

## Toward a contemporary Tirana<sup>1</sup> Public spaces: The pacemaker of urban regenerative processes for Sustainable People-Friendly cities

Sokol Huta

(PhD Candidate Sokol Huta, Faculty of Architecture, Sapienza University of Rome, address: Via del Macao,8 c.a.p.00185 Rome, e-mail: sokol.huta@yahoo.it)

### Abstract

The city and its suburbs, traditionally distinct from each-other, are now forming new forms like megalopolis, expanding city or territorial city. The relationships between the parts of the city are becoming more and more articulated, intertwined with memory and traces. The territory, though its definition remains vague, constitutes the unit of measurement and horizon of human phenomena, the reading of which will aim to identify the traces still present of these disappeared territorial processes .

"After two centuries during which the management of the territory had known as the only recipe the *Tabula rasa*, is thus traced a conception which considers the territory no longer as an almost abstract operating field , but as the result of a long and slow layering that is necessary to know to be able to intervene... The territory, as overhead of traces and past readings, is more like a *palimpsest*. " (Corboz, 1983).

Tirana, the capital city of Albania, is one of the rare cases of overlapping of Mediterranean-Byzantine and Mitteleuropean-ex-URSS cultures, representing in the best way the cultural mix, the most important actual phenomenon. It is important to understand Tirana's palimpsest in order to better understand the cultural influences on it (those physically deleted and those who still exist). How did the city responded to this stress? How has it changed the urban-rural relationship, which until 1990 gave total prevalence to the countryside? External stimuli received by the city of Tirana has been at the highest levels and the shock of the '90s have left their indelible imprints in the territory. In the perspective of globalization, what are the signs of confrontation with other cultures in the territory?

More specifically, the aim of the paper is to conduct a critical examination of the concept of *contemporaneity* focusing the attention on Tirana, which since the fall of communism has been expanding under the free trade economic pressure and rural-urban migration, becoming a classical example of developing metropolis but with some particularities; even though it hosts almost 1/3 of the entire population of the Country, it is very small compared to Latin American, Asian or Middle Eastern metropolis (less than one million inhabitants<sup>2</sup> ); the transition from a centralized Soviet system to the Western free market economy, in Albania has taken place without a *cushion phase* (which would have acted like a damper for the transformation) opening up to the world abruptly only after 1990 (unlike other former Soviet countries which began to open to cultural, economic and political worldwide cooperation since the 80s). Thus it becomes a perfect example to study globalization's effects onto developing metropolis, or, expressed with Nederveen Pieterse's words, an example of *braiding of cultures* (Pieterse, 2009).

Albania, from a centralized political system and a network production system (during communism), moved to a centralized production system and a network political system (after the fall of the Wall), strengthening everyday more the role of Tirana's metropolitan area in the region of South-East Europe. The goal of Tirana to become a contemporary metropolis is a difficult one and needs time and perspective to become true, however, it has all the prerogatives to be one for many reasons, such as; it has a good

<sup>1</sup> Parts of this material have been developed during author's Ph.D research near the Faculty of Architecture, Sapienza University of Rome. He would like to thank his doctoral thesis supervisors, prof. Alessandra Criconia and prof. Ludovico Micara, for continuing critical interest on author's work and helpful comments on earlier draft.

<sup>2</sup> Tirana's metropolitan area hosted 763,634 inhabitants in 2011 according to "Preliminary Results of the Population and Housing Census 2011", Institute of Statistics of Albania. 2011. [http://census.al/Resources/Data/Census2011/Instat\\_print%20.pdf](http://census.al/Resources/Data/Census2011/Instat_print%20.pdf)

topography, good climate and good environmental system and it is near the sea (about 35km); it is not yet saturated with constructions (there is enough space to reorganize / rethink the urban fabric); the population is very young<sup>3</sup> and very willing to change. But, what is the most important, creating a *territorial city* along with the sea city of Durres, it constitutes the most favorable geographical position for Balkan's peninsula *western gate* to Western Europe.

