

Perimetral Residential Blocks And Apartment Typologies in Tirana City

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ABSTRACT

Perimetral residential buildings are mostly related with the rapid expansion of urban settlements that followed the ignition of the industrial era at the beginning of the 18th century. This historic event was no part of sociopolitical development of the Albanian society of the time.

Nevertheless this typology became present in similar situations during the socialist period as an available solution in order to provide qualitative urban spaces.

As a poly functional urban entity, the perimetral block, was proposed in different situations, in terms of space and time. This paper aims to consider the different articulations of perimetral residential buildings present in Tirana city and their impact on the urban implant of the city.

The apartment inside the perimetral block represents some specific characteristics. It differs in many ways from those present in linear configuration or tower like ones. The apartment typology and its impact on social life and on life quality in general, are some other topics of this paper.

KEYWORDS: perimetral residential block, apartment typology, industrial era, urban implant, social life, life quality, urban space, etc.

1 INTRODUCTION

The urban growth is a complex process, strongly determined from technological and social development. From that point of view it can be assumed that the sustainability of the urban proposals depends on how many factors are considered and what the priorities are.

Tirana city has experienced intensive urban growth in different time periods, related those with the Developmental Plans known as The 5 year Plans. Part of The 5 year Plans were also urban plans for expanding or even new born cities which, due to a central administrative and executive governance, were made and implemented according to Technical Conditions and Regulations.

It is important to mention at this point, the influence of the urban implant of Tirana which belongs to the Italian period before the Second World War, and the strong imprints of the Soviet period after the War, at the beginning of the Socialist Era. In both cases,,it is about qualitative parts of the city, almost all of them part of our collective memory.

The perimetral block has been part of urban plans since Tirana started to exist as a modern city. They mostly concern inner courtyards, common ones, opened or closed. The close relationship created between volumes and dedicated spaces made of courtyards, was, other things apart, optimal for socialisation and the encouragement of collective attitude.

Even today lots of builders and architects have chosen to articulate the residential block as a perimetral one. This paper tends to observe some aspects of this phenomenon in order to make clear its impact on urban life.

2 HISTORY

The industrial city of the beginning of the 19th century might be the missing event in the developmental history of Albanian cities. Founded in different historic periods, their existence is influenced from different geopolitical factors, but the industrial era.



Figure 1

2.1 The Italian period

The collective residential building in Tirana is related with the Italian presence in the country, during the King Zog regime and later, during the Second World War.

These buildings are part of an infrastructural development which included a lot of strategic facilities. Although a late one, imported and within a conflictual historic contest, this exposure toward collective residential facilities, can be considered as one of the first acts of modern urbanization in Albania.

The infrastructural growth standing in the foundations of the sociopolitical changes of this period generated the collective housing, the administrative and social facilities and other, all included in a modern urban design.

These events, signed a dramatic change in the city face. By the time, The Second World War came to an end, and the Italian vision for the city, never concluded.

From that moment on, Tirana had to grow within the perplexity generated from a double exposure: the Italian imprint and the dynamicity of sociopolitical and environmental factors that varied in time and space. As the fresh capital of the country, it also had to show the best of it.

2.2 1944-1950

Although the industrial era belonged to the past, a new and personalized one became present in the country, once the SWW was over. Again, as part of the Atlantic Alliance and after on, of the Communist Block, Albanian society kept on existing and growing as part of a wide community of nations and as consequence couldn't help but performing like one.

Imported imprints regarding the soviet school of architecture and later on, the Chinese one, contributed on the configuration of the urban implant of Tirana city.



Figure 2

This implant followed the Italian vision for the city as a Park City. In a large urban scale, this vision produced some important urban accessories, like squares, boulevards, green areas and basically equipped residential blocs. The perimetral block was present in the site since the Italian period. Once again it was introduced as a reminiscence of the soviet influence, and as a potential mean on dealing with the housing problematic of the early 50es.

2.3 1950-1990

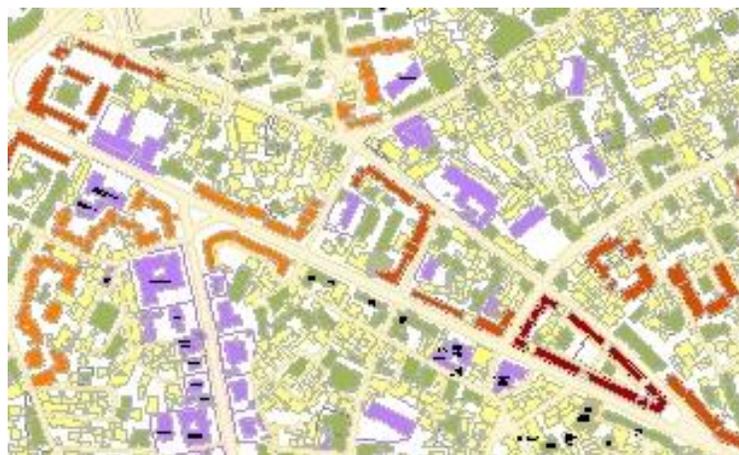


Figure 3

There is a rich background of mixed imprints at this period to relate on. But it would lose its influence gradually because of economic and demagogic factors.



Figure 4

It was politically incorrect to follow the architectural phonetics of the so called enemies of the country, but on the other hand some taught lessons couldn't be ignored. Those lessons were about economic use of land, flexible road net, sanitation and ventilation, all of them interpreted in volumes and space.



