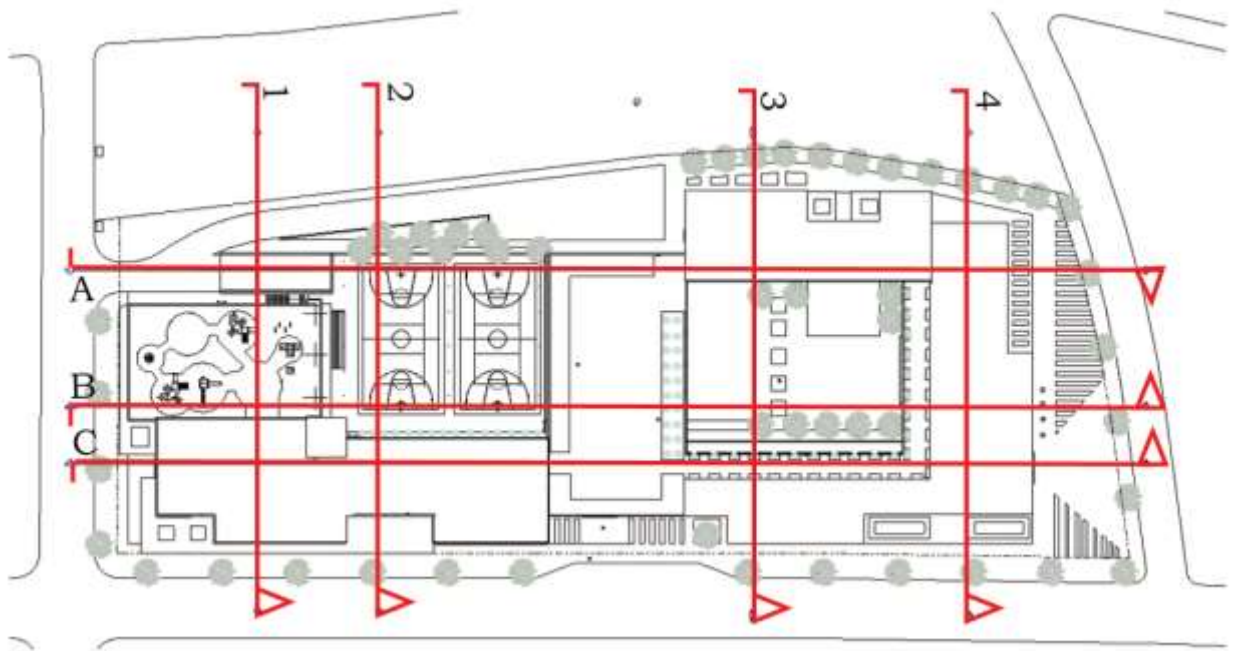


Figure 69. Site Layout with Section Cuts

In the section and Elevation below it is shown how each space and building connect. In this project not only the indoor circulation but also the spaces adjacent to them are connection and socializing spaces. The building of the community center does not border itself out of the community it is placed but instead offers all its sides to interaction and programs that aim to bring the community together.

