
Post-communist Transformation of Cities in the Countries of the Old Eastern Block: Tirana city between regeneration and renewal

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1 ABSTRACT

Exploring the spatial transformations resulted by the urban renewal and regeneration processes are under discussion in Albania. The present research is based on two pillars: the urban transformation, renewal and regeneration in post-socialist cities and the international competitions held for the regeneration of Tirana city centre. Within this framework by conducting a general view on the renewal and regeneration concepts, the paper aims to assess the level of transformation in the city and the role that political, social and economical factors played on the morphological changes. Thus research points that Tirana is still between regeneration and renewal though the good will of citizens and governors “A New European Capital City”.

2 URBAN RENEWAL

Cities are dynamic entities which are shaped with the impact of economic and social changes. The general process of transformation in the economy, politics and society creates a pressure in the increase of the demand for land, new buildings and new constructions. These changes increase the needs for public utilities and infrastructure for transformation. Chris Couch, a specialist in the field of urban development, describes the term urban renewal as “the physical change, or the change in the use or intensity of use of land and buildings, that is the inevitable outcome of the action of economic and social forces upon urban areas.”¹ With the urban renewal the morphological aspect changes for the city. The changes in the physical fabric play a critical role since they affect the urban functions as well as making the city appearance better or worse.² Actually this definition made by Couch is far away from what it aims and much more closure in meaning to the urban regeneration definition which will be defined later. The renewal of the urban fabric is influenced by the public sector in most cases and the renewal process is not a spontaneous procedure. These are two aspects around which revolve the definition of the urban renewal made by Roelf Verhage. Roberts states that “urban renewal” is one of the major components of the urban transformation³ while Roger Kemp says that it is a movement the aim of which was to “modernize and reshape the physical character of the city”⁴ Aims of the urban renewal, in fact, change from one country to another, from one region to another; they depend on many factors such as political, economical, social, cultural conditions, physical structure and geographical position of the area which is planned to be subject to renewal. In a more broad term a more general definition related to the term “urbanization” is given by Adolf Ciborowski:

Urban renewal represents one aspect of a broad challenge faced by humanity, namely, worldwide urbanization. This means worldwide environmental changes, to the detriment of the natural environment, for the benefit of man-made environments.⁵

¹ Chris Couch. (1990). *Urban Renewal Theory and Practice*, London: Macmillan Education Ltd, p.1.

² Ibid.p.115

³ Roberts, P. (2000). The evolution, Definition and Purpose of Urban Regeneration. In P. Roberts, & H. Sykes, *Urban Regeneration: A Handbook*. London: Sage Publications. p.16

⁴ Roger L.Kemp. (2001). *The inner city: A Handbook for Renewal*, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publisher, p.10

⁵ Ciborowski, A. (1970). Toward a more Humane Environment. *Theory into Practice*, pp. 168-174.

3 URBAN REGENERATION

Definition of the term “regeneration” is a key theme not only for the developing countries but either for the developed ones. A quick search on the internet may teach to everyone what the meaning of the word is and how it is used in different fields such as biology, physics, construction, urban planning etc. What we are concerned with is its definition in the field of urban planning and design. By 1970s, cities changed in terms of their economy, which brought also other changes in the physical, morphological structure of the cities. We have already defined urban renewal as the “process of essential physical changes” in Couch’s words, a process that is mostly influenced by economic changes. A more contemporary process of wider influence, toward which the government looks for attracting investment, to bring a solution for a number of social problems, such as unemployment and increasing the quality of life within an urban area, is defined under the name urban regeneration.⁶

Regeneration is concerned with the re-growth of economic activity where it has been lost; the restoration of social function where there has been dysfunction, or social inclusion where there has been exclusion; and the restoration of the environment quality or ecological balance where it has been lost. Thus urban regeneration is an aspect of the management and planning of existing urban areas rather than the planning and development of new urbanization.⁷

Roberts defines urban regeneration as a “comprehensive and integrated vision and action which leads to the resolution of urban problems and which seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area that has been subject to change”⁸ To conclude, urban regeneration is an activity, a process and a response, that aims urban changes (cultural, political, social, economical and physical), contributing to a better urban life.

