
Designing “based” on place attachment-Tirana case study

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1 ABSTRACT

People’s knowledge, understandings, cognitions and beliefs about various aspects of the physical environments are different. Designers and architects while projecting have their own feelings about a place but they should also keep in mind the personal spaces, territoriality, family and group use of space, crowding, environmental meaning, and other topics. The problem of designing focusing and respecting the sense of space is maybe the most difficult problem in the design field.

To understand the process of designing is one of the most complicated and complex issue in the design field. This process when is linked to feelings and place attachment gets into a difficult puzzle and labyrinth of problems that even the expert designer feels as novice. The paper outlines the concepts of place attachment, some of the developments in the city of Tirana, and in the end mentioning some of the buildings, places, and urban plans which left marks in their memories.

The aim of the paper is mentioning some of the drastic changes in the city of Tirana, Albania, during different periods of time, some feelings and emotions for places of buildings that don’t exist anymore and how these changes had remained strong in the minds, memories and phrases of Tirana’s inhabitant. The analyses will precede describing and comparing some of the non- existing places, the replacing buildings and if they respected any of the façade elements, the architecture , the urban impact or the social environments and feelings that the places kept with them. The paper approach is based also on interviews, observations and readings regarding the sense of place, place attachment and feelings of habitants of Tirana on the old and new projects situated in the city of great developments.

2 INTRODUCTION

To understand the process of designing is one of the most complicated and complex issue in the design field. This process when is linked to feelings and place attachment gets into a difficult puzzle and labyrinth of problems that even the expert designer feels as novice. The paper outlines the concepts of place attachment, some of the developments in the city of Tirana, and in the end mentioning some of the buildings, places, and urban plans which left marks in their memories.

Place attachment subsumes or is subsumed by a variety of analogous ideas, including topophilia (Tuan, 1974) place identity (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983), insidedness (Rowle, 1980) genres of place (Hufford, 1992), sense of place or rootedness (Chawla, 1992)environmental embededness, community sentiment and identity (Humoon, 1992).

People are the creators of places, and place creation and meaning flow from a continual process of interaction between the person, their social mileau, and the physical setting; this process results in the meanings that are endowed in a place, and thus a sense of place (SOP) that is personally and socially constructed (Case, 1996; Greider & Garkovich, 1994; Stokowski, 2002).

The frameworks of place are dominated by aspects of self, others, activities, meanings, and settings (Stedman 2002) but for Gustafson it can be mapped between and around the three poles of self, others and environments.

In 26 November 1912, Tirana raised the flag of independence and in 11 february 1920, the government resulting from the Congres of Lushnja, led by Sulejman Bey Delvina, proclaimed Tirana provisional capital, amidst the hospitality and enthusiasm of inhabitants of Tirana. (Bakui, 2000).

3 THE DEVELOPMENTS OF THE CITY AND PLACE ATTACHMENT

3.1 The old Tirana

For many individuals the most powerful memories revolve around places (Markus, 1992)

Tirana had some common places for mostly of its inhabitant. The mosque of Ethem Bey, the old Mosque, the Old Bazaar, the Kavaja, Durrresi, Dibra streets were some of the incredible marks of the city which remained till the common day a point of reference for meetings with people, directions and social and cultural activities.

In the year 1614, Sulejman Pasha began building “the old Mosque”, otherwise called the mosque of Sulejman Pasha, thus marking the founding of the present city of Tirana. “The old Mosque” was a rare cult and cultural monument. It was heavily damaged in November of the Year '44, razed to the ground in the year '45 and its place the “partisans’ Monument” was erected in the year 1949. (Bakiu, 2000)