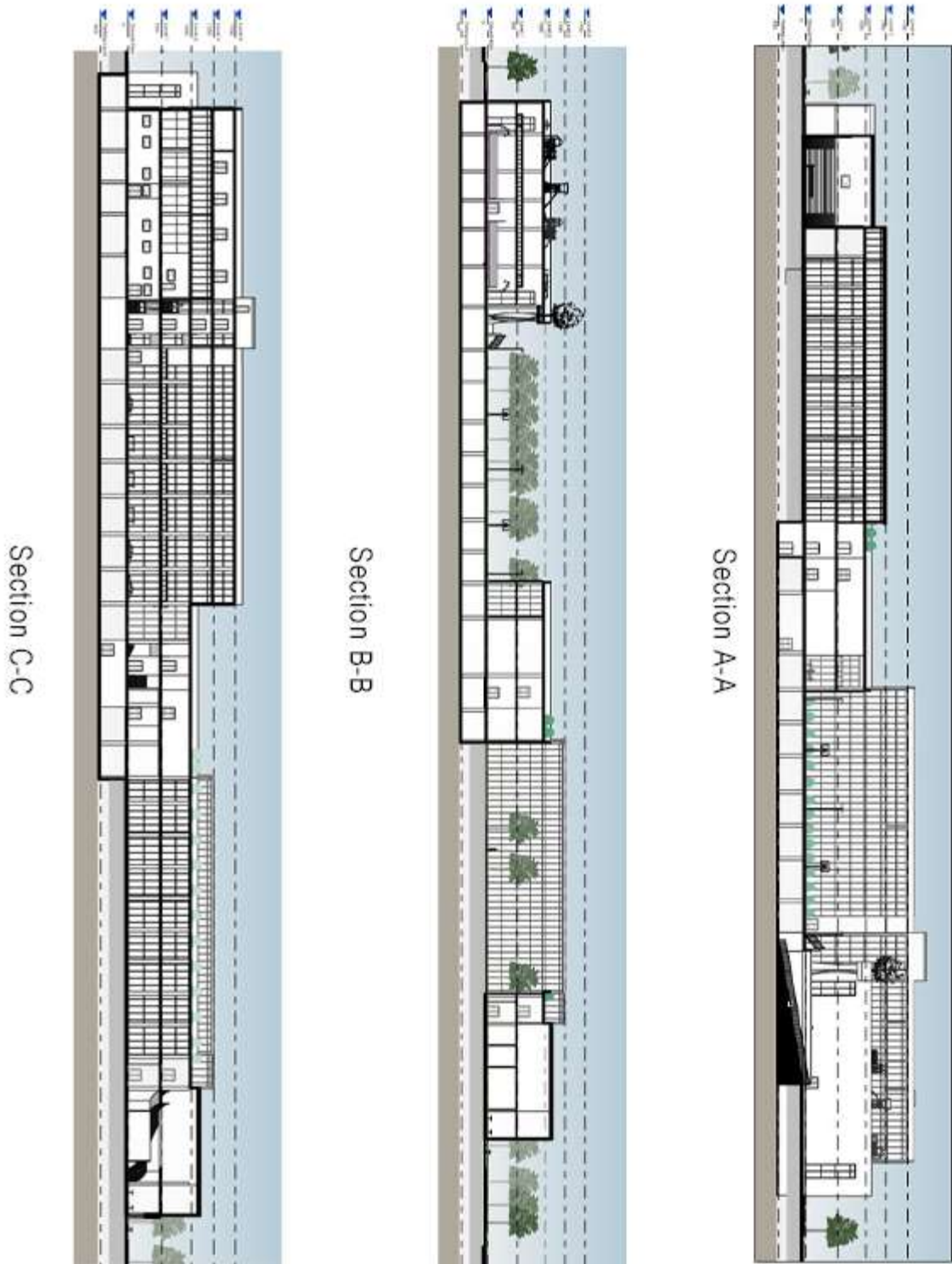


Figure 70. Section A-A, Section B-B, Section C.C

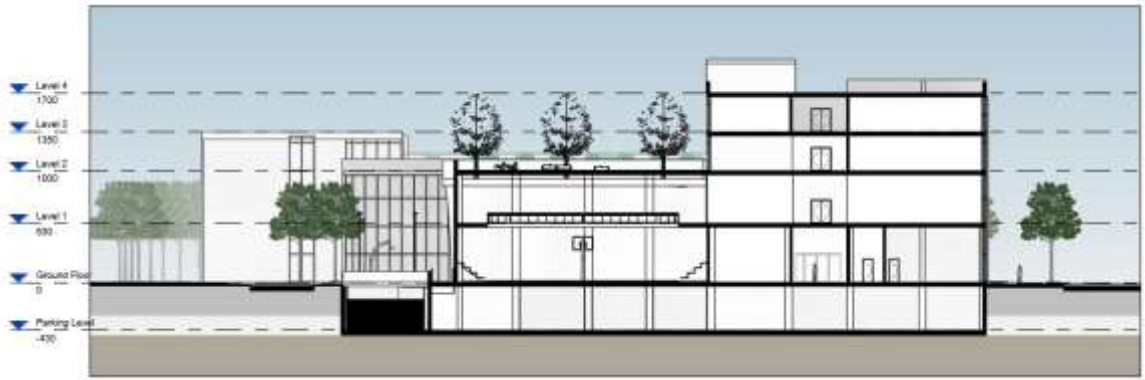


Figure 71. Section 1-1



Figure 72. Section 2-2

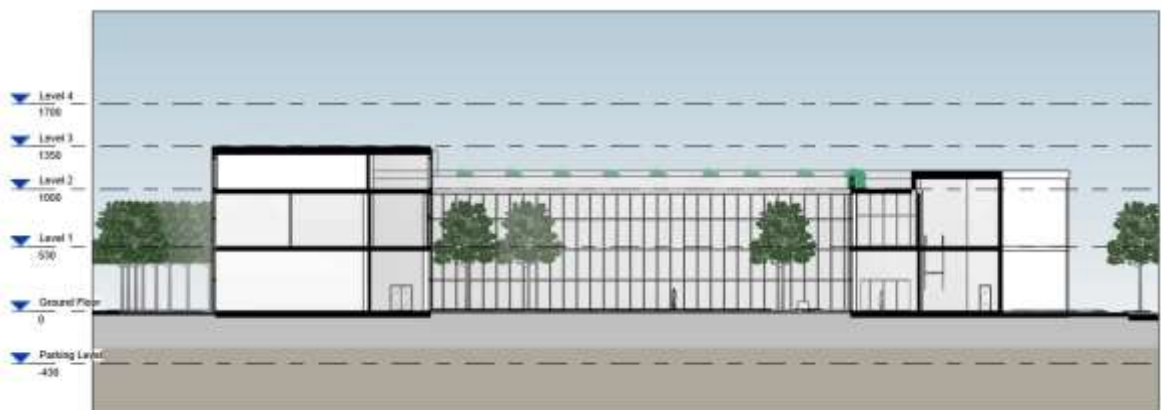


Figure 73. Section 3-3



Figure 74. Section 4-4



Figure 75. West Elevation



Figure 76. East Elevation



Figure 77. North Elevation



Figure 78. South Elevation

4.5 3D Visualizations



Figure 79. 3-D Street View Visualization South-West Façade

The View above is a concept from the crossroad of Filip Jano Road and the Petrela Road. The Volumes break the continuous linear façade that is generated often in the high rise development. The building is two levels on the Eastern Side and 4 Levels on the western side.



Figure 80. The Sports Court stands over the Underground Parking and opens to Community for multiple recreational uses on the ground floor.

The Outdoors sports court opens up to the residential area of the site, and is accessible both from inside and outside of the community center. The climbing wall dresses the wall of the gym with extra activity. The court is surrounded by the community street and giving an accent to it's presence and inviting community members to engage in group or individual activities in this area.



Figure 81. Interior Details of construction materials. Bronze Structural glazing combined with cast in place concrete create a modern setting

The Lobby from the Pedestrian Street is a place of multiple activities for the community. It is extended in two floors vertically and the community street horizontally. It offers access to the library, to the theater, to the courtyard, to the art gallery on the second floor, the social center and bars and restoration areas for the users.



Figure 82. Main Entrance Lobby

The Main Entrance lobby (*Figure 82*) from Filip Jano Road is placed in front of the multipurpose community room. It hosts the reception and info desk for all users and visitors of the community center, lounging and waiting area, staircases and lift to 1st level, access to inner court yard, the sports court, the social center in the front corridor, the recreational center in the left corridor, the library and cultural center on the left corridor.