Contemporaneity is architecture's final target (figure 1) and it tells the relation between identity, public space, urban regeneration, people-friendly city model, sustainability, transport, regionalism and globalization with respect to major questions, such as: the meaning of identity, today's urban regeneration possibilities and modes, and the role of public space for the transformation of nowadays developing metropolis, ecology etc. These aspects of a single problem are not identical, but they constantly interfere with one another. I am bringing them together because I am convinced that a critical situation, taking developing metropolis to an unsustainable threshold, is currently going on throughout these urban realities, by stratifying irreversible systems upon each-other.

In order to understand the dynamics of the buildup environment and the generative principles of the city, the most important tool, especially in the case of Tirana, as statistics and analysis of the *status of fact* are very limited or unreliable, is "*in loco observation*". Observation must be followed by analysis of the built from multimedia and multidisciplinary archives; promoting public discussions with architects, planners, historians and municipal employees; using historical maps, plans, drawings, photographs, films, legal documents and newspapers, and other sources that help us understand the evolution of the city. Focusing on multi-dimensional variables (spatial, technical, administrative, etc.), and also on cultural, political, and economic characteristics, would help to examine and analyze the transition in order to see the transformation through time and in different sectors of the urban area.

The results of the analysis, propaedeutic for the *contemporarization* of Tirana, should define; the quality of public spaces, plazas and sidewalks; the percentage of public, semi-public, semi private and private spaces; the quality of public and private transport; the quality of pedestrian and cycling pathways, not only from the physical point of view but also in terms of perception; the quality of street furniture and services offered; social activities in public spaces and the connectivity throughout various sectors of the city.

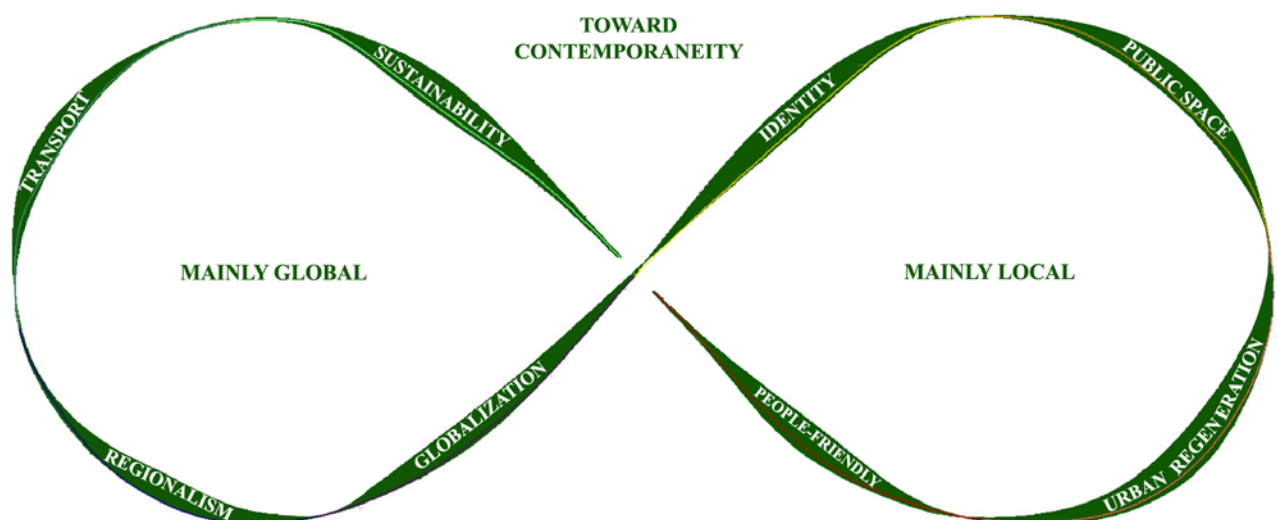


Fig. 1: Infinity/Eternity: the correlation of the main features leading to eternal contemporaneity

The paper will focus on two different but interconnected scales of development: regional and urban. These two scales cannot be considered separately because the city's development is influenced by the whole

<sup>3</sup> "...Over the past fifteen years, persons aged under nineteen years made up on average 38-42 per cent of the country's population...", Research of Human Development Center, Prof. Dr. Adem TAMO and Prof. Dr. Theodhori KARAJ, Tirana, 2006

organism to which it belongs. On the one hand, any change at the regional level directly affects the city, at the other hand, the development of the city itself gives positive feedback for the whole region.