4 POST-COMMUNIST TRANSFORMATION OF CITIES IN THE OLD EASTERN BLOCK

The fall of the Berlin Wall was the first step which initiated the beginning of substantial changes for all Eastern European countries. It happened on November 9, 1989 when thousands of protestors broke the most potential symbol of cold war in Europe. The fall of Berlin Wall became the root of a transformation process in political system, social structure and infrastructure in Europe. Practically, the communist regime began to collapse one by one in all Eastern Europe and USSR countries. German Democratic Republic and Hungary were the first countries in which this system collapsed.⁹ As the Communist regime ended a transformation process in political, economical and social sectors of life occurred in all Eastern Europe countries. The political transformation consisted of the creation of basis for political pluralism, rule of law and reorientation of foreign policy. Transformation in economic sector consisted of privatization of the state companies and the reduction of state role as a producer. The formation of an economic system, industrial policy and creation of competition supervision was another aspect of economic transition. The social sector consisted of reform of social security systems and adjusting the educational system to the market economy.¹⁰ The transition to market economy had a very big effect in the families of Eastern Europe countries. It caused an economic uncertainty to the individuals and their families. The process of privatization brought unemployment, as well as market economy made possible for people to open their own business.

Another social impact was the rising migration to western countries. The opening of the borders in central and Eastern Europe towards the west and the facilitation of migration between the former Socialist countries led initially to the presumption of a massive migration potential aimed towards Western Europe. To

⁶ Chris Couch, Charles Fraser, Susan Percy (eds.). (2003). *Urban Regeneration in Europe*, London: Blackwell Publishing, p.6

⁷ Ibid., p.2

⁸ Peter Roberts in Peter Roberts and Hugh Sykes(eds.). (2000). *Urban Regeneration: A Handbook*, London: Sage Publications, p.17.

⁹ Jürgen Dorbritz, “Social, Political and Economic Transformation” in Dimiter Philipov, Jürgen Dorbritz, (2003), *Demographic consequences of economic transition in countries of central and eastern Europe*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, p. 22

¹⁰ Ibid.

understand the drastic changes that occurred during the transition period, from dictatorship of the proletariat to democracy, from one party ruling system to that of multiple party, from a regime in which the state totally controlled the urban and rural territories to a situation where the state and the government have lost the capability to control and direct any changes it is necessary to study and to be informed of the socialist city features.

Hartmut Haussermann outlines these characteristics of a 'city in a socialist society' into 5 main items:

- a dominant and 'artistically' designed urban centre, with a high concentration of publicly organized amenities based on an ultimate power of state over real estate;
- the city being a compact entity, with suburbanization only in the form of large buildings;
- visible deterioration of large areas of buildings constructed before World War II;
- absence of classical forms of segregation (that is, by income), but discrimination by politically distributed privileges and by age;
- fragmentation of local decision making between the party, the central state and industry; the non-existence of local self-government.¹¹

Considering these points it can be pointed out that urban renewal projects did already shape the centres of the cities of the Eastern Block. This phenomena strongly related to politics was also present in Albania city centre though different from the other Eastern Block a large number of buildings constructed before the World War II were preserved. The society and its structural changes have certainly their effects on the spatial dimensions of the city. After the fall of the communist regime, cities that were under this type of government went into a process of radical development and spatial transformation. Today, post communist cities are confronted with a boom in construction, such as hotels, offices, shopping malls, housing projects etc. Transformation as a process is a development related with time. Growth of a city, its history and its changes through time define the transformation process in general, but political events play a very important role at certain moments of history and leave their prints on the physical structure of cities and the social structure of the nations.¹² Generally speaking these changes occur gradually in a long period, but in post communist countries the changes are rapid and very different compared to the Western developed countries.