Figure 83 Community Street in front of outdoor sport court area

The Community Street in (*Figure 83*) is a miscellaneous passageway of activities and views. It connects each activity and space indoor the community city, as an urban street. The continuous linear community street offers alterations of different height and natural light amount to its spaces from the beginning till the end, on the ground floor and in the 1 level too, making each space unique and prone of activities and memorable experiences to its users.



Figure 84. Gym, Running track, Fitness and Climbing wall

The Multipurpose indoor gym (*Figure 84*), the Fitness room with glazing walls overlooking the gym court, the Climbing Wall and the 2.5 wide running track connected to the fitness area on the 1st level. It offers space for many recreational activities, such as sports, dances, games, fitness, indoor climbing wall, etc. The covering structure will be used to hold the rooftop terrace shown on (*Figure 85*).



Figure 85. Children's Playground and adjacent to the Childcare on the roof of the Gym

The roof-top of the gym (*Figure 85*) is used as a private and secure playground for the childcare on the 2nd level of the community center. Its activity is enclosed only to the childcare.



Figure 86. Roof Top Terrace above the multipurpose community room and Art Classes

The roof-top terrace on (*Figure 86*) “disconnects” the Social center with the Recreational Center in this level, to connect it with a social outdoor space to all the users of the community.



Figure 87. Proposed Project of Urban Community Center in Context of the Emerging Neighborhood

The (*Figure 87*) shows the building height and volume in the context of the future urban development's emerging in the area. This model was generated by the regulatory rules and conditions applicable from 2018 by the municipality of Tirana.



Figure 88. Birds-eye View of the Project from South – East

The (*Figure 88*), (*Figure 89*), (*Figure 90*) shows the building volume in a bird's eye perspective in order to better understand the land use from above.



Figure 89. Bird's eye view of the project from North-West



Figure 90. Bird's Eye view of the Project from North- East



Figure 91. Entrance from Pedestrian Street, South - East

In (*Figure 91*) is shown the presence of the community street from the plaza accessible from the pedestrian street. Because of the vicinity of this street with the New Boulevard of Tirana, the Cultural Center of the Community, comprised of the Theater, the Library and the Art Gallery hall was decided to be placed here in two floors, allowing not only its users but also visitors to the premises and events of the Urban Community Center. The ground floor and the first floor are used as lobbies and restoration areas. From this entrance also restoration and bar areas are accessible directly from the plaza created in front of this entrance and offered to the public referring to the Ground Floor plan in (*Figure 65*) and the 1st Level Plan (*Figure 66*) and a three dimensional ground floor plan in (*Figure 92*).



Figure 92. Render of the Ground Floor with shadows and greenery

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Conclusions

- “What type of community center and which programs does this city and its residents need?”

- “Why does Tirana need a Community Center?”

Through this project I explored how architecture could be used as a medium to encourage both economic growth and social revitalization in a community. Building on the goals and visions of an emerging urban community, the design features spaces where the residents of this neighborhood can come together with other community members or alone and interact, create, perform, relax, boost their skills, find and give support and care, as well as spaces that promote participation and decision making in the local governance. By creating this facility, I believe that residents will be empowered to go out into the community and encourage positive economic and social change.

Previews unplanned urbanization and increasing population is adversely affecting the mental and physical health of the residents of Tirana. Lack of community centers, open spaces, and interactive activities for all generations and group of interests, is a result of weakening urban functions thus there is a critical need to develop more community centers to reduce the adverse impacts on human health.

Properly constituted community centers will be the foundation of properly functioning Albanian society. They will be the ground zero, foundation places for citizenship. They will be the launching pads for creative enterprise and will be the foundation places of memory in the society.