Figure 5

Once again perimetral articulations showed to better meet the needs of a growing city, although many problems became present. Land management was one of the problems to deal with. Small parcels inside the city belonging to legal owners became a barrier for a complete implementation of urban entities. This and other determined the facades of the residential blocks which often were visible only from the outer side.

Left with no economic and technical assistance after the great break with China, it was difficult to go on, so lots of restriction actions took place. Modular projection (tipizim) was one of the most important actions and it was present in all stages of projection and implementation as well. Low cost and basically equipped residential blocs with precast elements appeared in the site. The prefabricated houses were considered as the last effort to deal with the housing demand, but not the best way to solve it. Many problems appeared concerning transpiration and the thermal comfort.

It is important to say that the at this point, the urban layout of the block have made the difference between sustainable and unsustainable.

The residential blocks, in the image on the left, made of precast elements, is in general much more comfortable today than lots of other blocs. This block was projected compact enough to avoid the construction of additional structures inside it. At the same time, there were space enough, and well distributed one, to allow small to medium interventions without corrupting the value of the space. These interventions are parking places, shops and other services all in the ground floor of the block..

The Regulations and Technical Conditions (Codes) played a crucial role at this moment. The poor architectural language compromised the aesthetic value of the new structures. But other values, those deriving from Regulations and Codes, showed to be a strong point which in many cases determined the future of the block.

2.4 Tirana Today (transition)

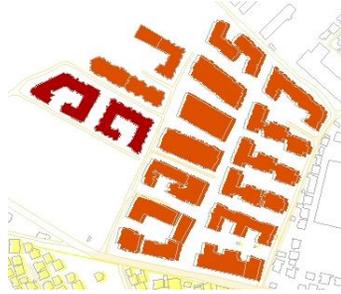


Figure 6

What happened after the nineties in the constructing sector is an explosion of tools and materials, means of expression, etc. The long period of restriction was over. Time had come for new solutions.

But the existing Urban Regulatory Law was a barrier. It was considered outdated and no longer reliable. And barriers are made to fall. Almost 20 years after that, the search is not over yet.

The old Urban Regulatory Law is not yet displaced with a new reliable one. Reliable means stable, and the only stable thing in these last 20 years is the instability. Updated recommendations, Google translations, and other kind of speculative formulations appeared in the practices of the Urban Planning Office of the Municipality. All, making real a reality of pure profit and lack of vision from the institutions.

By that time the housing demand had consumed all the inner parts of the city, and started focusing on the suburbs. Till now it was all about distances and heights (or better, how to avoid them). But when it comes to brand new urban implants, we all need regulations

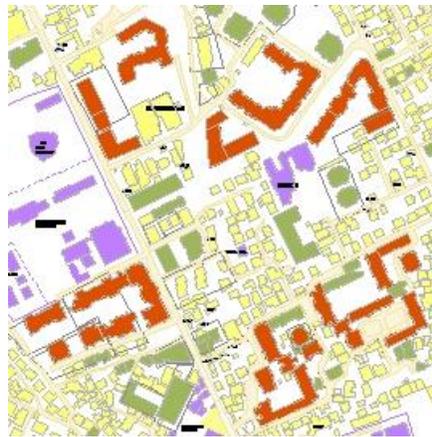
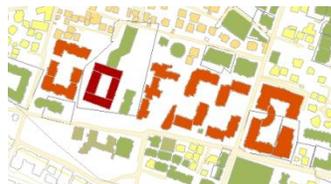


Figure 7

Irony apart, this is a break point in the history of Urban Regulations. The need for stable regulations at this stage is articulated from the constructing sector. A moment of reflection or another pragmatic request, it matters less than the fact that there is a serious institutional involvement on producing a reliable and updated package of rules to follow.



But what is the impact of all this in the perimetral block?

The perimetral block is made of inner space and outer volume. Plan and altimetry dimensions strongly affect sanitation and natural ventilation, thus living conditions. When the distances and heights recommended from the regulations are not applied, the life quality is seriously compromised.

Ventilation is affected from the dimensions of the section. Often these sections allow two apartments to fit in the shortest direction. This means that no cross ventilation is possible, and that the sanitation is insufficient. In this cases, the cornered apartments are those of mayor distortion. Because of the exaggerated depth dimensions, there are apartments with lots of useless space within a poor program.

The orientation of the block determines the thermal comfort of the apartments. Normally it is impossible to expose all the apartments in a profitable way. But it is indispensable to allow minimal sanitation for each of them. This minimum in high blocks is often impossible.

Exaggerations of plan and altimetry dimensions, have seriously compromised sanitation and ventilation conditions of the apartments inside the block.

The perimetral block is a repetitive entity. It never appears alone. A bunch of perimetral residential blocs make an alley, the very place to have a family grow. And an alley needs institutional administration and urban accessories.

Missing reliable rules and recommendations have already caused serious damages to the new residential blocks built in expanding areas.

3 CONCLUSION

The perimetral residential block is a well equipped urban entity. It allows the attachment of a wide variety of functions, living apart.

Tirana case, have showed that a correct lay out of the block can offer flexibility and sustainability at the same time.

The quality of the apartment inside the perimetral block, strictly depends on plan and altimetry dimensions.

The double exposure of the apartment, toward inner spaces and outer ones is an advantage to be considered. The court yard offers optimal conditions for socialisation and insemination of collective attitude.

Time has showed the efficiency of this instrument when it comes to urban extension. Flexible road net, permeability and cohesion are some of the qualities of the perimetral residential block.

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