## 2 Contemporaneity and Identity in Globalization's Era

The 2012 winner of “*The Pritzker Architecture Prize*” is the Chinese architect Wang Shu, and a part of Jury's citation is as follows:

*“The architecture of the 2012 Pritzker Prize Laureate Wang Shu, opens new horizons while at the same time resonates with **place and memory**. His buildings have the unique ability to evoke the past, without making direct references to history...*

*Wang Shu's architecture is exemplary in its strong sense of cultural continuity and re-invigorated tradition....the past is literally given new life as the **relationship between past and present** is explored. The question of the proper relation of present to past is particularly timely, for the recent process of urbanization in China invites debate as to whether architecture should be anchored in tradition or should look only toward the future.*

*As with any great architecture, Wang Shu's work is able to transcend that debate, producing an architecture that is timeless, deeply rooted in its context and yet universal....*

*Using **recycled materials**, he is able to send several messages on the careful use of resources and respect for tradition and context as well as give a frank appraisal of technology and the quality of construction today, particularly in China. Wang Shu's works that use recycled building materials...*

*The 2012 Pritzker Architecture Prize is given to Wang Shu for the exceptional nature and quality of his executed work, and also for his ongoing commitment to pursuing an uncompromising, responsible architecture arising from a sense of specific culture and place.”<sup>4</sup>*

This might be one of the most significant facts of architectural developments of our era. The future of architectural trends in developing countries might be overwhelmed by this change of direction, as all the conception of architecture, urban design, sustainability and urban know-hows in developing metropolis might be hit by this event. Innate identities are finally gaining an important role in the developing world too. One may say that “*local identity must be taken into consideration for architectural intervention*” is not new (and he would be right), as many scholars have said it for many years during the past century, but it is the right place and the right moment that makes this event of great importance.

China is the world's greatest reality of *rural-urban migration*, the process of urbanization of developing countries where urbanization has brought total transformation of cities giving birth to a great number of metropolitan areas. The doubling, tripling, quadrupling or even more the extent of an urban settlement in a few years, immediately after a developing country opened to worldwide economic exchange, is what has happened within Third World Countries especially during the last decades, giving to planners no time to organize, control, orient and use properly this economic boom swollen by globalization.

In Albania, the passage from one political system to another brought with it the desire to totally cancel the past for moving forward<sup>5</sup>. Thus identity references have been forcibly removed rejecting history as the sole manner to look toward “*contemporary futures*”. The overturning of the Albanian society in 1990 can be expressed very well with the help of the *catastrophe theory*<sup>6</sup>, of René Thom.

Small changes occurred in time brought the abrupt change of direction of every aspect that until then characterized the Albanian *model*. The architecture and the figure of the architect passed through this changes too, leading to the break of architectural continuity in Albania. Today's architecture has still

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.pritzkerprize.com/2012/jury-citation>

<sup>5</sup> The desire to break with the past is not new for Tirana, as after World War II many traditional architectures were demolished and replaced with new buildings. The demolition was the result of a desire to break with the Ottoman and Italian past declaring the beginning of a new history for the Albanian state from 1945.

<sup>6</sup> “*Catastrophe theory is fundamentally concerned with the relationship between **quantitative** and **qualitative** change. It deals with the fact that a continuous process (quantitative change) can operate within a system producing no noticeable change in its form (qualitative change) until a sudden qualitative change takes place (commonly conceptualized as reaching a threshold).*”, (M. Day and J. Tivers, 1979)

difficulties to integrate and to fit in existing sociocultural environments while monothematic architecture goes on. Even though it's been a long time since modernist's *tabula rasa* has been excluded from architect's *modus operandi*, there had not been much progress until today, when the Pritzker Price Commission decided to give significance to the totality of knowledge the architect need to possess in order to give birth to a good architecture. He has to be conscious of environmental changing and also has to know the history of the place and domestic materials in order to achieve contemporary architecture.