Central and Eastern European cities that were under the communist rule, the étatist policies and practices of space production imposed by the regime are the cities that were mostly affected by communist regimes. The transition from communism to democracy in some of them was lived normally but in some others, it happened in a very drastically. Even though there are some differences in the transition period from country to country, what can be said is that the "post communist transition may have a significant number of unique characteristics" depending on the country and "undoubtedly no one can support the fact of being the only transition of the moment"¹³ Yet, this transition means nothing if not compared to others. For Enyedi "transition" means a "particular significant stage of social development in which and more external difficulties and/or internal difficulties hinder the reproduction of social and economic environment that forms the basis of the society."¹⁴ These tremendous, spectacular and chaotic changes that the postcommunist transition period brought draw the interest of researchers, especially on the spatial change and urban reconstruction.

Ivan Szelenyi points that these spectacular changes of "urbanism" in post communist cities furthermore are present in the social outline and urban forms of the city.¹⁵ Michal Illner and Alois Andrlé state the same for the Czech Republic. According to them the regional transformation involve two types of processes: The first is strongly related to social changes and the physical structure of the city is "re-moulded" by those changes and the second one is claimed to be the regional structure itself for the fact that "it acts as a moderator of societal changes"¹⁶. In Prague, after 1990 three processes were correlated to these highly visible changes: "(1) the commercialisation of the historical core; (2) the revitalisation in some inner city neighbourhoods, which has taken the form of commercialisation and gentrification; and (3) residential and commercial

¹¹ Häusseman, H. in Andrusz, G., Harloe, M., and Szelenyi, I. (eds.). (1996). *Cities After Socialism: Urban and Regional Change and Conflict in Post-Socialist Societies*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, p.222

¹² David C. Thorns. (2002). *The Urban Theory and Urban Life*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.2

¹³ Gyorgy Enyedi. (1998). *Social Change Transformation of Cities and Urban Reconstructing in Central Europe*, Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, p.9

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Gregory Adrusz, Michael Harloe and Ivan Szelenyi(eds.). (1996). *Cities After Socialism Urban and Regional Change and Conflict in Post-Socialist Societies*, Oxford: Backwell Publishers, p. 310

¹⁶ Michal Illner and Alois Andrlé. (1994). "The Regional Aspect of Post-Communist Transformation in the Czech Republic" *Czech Sociological Review*, Vol. 2 (No. 1: 107-127)

suburbanisation in the outer city.”¹⁷ During the socialist period in Eastern European cities ‘urbanism’ such as urban culture for instance, vanished and according to Szelenyi it was lost since urban changes had no option, there were no motivation toward the development of public places.¹⁸ When compared to the capitalist system, planners during the socialist period had something that they do not possess now; it is the freewill on construction. In other words, the land during the socialist regime was state property and with the state order they had the possibility to implement their projects without much interference, but in capitalist world it is the opposite. Since the land had no market value in the socialist system, urban planners had no land price constraints. For this reason they had a greater prospect in finding free places for their design to be implemented.¹⁹