The proposed public facility in this research thesis, is an added value to any community, at any time, taking into consideration the human social and individual

wellbeing, and its effect in the whole community! With intelligent programming and effective community outreach, an urban community center can be a fundamental component to enact positive change at the community level.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

(Albanian)

UNIVERSITETI EPOKA
FAKULTETI I ARKITEKTURËS DHE INXHINIERISË SË NDËRTIMIT
DEPARTAMENTI I ARKITEKTURËS
TEZA PER MASTER SHKENCOR - KURSI 500

Pyetësor për Projektimin e një Qendre Komunitare Urbane

Gjinia:	_____	Edukimi:	_____
Mosha:	_____	Shkolla:	_____
Hobi:	_____	Lagjja:	_____
Sporti:	_____	Qyteti:	_____

Ky Pyetësor zhvillohet në kuadër të kërkimeve në terren mbi zhvillimin dhe projektimin e një Qendre Urbane Komunitare si nje detyrë kërkimore dhe projektimi për përfundimin e studimeve të Larta në Degën e Arkitekturës. Ky pyetësor ka për qëllim të mbledhë informacion mbi njohjen dhe nevojat e banorëve të qytetit të Tiranës me ndërtesat multifunksionale, rekreative të qytetit ku banojnë dhe impaktin e këtyre qendrave në mirëqënien e tyre dhe të komunitetit ku ata banojnë.

Ky pyetësor ndihmon në evidentimin e nevojave të komuniteti për ambiente të përbashkëta multifunksionale, rekreative, sportive, dhe edukative. Përgjigjet e këtij pyetësori do të përdoren në përzgjedhjen e programeve të nevojshme dhe të dëshiruara, të ofruara këto nga Qendra Komunitare e Lagjes ku do të propozohet, në të mirë të zhvillimit të lidhjeve të komunitetit dhe mbi të gjitha mbi zhvillimin dhe mirëqënien e individit në ambientin ku jeton.

Ju lutem përgjigjuni pyetjeve më poshtë.

1. Cilës grupmoshë i përkisni?

- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| a. – 10 Vjeç | e. 26-35 Vjeç |
| b. 11-16 Vjeç | f. 36-55 Vjeç |
| c. 17-20 Vjeç | g. 56-70 Vjeç |
| d. 21-25 Vjeç | h. 70 + Vjeç |

2. Prej sa kohësh banoni në lagjen ku jeni aktualisht?

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| a. More than 20 years | c. 5-10 Years |
| b. 10-20 Years | d. Less than 5 Years |

3. A keni dëgjuar për qendra komunitare në qytetin ku jetoni aktualisht?

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| a. PO | b. JO |
|-------|-------|

4. A keni frekuentuar ndonjëherë një Qëndër Komunitare?

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| a. PO | b. JO |
|-------|-------|

5. A organizoheni me moshatarët tuaj apo me kolegë, rregullisht në ndonjë event vjetor, sport, kurs, apo grup tjetër interesi?

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| a. PO | b. JO |
|-------|-------|

6. Kush është statusi juaj primar në qytet?

- a. I punësuar
- b. Nxënës/e - Student/e
- c. Pensionist/e
- d. Shtëpiak/e
- e. I Papunë

7. A keni interes të angazhoheni në jetën komunitare aty ku banoni?

- a. PO
- b. JO

8. Cila nga pikat e mëposhtme do të ngjallte interesin tuaj për frekuentim, nëse do të ishte pjesë e komunitetit tuaj?

- a. Bibliotekë / Librari / Kërkime / Studim
- b. Shërbime Sociale / Aktivitete Vullnetare / Kujdestari
- c. Sport / Pishina/ Fitness / Lojëra / Argëtim / Kompeticione
- d. Parqe / Natyrë / Qetësi
- e. Grupe të përbashkëta Interesi / Shoqata / Sindikata / Përfshirje / Përfaqësim
- f. Kurse Profesionale / Laboratore Start-up / Qendra Formimi dhe Informimi
- g. Kurse Jo Profesionale / Aktrim / Kërcim / Pikturë / Skulpturë /
- h. Pas-shkollor / Ambiente pushimi dhe studimi për fëmijë dhe të rinj
- i. Qendra kulturore / Ambiente Performance / Galeri

9. A mendoni se disponimi I ambienteve që përzgjedhët mësipër do të ndikonte në mirëqënien tuaj sociale dhe mendore dhe si rrjedhojë dhe në produktivitetin tuaj si individ?