Besides, this approach is not new, as Hassan Fathy, the most known Egyptian architect after Imhotep, wrote in 1961 about the meaning of *contemporaneity* in the article "*Contemporaneity in the City*" (Steele, 1992);

*"...to be "contemporary" – a work of architecture must fulfill these conditions: it must be part of the bustle and turmoil, the ebb and flow of everyday life; it must be **related harmoniously** to the rhythm of the universe; and it must be consonant with man's current stage of knowledge of change."*

He points out the necessary continuum of history as the main characteristic of contemporary architecture, though not the only. In the same article he writes about the main goal of architecture to be *eternal* and not *ephemeral*;

*"for all great architecture is contemporary – of its time, relevant to its situation in space, time and human society – but also **eternal**. Without being eternal – that is in harmony with the cosmos and the evolution of life – no architecture can be called contemporary. In this sense there is an absolute contradiction between "contemporary" and "**ephemeral**", which we ought to remember."*

, and again he anticipates what will be the tendency of the 2012 Pritzker prize commission by saying ;

*"Contemporaneity in planning means consonance with the current stage of change in knowledge and science. Consonance, that is, with humanity's total knowledge of science, which includes our knowledge of the current psychological state of the mass humanity, and our knowledge of disciplines relevant to planning – both those the planner should be familiar with and those familiar to the political authority responsible for the plan.....What sort of information do we consider planners must have to be effective? They need to understand the problem of human settlements in its totality, and to realize the wide range of sciences that must be consulted in making any sort of planning decision. Almost all planning faults are faults of partiality, of not being comprehensive enough or not being thorough enough"*

### 3 Public Space and urban regeneration

The importance of public space related to the matter of the studying of social behaviors is well expressed with the words of Gøsta Esping-Andersen: "*Hence, to better grasp what drives today's economy, we must begin with its social foundations*" ( Andersen, 1999 ).

I like to consider the system of public spaces as the sum of two systems; a *static system*, composed of plazas, sidewalks and pathways; and a *dynamic system*, made-up of public transport and bike lanes. This should create a continuum apparatus that penetrates and connect the whole urban texture, and characteristics such as; safety, accessibility, adaptability, flexibility, livability, prosperity, attractiveness and healthiness, should be the main goals for new public spaces which must favor social equity and mixture. The main *points* of this system (made of fixed and mobile elements) and the most sensible ones, are the *intermobility nodes*, where different types of transport met and interchange. These points are surrounded by other multiuse fixed elements, spaces where socialization, entertainment, communication and commerce take place.

In Tirana, actually, the care for open spaces dedicated to children does not seem to be a priority for the city. Playgrounds, parks and squares are missing, except the centre, where, however, they are not designed in an exceptional way, often by lacking the necessary equipment 's. The few examples of game parks are not interconnected between them in order to create an infrastructural network, that would communicate with the

rest of the city, which of course would bring them greater turnout. These spaces must also be multi-purpose and suitable for adults to use. They should make recreation possible for everyone, not just for children, in order to have a mixture of different ages; *"If children are not able to explore the whole of the adult world round about them, They can't become adults"* (Alexander, 1997).

Tirana has many transport issues but some are simpler than others to repair, such as bicycle lanes system. The city would be very convenient for biking as it has a smooth terrain, almost plain, and it is not very extended in the territory, but instead it lacks of cycleways. Thus biking is not an option at all for the unacceptable conditions of the rider, constant target of motorists and pollution. By considering the pedestrianization of some parts of the city and by breaking the myth of the car, which currently reigns, might be a good step toward a people-friendly city.

The great importance of sidewalks within a city has been widely described since 1961 by Jane Jacobs; *"Sidewalks width is invariably sacrificed for vehicular width, partly because city sidewalks are conventionally considered to be purely space for pedestrian travel and access to buildings, and go unrecognized and un respected as the uniquely vital and irreplaceable organs of city safety, public life and child rearing that they are."* (Jacobs, 1961) and many other scholars after her have always praised its role and function.

The intervention in public spaces can give rise to a chain of regenerative events, creating a domino effect overall urban life of a city. Examples like *Curitiba* (Brazil) and *Copenhagen* (Denmark) are of excellent guarantees for the hypothesis of a regenerative process.

*Jaime Lerner*, who's famous phrase is *"The city is not a problem but a solution"*, renewed urban space in his hometown during his three mandates as mayor of Curitiba. During those years he showed to all the planners what can be done in the contemporary metropolis starting from two very important issues, mobility and sustainability.

*Jan Gehl*, the father of sustainable transformation of Copenhagen, on the other hand says: *"It is through small everyday activities that public space is lived ... because it is useful, interesting, secure, and maintaining the public space inhabited it is possible to preserve the vitality (or the utility), interests and security"*. Gehl offers a particularly relevant point of view, which focuses on the public city, its responsiveness to contemporary social practices, of which the author monitors the constantly changing, and the variability over the contexts and seasons. The attention given to persons (significantly indicated with the expression *"people-oriented approach to city planning"*) is therefore intended for creating suitable spaces for the performance of activities that will be put in place.

The formal, functional and symbolic characteristics of a public space does not determine, but certainly significantly affect human activities that take place in it, actually contributing to its overall vitality. Furthermore, the multiplicity of scales through which the dynamics of living unfolded as large, medium and small, identifying areas of social practices and different levels of interaction with the territory and the city, with which the project is asked to confront, organize pertinent topics and provide relevant and adequate repertoire of technical and interpretative devices.

Obviously Curitiba and Copenhagen are completely different contexts and the dynamics by which these were guided are not , of course, those of Tirana but they serve as examples testifying the success of an efficient development of public transport and public spaces as a sole system.

#### **4 People-Friendly city and sustainability**

There are *age-friendly*, *women-friendly*, *cycling-friendly*, *climate-friendly*, *eco-friendly*, etc. cities, and the concept is always the same: creating an urban structure that has in its central thinking aged people, women, cyclists, climate or ecosystems. So, a people-friendly city gives the attention to people in general, aiming to promote human interaction and good public spaces.



Sustainability is what puts together all the voices of figure 1, the “*infinite scheme*”, as it is connected to all of them. We must “*Act Sustainable*” in all the scales: global, regional and local. The word “*sustainability*”<sup>7</sup> have given birth not only to the writing of thousands of books but also to new fields of study, such as; *Sustainability science*, *Sustainable development*<sup>8</sup>, *Environmental sociology etc.*; and the formation of various national and international organizations such as; *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)*, *United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)*, *Earth System Governance Project*, *Global Environment Facility (GEF)*, *European Environment Agency (EEA)* etc., and the formation of research groups such as ; *European Sustainability Science Group (ESSG)*, *Sustainable Europe Research Institute (SERI) etc.*

It is shocking how much have been said about this word. Thus I will not deepen the concept, but only describe actual highlights of the issue and focus on its latest developments. But still, I think there is no need to read about it to make us *see* the effects of urban development in our cities. There is no need to read anything to notice how the environment we live in is changing so rapidly that sometimes we can't even be sure if there was a playground or not where now stands a building.

But we learn from the third edition of 2004 of “*The Limits to Growth*”, published for the first time in 1972, how serious this matter is;

*"[The second edition of Limits to Growth] was published in 1992, the year of the global summit on environment and development in Rio de Janeiro. The advent of the summit seemed to prove that global society had decided to deal seriously with the important environmental problems. But we now know that humanity failed to achieve the goals of Rio. The Rio plus 10 conference in Johannesburg in 2002 produced even less; it was almost paralyzed by a variety of ideological and economic disputes, [due to] the efforts of those pursuing their narrow national, corporate, or individual self-interests...humanity has largely squandered the past 30 years."*

Considering “*the next generation*” the children of today, it would be far more easy for us to *exit the box* of definitions and deal with the present, realizing that if we instruct them for a sustainable way of living we might achieve far more results than we are achieving today. We would have immediate turnout as the children would turn back home from school and involve their parents too in sustainability matters (a similar experience of teaching children took place in Curitiba having great results).