During the transition years the changes in the urban context and planning were not very encouraging. The legal and economical transformations faded planning. Land was reattributed to the owners and the real estate market was “re-introduced”. Private sector gained maximal rights, which is one of the key reasons for the planners not to have the same ability to control the urban development emerging in the cities.²⁰ According to Aldo Rossi landownership is “one of the most important, perhaps fundamental problems of the city” adding that it also “constitutes a strong constraint on urban development”.²¹ Baykan Günay shares the same idea in his book on Property Relation and Urban Space. He states: “Ownership pattern of both urban land, and potential land open to urban growth, constitute one of the most critical challenges of urban form.”²² Further, according to Günay the “rearrangement of property rights in land is a basic task of urban development and transformation”.²³ The urban form which is characterized by the urban fabric and built environment, reflects the spatial segregation of the transition period. Enyedi holds the view that the built environment is subjected to three functional changes: “expansion of commercial areas, transformation of industrial zone and the altered character of housing”²⁴ On the other hand Konstantin Axenov points out that what distinguishes the posttransformation city are “urban hybrid structures”. This feature of the city creates the organism of “post-transformation city space” by interconnecting its components cited as “socialist, transformation and international business forms.”²⁵ If we could see concretely what happened in post-communist cities we would understand more clearly the changes that took place in that period. For example, post-communist Prague for Ludek Syroka witnessed the “re-emergence of some precommunist pattern, transformation in some areas from communist times and creation of new post-socialist landscapes.” Characteristic post-communist development for this city are claimed to be “accelerated concentration of advanced functions through commercialisation and densification of city centre”²⁶ Advanced functions such as changing the function of the residences to offices, development of multipurpose business centres including also facilities that serve to the tourism like restaurants and hotels are subject characterizing the post-socialist cities. Residential spaces of postcommunist Sofia have been subject to some consequences of the transition period such as “the loss of compact urban form inherited from the socialism and the growth of a lower –density suburban periphery.”²⁷ Sofia was experiencing the suburbanisation process which was a process that emerged in other countries too.

¹⁷ Luděk S’ykora. (1999). “Changes in the internal spatial structure of post-communist Prague” *GeoJournal* 49: 79–89.

¹⁸ Gregory Adrusz, Michael Harloe and Ivan Szelenyi (eds.), “Cities After Socialism Urban and Regional Change and Conflict in Post-Socialist Societies”, p. 315

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 301

²⁰ Sonia A. Hirt, ‘Planning the post-communist city: Experiences from Sofia’, *International Planning Studies*, 10:3, 219 - 240

²¹ Rossi, Aldo. (1992). “The Architecture of the City”, Opposition Books, London: MIT Press, p.152

²² Gunay, Baykan. (1999). *Property Relations and Urban Space*, Ankara: METU Faculty of Architecture Press, p.3

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Gyorgy Enyedi, *Social Change Transformation of Cities and Urban Reconstructing in Central Europe*, p.29

²⁵ Konstantin Axenov, Isolde Brade and Evgenij Bondarchuk. (2006). *The Transformation Of Urban Space In Post-Soviet Russia*, London: Routledge, p.176

²⁶ Luděk S’ykora, “Changes in the internal spatial structure of post-communist Prague” *GeoJournal* 49: 79–89

²⁷ Sonia Hirt and Atanass Kovachev in Sasha Tsenkova and Zorica Nedovic- Budic (eds.). (2006). *The Urban Mosaic of Post-Socialist Europe*, Germany: Physica- Verlag, p.113.

Budapest for example experienced the same transformations as a consequence of commercialisation.²⁸ The built environment of the newly formed capitalist cities (as in Sofia example) “organization of open spaces” is needed for the simple fact that the transformation period brought a “loss of public green spaces and their fragmentation into explicitly private enclosures”²⁹

Tirana city is another example of this phenomena. It is still suffering from the loss of public green areas. During the transition period, open spaces; boulevards, city parks, green spaces and public plazas were totally occupied by kiosks of all sorts, losing their original character as a result of the lack of control and construction policy of the public sector. For example Aliaj, Lulo and Myftiu state generally the urban post-communist Tirana transformations as follows:

What characterizes Tirana in the post-socialist time is an extreme degradation in the quality of urban environments and the occupation of lands by illegal developments, a process that is accompanied by serious harms to environment.³⁰

To go over the main points of the transformation period, post communist cities went through a considerable number of political, economical and social changes that were the main cause of the urban transformations in those cities. A large number of constructions brought the degradation of the urban environment, compounding the main problem to be solved during the process called “regeneration”.