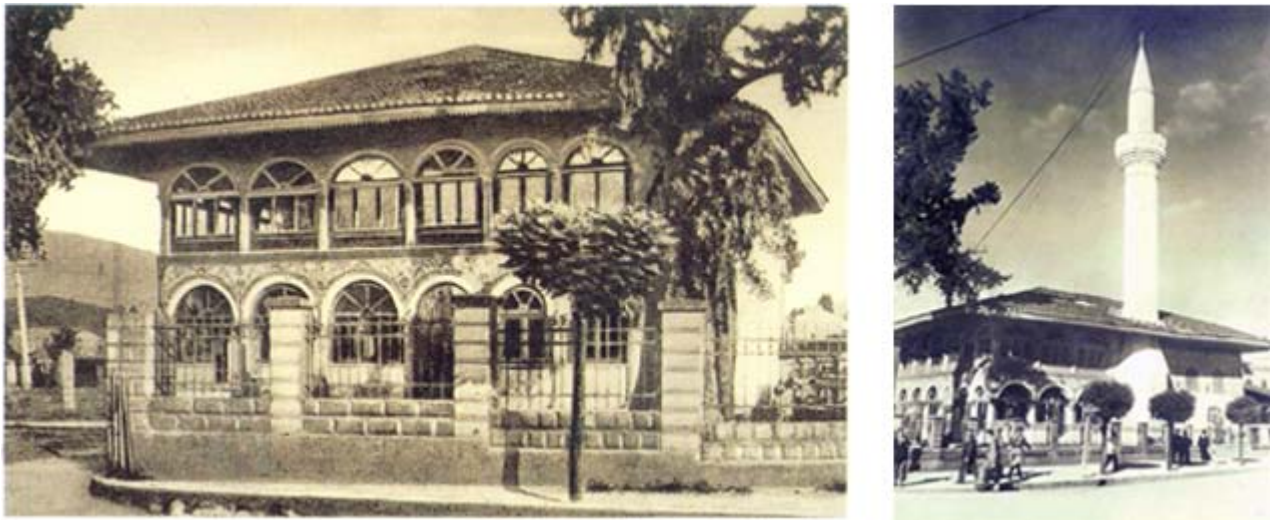


Fig. 1: The old Mosque. Built by Sulejman Pasha in the year 1604. It was demolish to build a monument for the partisans.

The most beautiful monuments in Tirana are the “Mosque of Et’hem Bey” and the “Clock Tower” that are linked with one name, that of Ethem Bey. He completed the mosque that his father had begun to build (Mulla Bey, in the year 1793) and in the years 1821-1822 he begun building the clock tower. The clock was completed about the year 1830, by means of money of the nobility of Tirana offered. (Bakiu, 2000)

In the year 1928 the tower was raised five meters more, the clock was put in and it took the beautiful sight it has now. The symbol of the clock tower is placed in the memories of every person who have been in Tirana, not just as habitants but also as a visitor. The outlines and shapes of it was the convergence point the focus of two main streets.

Knowing these unsaid rules the buildings all around it and next to the streets was constructed respecting the rules of perspective making the clock tower the point of foci, or the reference point for the city. Even nowadays a lot of visitors and foreigners have the clock tower as a point of directions. People are really relating to this place.

A German visitor said “When I came firstly in Tirana I noticed the clock tower in the center, and I loved it, then it became an orientation map for me. Everywhere I went visiting the city I related the distances and directions with the clock tower”.