## 5 Transport

During the actual worldwide economic crises public investments are very weak thus it's not very easy for the state to intervene and change the whole transport system aiming to a sustainable one. But, even if it wasn't for the economic crises, every change in the transport system has to deal with the built environment which cannot change with the same pace.

---

<sup>7</sup> The definition of Brundtland's Commission of the United Nations on March 20, 1987, is: “*Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*”

<sup>8</sup> “*Cities are responsible for 67% of the total global energy consumption and more than 70% of greenhouse gas emissions and these trends significantly intensify the severity of some of the two great challenges of our time; climate change and energy security...The building sector is one of the main contributors to carbon emissions, with approximately 40% of global energy consumption, it consumes 12% of all fresh water and generates 40% of the total volume of waste. One of the key goals of urban sustainable development is to promote energy and resource efficiency in the building sector and to provide good, healthy and affordable buildings for people in cities.*” - <http://www.ias.unu.edu/urban/index.php/cities-and-climate-change/>

The biggest problems of metropolis in developing countries are traffic congestion and air pollution<sup>9</sup>. The blame of these consequences of development is given to the automobile, and the best way to lighten the city from it is to strengthen public mass transit. But the race between the automobile and public mass transport is stiff, as the first one is private and flexible and the second one depends on taxes and generally is financially unsustainable, especially in developing metropolis, where taxes aren't that consistent.

Private transport has many qualities and it doesn't make any sense fighting it. Anyhow, we must not adapt the city to it, instead *it* has to adapt to sustainable and people-friendly city's structure. The better way to make sustainable an actual transport system is the supply of transport services and attractiveness of walking and cycling considering always the constrains of the built environments.

The consequences of the development, traffic congestion and air pollution. are of course tied to each-other and the best way to overcome it is to promote *non-motorized transport* modes such as cycling and walking.

If properly promoted, these alternatives can provide access to public spaces, shopping, schools and work for most of the population. Also, a good integration between transport and landuse, making easily accessible the territory brings to alternative transportation. Densification and mixing of functions makes walking, cycling and public transport desirable, and reduces the need for automobile trips.

Attractiveness of the built environment, urban design and pleasant pathways are very important elements to incentivize non motorized transport. Of course, this kind of transport needs a long time to be introduced in Tirana where, actually, the private car is a social status besides a flexible mode of transport.

Even though Tirana is a city of small dimensions compared to other metropolitan areas (the radius of Tirana is approximately 6 km) where these systems work very well, cycling is almost inexistent and walking is not very enjoyable because of sidewalks and pedestrian pathways not optimal conditions. The quality of urban design and architecture enclosing pathways is very important for propensity of slowly passing through the city.

The excellent combination of mass transit and non-motorized with good urban design would be the *polar star* towards a sustainable transport system, even though this issue remains elusive indeed in developing world's metropolis, as their tendency is to expand in a rapid way without giving us much time to address social behaviors towards sustainable transportation.

Last but not least, we should consider not only the city but the whole metropolitan area instead in order to establish a general scheme which would guide infrastructure, is the most important thing for an enduring transport system. Regional communications influence directly to the well-functioning of a metropolitan area.

---

<sup>9</sup> "...Choked with some 300,000 cars, lorries and buses which burn fuel banned in the EU, Tirana is now seen as the most polluted capital in Europe....On an average morning the volume of PM10s is more than 10 times the World Health Organization limit. Sometimes it is much worse. Agron Deliu, an air quality expert from the health ministry, said he had calculated that 35,000 tons of air pollutants were emitted from traffic in Tirana in 2003 - that is 49kg per person... ". (Paul Brown, 2004)