5 BETWEEN RENEWAL AND REGENERATION

The collapse of communism is undoubtedly one of the major societal transformations for Albanians. In 1990 the city centre in Tirana was occupied by thousands of students that protested and walked from Enver Hoxha University through the streets and roads of the capital demanding the end of the dictatorship hoping for a better future. After long years under the communist rule the city centre and its axis, which was used only for parades till that time, was converted into a space of manifestations for liberalization and democratization. The main feature of the postcommunist Albania has been a significant decrease in the state control and its nature. The one party regime was abandoned for the constitution of a multi party parliament while democratization brought liberalization and privatization. These political, social and economical changes quickly reflected in the city life. The problems of a country, which was governed by a highly centralized regime that in turn was suddenly left aside, influenced the spatial structure of the city. The illegal constructions aforementioned were initiated as a result of migration, but this was not the only reason.

Beside the illegal construction around houses and building blocks, the construction of private businesses like restaurants, bars, shops and kiosks without a constructing permit on public spaces and largely in the city centre was one of the urban disorders of the time.³¹ Land grabbing was seen all over Tirana and for example by the mid-1990s there were about 2000 kiosks, built in this manner.³² Examples of land grabbing were concentrated mostly on the two sides of Lana River, a park inside the Tirana city’s central axis named as “Parku Rinia” and the central square of the city “Skanderbeg Square”. Lana River is the river that passes through the Albanian capital city. The green strip which once laid along the river was totally converted into a jungle of illegal constructions. The illustration below expresses best the situation of those years in that zone. The opportunity to encounter creative designs indeed was quite high there. Materials used varied a lot, such as stone, concrete, wood, zinc and even tissues and linoleums, and the designs are worth being studied for richness they brought in the architectural aspect. “Parku Rina”, which is the biggest green area in the centre of the city, situated near the central square, has a very rich history in itself. It also illustrates the development of post-communist period. It is located in the vicinity of many public and governmental buildings. This first park of the city of Tirana was first

²⁸ Ivan Tosics in Sasha Tsenkova and Zorica Nedovic- Budic (eds.). (2006). *The Urban Mosaic of Post-Socialist Europe*, Germany: Physica- Verlag, p.139.

²⁹ Op.cit.

³⁰ B. Aliaj, K. Lulo and G. Myftiu, 2003, *Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development*, Slovenia: Gorenjskitisk, p.67.

³¹ Ibid., p.69

³² Ibid.

created in 1950 with a surface of 29.810sq m and with about 102 trees planted during the park construction.³³ In the post-communist period every sq cm of the park was occupied by kiosks, restaurants and other structures for various businesses. In other words, “the park disappeared under dozens of illegally constructed restaurants, cafes and clubs”³⁴ being estimated to be about 2000 in number. Strange enough, the density seen in other areas was not valid for the park. The buildings were constructed “in between the trees and sometimes even the trees were integrated within the buildings with very sensitive details developed.”³⁵ The central square, “Skanderbeg Square” was another important area that was destroyed by the boom of the illegal constructions. Kiosks engaged all the vacant areas that were found all around. The identity of places of the capital city was subject to a deep crisis. That condition was a crucial urban problem of the 1990s. In the “Human Development Report, Albania 2002” prepared by the Human Development Promotion Centre of the United Nations, it is stated that beside the level of development and culture, the illegal construction in Albania is the first and foremost “weakness of public and local administration” and the latter is more faulty for not guaranteeing the functioning of the rules.³⁶ The increased contact with the outside world led to the emergence of an interest toward global architectural movements among Albanian architects, developers and governmental leaders. Edi Rama, who was elected mayor of the city of Tirana in 2001 and who is the present mayor of the city, started to plan and program the renewal of the city centre, thus the demolition of those illegal buildings that occupied the public spaces. This process is defined as follows by the Human Development Report researches:

The first demolition began rather as an attempt by the state authorities to demonstrate their resolution in the matter. They started from places in Tirana where there was a great concentration of illegal buildings. The demolition work was welcomed by the population. Encouraged by this, the central and local government authorities in the main towns of the country instigated a mass campaign for the demolition of these illegal constructions.³⁷

Definitely this was a renewal project for the capital city which seems to be successful. The central areas and the Lana River were cleared off from that mess created in a period of ten years. Edi Rama made prepare the diagnosis and provided a striking renewal project which resulted in a “neat” city centre. It will not be the only project for a better future. It would be followed later by other rehabilitation projects like the renovation of the city facades and last the international urban regeneration competitions held.