- a. PO
- b. JO

10. A mendoni se disponimi I ambienteve që përzgjedhët mësipër do të ndikonte gjithashtu në mirëqënien dhe në besimin e komunitetit që ju rrethon?

a. PO

b. JO

11. A do ta ndryshonit Vendbanimin tuaj aktual në bazë të disponibilitetit ose mungesës së hapësirave sociale.

a. PO

b. JO

12. Nëse do të kishit një qendër për komunitetin, a do ta frekuentonit atë rregullisht?

a. PO

b. JO

JU FALENDEROJ PËR KOHËN TUAJ!

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

(English)

EPOKA UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE AND CONSTRUCTION ENGINEERING
DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE
MASTER THESIS - COURSE 500

Questionnaire on Designing an Urban Community Center

Gender:	_____	Education:	_____
Age:	_____	School:	_____
Hobby:	_____	Neighborhood:	_____
Sports:	_____	Area:	_____

This Questionnaire is developed in the framework of field research on the development and design of an Urban Community Center as a research and design task for the completion of the master studies of Architecture in the Department of Architecture. This questionnaire aims to collect information on the knowledge and needs of the inhabitants of the city of Tirana with the multifunctional, recreational buildings of the city where they live and the impact of these centers on their well-being and the community that they share.

This questionnaire helps identify community needs for shared multifunctional, recreational, sports, and educational environments. The answers to this questionnaire will be used in the selection of necessary and desired programs, provided by the Community Center of the neighborhood where it will be proposed, for the benefit of the development of community ties and above all on the growth and well-being of the individual in the environment in which you live.

Please answer the following questions.

1. What is your age group?

- | | |
|----------------|----------------|
| a. – 10 Years | e. 26-35 Years |
| b. 11-16 Years | f. 36-55 Years |
| c. 17-20 Years | g. 56-70 Years |
| d. 21-25 Years | h. 70 + Years |

2. For how long do you live in your current home?

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| a. More than 20 years | c. 5-10 Years |
| b. 10-20 Years | d. Less than 5 Years |

3. Have you heard of community centers in the city where you live now?

- | | |
|--------|-------|
| a. YES | b. NO |
|--------|-------|

4. Have you ever attended a Community Center?

- | | |
|--------|-------|
| a. YES | b. NO |
|--------|-------|

5. Do you gather with your peers or colleagues, regularly at an annual event, sport, course, or other interest group?

- | | |
|--------|-------|
| a. YES | b. NO |
|--------|-------|

6. What is your primary status in the city?

- a. Employed
 - b. Pupil / Student
 - c. Retired
 - d. Household
 - e. Unemployed
7. Are you interested in engaging in community life where you live?
- a. YES
 - b. NO
8. Which of the following options would arouse your interest in attending, if it were part of your community?
- a. Library / Research Center / Study
 - b. Social Services / Volunteering / Care Giving
 - c. Sports / Pools / Fitness / Games / Leisure / Competitions
 - d. Parks/ Nature / Relax Areas
 - e. Interest or Peer Groups / Associations / Involvement / Representation
 - f. Professional Courses / Start-up Labs / Training and Information Center
 - g. Hobby Classes / Acting / Dance / Painting / Skulpture /
 - h. After School / Study and recreational areas for kids and youth
 - i. Cultural Center / Performance Halls / Gallery
9. Do you think that the availability of the environments you selected above would affect your social and mental well-being and consequently your productivity as an individual?
- a. YES
 - b. NO

10. Do you think that the availability of the facilities you selected above would also effect the well-being and trust of the community around you?

a. YES

b. NO

11. Would you change your current residence based on the availability or lack of social area?

a. YES

b. NO

12. If you had a community center, would you attend it regularly?

a. YES

b. NO

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME