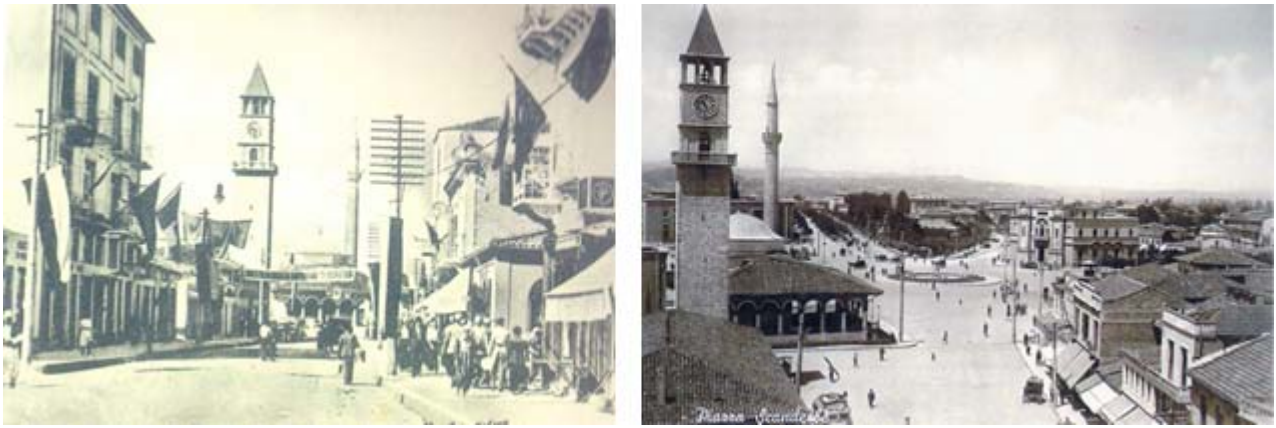


Fig. 2: “28 Novemeber” street- the old street of the bazaar and “Scanderbeg” Square, the Clock Tower was the point of reference for the city, It was visible from every part of it. Picture of 1940.

As Low and Altman mention in the world “place” focuses on the environmental settings to which people are emotionally and culturally attached. (Low, Altman 1992). Ethem Bey relating the church in memory of his father contributed to the construction of one of the most beautiful mosques of Albania. “Place attachment is related to people” (Low, Altman 1992). The nobles of Tirana contributed with the money to build the mosque and the clock tower as an expression of their faith in religion and a contribution in the emblems of the city. People contribute in creating a place identity as they are creating their own identity. Many rich people offered from their money and left testaments for improving the roads and building cult objects. The bridge of Tabaks today a monument of culture and the Bridge of Terzis were built by the money the communitie of Tirana offered.

Low emphasizes how place attachments provide people and groups with a sense of cultural identity (Low, 1992)

In 31 January 1925, Tirana was proclaimed the definitive capital and, as such, it began to be built after western standards. (Bakiu, 2000). In Zog’s time, the boulevards and main streets, the most beautiful ones even today, were built. The ministries were built and the “Scanderbeg Square” was opened. Several studies and plans had been applied mostly by foreign architects. The government had also conducted drastic changes in the city mostly without any referendums or asking the inhabitants about the changes in the city. As Low suggest, the question of place attachment has a role to play in environmental design of places. Designers and planners are aware that people ate attached to places: they experience the resistance of populations who do not want to be relocated or to have their neighborhoods changed or modified. (Low, 1992)

In Tirana the urban plans and the projects implemented were based all on new and unknown architecture for the Tirana city. On the hands of foreign designers, mostly Italian and Austrian, Tirana, was a vast and empty place; a “tabula rasa”- no emotions, no feelings, no sentiments or memories for it.

But the community feelings and sense of space in Tirana was destroyed more than ever by the communist time. The building of the municipality, the churches and mosques and also the old Bazaar which by the historians were the first stones and marks of the city were some of the symbols demolished during the period.

During the communist period the practice of religion was outlawed and many beautiful residential and religious buildings were demolished. (Pojani, 2010) The Tirana inhabitants were mostly of the Muslim religion but the city receives and kept in harmony even the other religions without any problems. The Communist period and the demolition of many mosques and churches made the inhabitants “speechless”. Not allowed to talk by the government regime, the inhabitants thought about the religious places with heartbroken, seeing the new buildings placing them with monuments building up cults for the war. Even that no written evidence of the ideas and feelings of habitants about the place which were the symbols of their religion, still on the conversations of the elderly it can be hear a great valuation about the architecture of these byuildings:

“What a pity, so many icons, paintings on walls, elements of the facades. They were beautiful buildings”

As Low suggest a better understanding of place attachment may provide new options or, at the very least provide better and stronger arguments for the conservations and maintenance of environments that would otherwise be destroyed or totally changed. (Low, 1992)



Fig. 3: Entry of the “Xhemal Pashe Zogj” street, today “Dibra Street, on the left ST. Evanghelizmu church on the right the old Bazaar. Demolish during the communism peiod. Karapici Mosque- demolished to built Tirana’s city hall in 1939

Place identity is a substructure of self-identity. It contains ‘memories, behaviors and experience which relate to the variety and complexity of physical settings that define the day to day existence of every human being (Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff, 1983)

The first stone in the city of Tirana was the old bazaar. Tirana, firstly a village was in the middle of Albania in a good position for the trade and the changing of goods. According to Kera Passenger were meeting in Tirana to buy, sell and rest before they proceeded in other city. (Kera, 2004) The symbols the marks and the outlines of the old bazaar are erased from the place that it used to be and nowadays mostly even from the memories of the habitants. Just a few still say: “At the old Bazaar....”



Fig. 4: Old Bazaar, Foto of 1939, on the left and on the right, The old bazaar and the old mosque seen from the clock tower.

One of the buildings which remained in the minds of the habitants of Tirana was the famous cafeteria close to the center in the intersection of the two main streets of Dures and Kavaje. This place even that of no economic, cultural, political importance was famous for the strange architecture of the roof, in a Far East style, and for the significance in everyday life. People met with others in that cafeteria, sit, relax, talk, chat, gossip and see the passing pedestrians. In a strategic position the building gave different feelings and emotions to its users. As Low and Altman mention a place suggest different emotions to individuals.

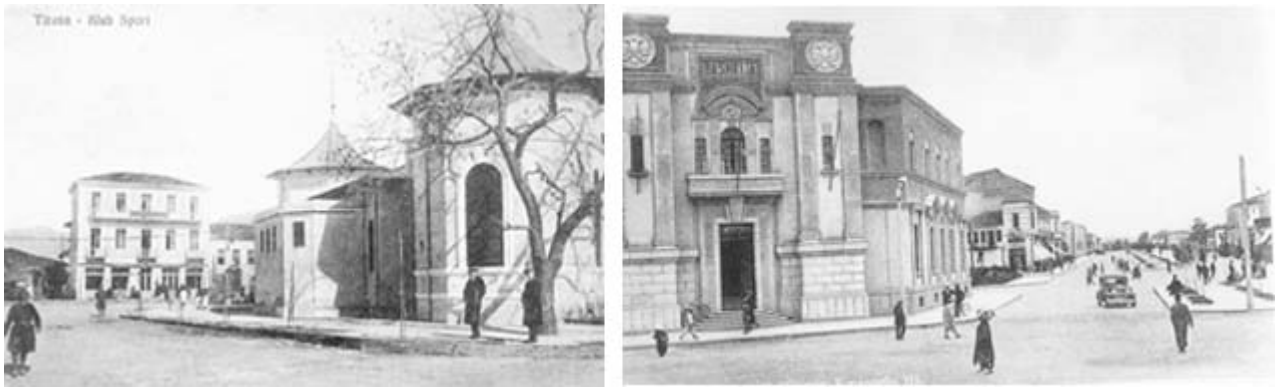


Fig. 5: Left- Kursali Cafeteria, known by the habitants as “Tajvan Cafeteria” and Sport club Tirana, right view- The old Municipality, knock down in 1981.

Next to this cafeteria the Italian architects used to build a two floor building with neoclassical elements which was demolished in 1981 to open one street and to build the national museum at that same place.

“It was a big and important building. With its heavy and monumental shape it impost you the fear and the respect for the government. It was fear to pass next to it, and if you had to enter there... there were problems... (Laughing)”- a habitant of Tirana.



Fig. 6: Musolini boulevard (Today the Kavaja Street), Kursali Kafetria (Known as Tajvan Cafeteria), Mother Queen Boulevard (Today Durresi Street), and the old municipality

3.2 Place attachment in post-communist period

Tirana has been a city under the migratory invasion on several periods.

The total area of the city had passed from 12 km square in 1990 till 56 km squares in the present days. The data of the National Institute of Statistics INSTAT shows that the population of “The great Tirana” had been increased from 343.000 inhabitants in 1989 to 941.000 inhabitants in 2001.

Pojani in her article about “Tirana city profile” mentions about the social impact of the urbanization and the post '90. Tirana’s citizens have experienced drastic social as well as economic transformations. The evaporation of small, traditional communities, the commercialization of social relationships and the diverse new opportunities for financial gain are overriding traditional values. Regional differences and rivalry among new urbanites have contributed to a loss of concern for public space. Recent migrants often have difficulty understanding that urban living implies respect for common space, particularly that which is shared with strangers who follow different customs and speak in different dialects, but who have the same rights to the

city. (Požani, 2010) In this way even that the “old Tiranas” felt that their city was falling apart, for another time they felt useless. In front of the big transformations, urbanizations, the desire to get rich, a lot of persons sold their own private house with garden to investors who built high floor building.