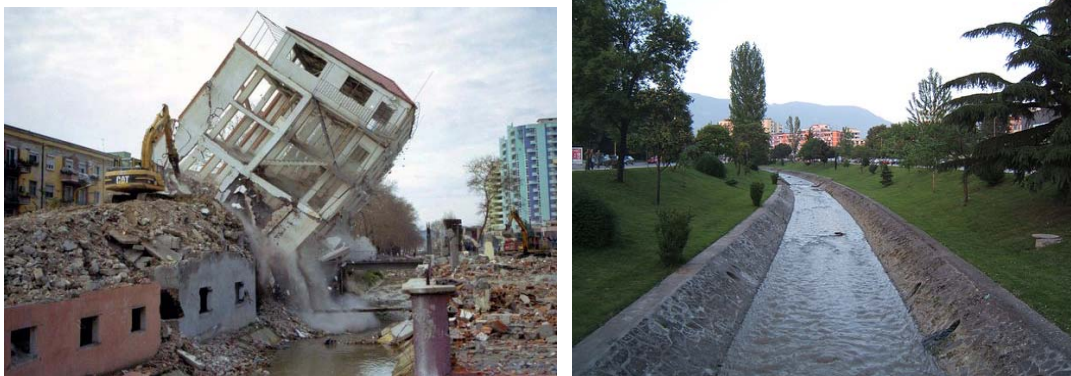


Figure 1: Demolition over the Lana River of one the highest buildings erected along the river, 2003, (Source: <http://www.shqiperia.com>, http://www.shqiperia.com/galeria/main.php?g2_itemId=29193, accessed on 11/06/2008)

Figure 2: The present view of the Lana River, year 2008 (Source: <http://www.flickr.com>, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/rapsak/161778790>, accessed on 11/06/2008)

³³ <http://www.urge-project.ufz.de>, <http://www.urge-project.ufz.de/tirana/greensys.htm> (accessed on 10/06/2008)

³⁴ <http://ourmanantirana.blogspot.com>, <http://ourmanantirana.blogspot.com/2005/12/in-rinia-park.html> (accessed on 10/06/2008)

³⁵ E. Dojce, *Property Relations and Urban Space in Albania Before, During and After socialism: A Case Study on the City of Pogradec*, p.56

³⁶ UNDP. (2002). *Human Development Report: Challenges of local governance and regional development*, p.86

³⁷ Ibid.

In the illustrations above, the quantity and the quality of the changes that the demolition and the rehabilitation projects brought are seen. The radical change between two photos below, which indicate the colossal work done by the local government between 2003 and 2008, is indeed striking.

5.1 COMPETITIONS AS STEP TOWARD REGENERATION

Organizing a competition signifies putting forward principal directives of urban planning and design issues. A competition is a model of thinking about the city not only in architectural and urban terms but more widely, in economical, cultural and social terms. There are many actors and forces that have their impact in the development of a plan and the contemporary designs for regenerating a city. Competitions generate new ideas, new techniques, new models and consequently new visions in urban design. These different approaches were present in the Tirana city centre competition and probably this was the main aim of the municipality: to gather new visions for the future of the city, i.e. new ways of thinking the city.

Urban regeneration is believed to be an essential key in the upgrading of the city life. "As it is stated in the announcement of the competition, since the current level of construction and the dramatic increase of traffic have created a hectic lifestyle and poses a tough challenge for the development of new urban planning of Tirana"³⁸ The Albanian government, in order to make it a capital city of European standards, announced officially a competition for the urban regeneration of the city centre on May 26th, 2003. With this project the municipality of Tirana aimed the urban and architectural progress of the city, which was also expected to bring an improvement in the political, economical, social and cultural life of Tirana. This initiative of the Municipality of Tirana has become a model for similar projects in other cities of Albania. It is thought that contemporary urban design projects will be protagonists of a better Tirana city centre and will provide a better economic vitality.