A student of architecture talks about the place which she grew with emotions:

“When my parents decided to sell the house I used to lived, and in which I grew, I cried for days, and I hated my family! I even accused my parents of destroying my life. The first period I couldn’t even pass next to the place where my house used to be. A lot of my childhood memories came back. Every tree, stone that used to be in that road was familiar to me and I had memories related to each of them. I hated the people that bought a flat in that building. I know now that it is not their fault but they appear to have destroyed that place. I hated also the architect which built that ugly building without bringing back any of the elements of the old building.”

As Riley (1979) wisely suggested in a paper entitled “Reflections on the Landscape of Memory” the remembering of a place may have less to do with the place per se, and more to do with yearning for the emotion or mood it once evoked.

The habitants of Tirana has shown that mostly of the time suffer and swallow the feelings for a place even that they don’t agree with the decisions of the government or the municipality for a certain place. Drastic changes happened after the year 2000 in the city, while again the urban plan for the city center was again left in the hands of foreign architects. Tirana Center was again a Tabula Rasa. Renders and beautiful images shocked the habitants which understood the drastic changes after some of the projects ideas were implemented. It took a while to comprehend that it couldn’t turn back the old, behaviors, memories, attitudes about these places.



Fig. 7: Model in 3d and renders the the Architecture Studio proposed for Tirana’s city center

Lately with this new trend of borrowing foreign architects the government has decided to construct big projects for the city. One of them is the construction of a new parliament, demolishing the building of Piramida which is a building situated in the main boulevard and built during the period of communism as a mausoleum for the dictator Enver Hoxha. On the news of its demolishment the habitants of Tirana, the whole society of Architects, students of architecture and a lot of other societies raised their voices again it. As a building with a lot of functions it hosted a library, the main office for the youth culture, offices, the first internet cafeteria in the city, a Club, fairs of books on the areas, the Movies Night screen, concerts, and a lot of other activities. This place to a lot of people meant a lot, and everyone related it to the emotions and memories that he or she had experienced in that place. To the five architecture studios which participated in the competition the area plan and the needed material were sent in their offices abroad, and saw for the first time the building they were designing over the days of the presentations.

Below are some of the interviews and ideas of people to this building, collected by a student of Architecture:

“On the big screen in front of Piramida I saw for the first time a video-clip of my favorite groups, and inside it, I participated in the concert “All that Jazz”, ”

“I wasn’t born in Tirana, but if I lived here I would have certainly took my rollerblades every day to skate in the buildings slopes. Do you remember the news about the couple which felt from Piramida, while skating? After the shock of the news I felt envy... What a wonderful experience!”

“My American friend called me once and asked: Hey what’s happening in Tirana? Do you still have that strange building like a pyramid? It came out every time I google for the city.”

“I took my first kiss, under that big tree, in the Piramida’s park. There we engraved our names. We were sitting there every time we met. It was our place”.



Fig. 8: Left, the existing building of Piramida, the National Culture center, as a public place- Right-the new model proposed by a Austrian architecture studio, parliament Building- the offices of the government

Can a person talk about a public place as it were his? As Marcus explain place attachment is also manipulating or molding a space to reflect who we believe we are. Having title to a place is only the beginning. (Marcus, 1992). Have the architects or the government which decided to demolish the Piramida building took in considerations the sense of place, the place attachments, and the feelings, and memories of all the habitants and the visitors of the city?

4 CONCLUSION

The paper passed through some of the main phases of the Tirana’s history focusing mainly on the spaces which had an importance in the memories and shapes of the city and of its inhabitants. Through the process of interviews, observations, readings and own experiences, the paper described some of the building and some place attachment for these buildings.

Designer are known for the great sense of visualizations, and for shifting their imagination in the future to understand how a building will appear after it is built. Should they rely on this unknown and future reality better than in the old known past? Do they see the process of self-attachment or the impact that these building will have in the feelings, memories and emotions of the users?

With the information that place attachment is a significant part of human well-being and psycho-cultural adaptation to environments, designers may be able to solve problems of housing and public space in ways that protect those aspects of the environment that are most important for attachment. The process of design should take in considerations the place attachment, the city symbols, the feelings, the attitudes, the behaviors, the memories and ideas of the community regarding the physical environment. Architect while designing should consider the fact that is not just a space but for a lot of people is a place.

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