Municipality's initiatives for a regeneration of the city centre beside the supportive ideas have been criticized by intellectuals. From the very beginning many valid questions have been raised among planners, architects and politicians. Aliaj, Lulo and Myftiu include the discussions on this issue in their book. What do we yield and what do we lose with the destruction of the illegal buildings? Should we design high-rise buildings or should we continue to construct up to 5 floors high? Does the old Tirana have real architectonic values? Should we keep traditional Tirana or should we change it in a new symbol of multi-storey building? When the situation in Albania is considered, should we first plan and then construct or just the opposite? May the municipality continue to provide the appliers with construction permission without first having an urban study?³⁹

5.1.1 COMPETITION?

The competition was organized in three phases. Firstly, 400 international studios were sent a request for expression of interest, and the competition announcement was published in some international periodicals. Based on Alia, Lulo, Muftiu's research the start of the competition was the announcement in the International Conference of ENHR. The announcement was organized by an Albanian NGO named as Co-PLAN whose role in the competition was very crucial⁴⁰. About 48 studios from different countries entered the first phase, at the end of which, three studios were selected¹⁶⁶ as it was expected from the competition brief. Its internationality is seen in the range of countries which participated. Offices taking part were from China, Greece, Germany, Croatia, Italy, England, Spain, Finland, Netherlands, France, Austria, Chile and Japan. The three shortlisted offices came from Germany, France and Netherlands, Boles and Wilson, Architecture Studio and Mecanoo Architecten respectively. The second phase was the one that selected the winning studio of the conceptual project of the Albanian capital city after 30 years. The work done by the individual studios were presented in front of an international jury and with the attendance of the national television channels. The international jury awarded the French office with the first prize while Bolles and Wilson was selected the second and Mecanoo Architecten as the third. The Architecture Studio developed the details of the conceptual design during the third phase, bringing

³⁸ The competition announcement, (2003). Digital archive of Tirana Municipality

³⁹ B. Aliaj, K. Lulo, & G. Myftiu, *Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development*, p.129

⁴⁰ B. Aliaj, K. Lulo, & G. Myftiu, *Tirana the Challenge of Urban Development*, p. 130

the project in a more clear and acceptable mode. The fourth phase is the phase for planning the other parts of the city and the components of the master plan continuing the competition tradition.

6. CONCLUSION

After 1990 Tirana faced up to a heterogeneous and dense population which was accompanied by urban malfunctions. The urban fabric has changed drastically in the city centre as well as in the suburban areas and mostly in residential ones. As already mentioned urban transformation means structural changes evident in the morphology of the city and in the urban functions. In other words, it is a process which is often the outcome of actions, a change which may be physical, spatial, social-cultural or economical. When it is an action that aims to ameliorate the living conditions, then it is either a rehabilitation or a regeneration, but transformation might be either a spontaneous change which might be for good or for bad. The urban transformations that the city of Tirana has been subject to, show similarities to those observed in other post-communist cities. The transition to capitalism has been reintroduced to the city. Urban renewal projects have become one of the keys of urban transformation. "Slum clearance" is one of the objects of urban renewal operations that aim to build better environments to provide people with better living conditions. The existing structure of the project area is demolished and changed for this purpose. On the other hand, urban regeneration aims to bring solutions to many social problems and to ameliorate the quality of life in an urban area. Tirana, the capital city of Albania, becoming a metropolis with its growing population, was in need of a prestigious vision for the future. The regeneration started with the new movement that the Mayor of the Municipality launched under the slogan "return to identity". In this context, the renovation of the building facades by painting has transformed the city into a lively colourful ambiance.

The third effort with a great significance was the designation of a master plan in order to re-find Tirana's lost identity and promote its image in the international level. The latter was the motive that leads to the organization of an international competition where prestigious offices of architecture were invited and a number of which showed interest in giving Tirana the new image of "A New European Capital City" and being part of this regeneration process.

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