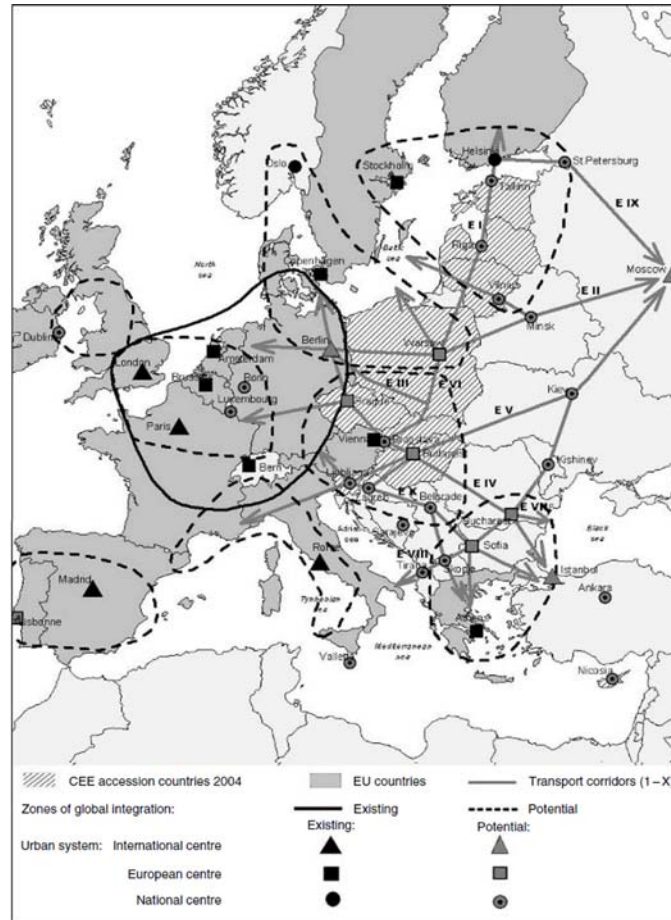


Fig. 2: New European urban system or global “integrated zones of metropolitan cooperation?”<sup>10</sup>

“Globalization goes together with regionalization. If between 1840 and 1960 the main political form of globalization was nation state, presently the leading political form of globalization is regionalization.” (Pieterse, 2009)

Regionalism is an effect of globalization as the power of single states is too weak to affront and manage global tendencies. So, many states cooperate with each-other, mostly economically, forming regions (one the latest examples is EU). As Saskia Sassen points out, the power of single states tend to weaken because nowadays economy depends much more from metropolitan regions, which act like trade cores, than from the states. So, the economy of a country depends on the economic strength of its metropolitan area, on its integration on regional scale and on the power his region has upon worldwide economic fluxes.

The latest decision of the newly arrived mayor of Tirana to move the train station to *Kashar*, a suburb about 10 km northwest of the current train station’s position, gives us a very clear signal on the extent of the capital. This decision confirms totally the trends of the last 20 years to create a *territorial city* with the western seaside city of Durres. In fact, the highway that connects the two cities is day by day assuming the role of a functional axis, charged with firms and businesses, shopping malls and private universities.

The trend of Tirana to expand toward Durres by ensuring access to the sea, makes the development of the infrastructural, economic and political systems of the territorial city, become a propaedeutic step to Tirana’s development. The investigation of Albania’s role and international agreements to which it is part, also as the investigation of the economic relationships with the rest of the region, would explain even more the nature of this territorial city. The binomial city Tirana-Durres has become the starting point for direct

<sup>10</sup> F. E. Ian Hamilton, Kaliopa D. Andrews “Transformation of cities in Central and Eastern Europe: towards globalization”, United Nations University Press, 2005, pg.482



lines of communication in all directions of the country and the international expressways which goes up to Kosovo, or the "Koridori 8" and "Rruga e Arberit" that go towards Macedonia and Bulgaria passing through Skopje and Sofia, up to Varna on the Black Sea.

Globalization is a cultural and economic interchange over worldwide countries. The way Jan Pieterse sees globalization is: "Cultural mixing refers to a politics of integration without the need to give up cultural identity while cohabitation is expected to yield new cross-cultural patterns of difference. This is a future of ongoing mixing, ever-generating new commonalities and new differences" (Pieterse, 2009).

In developing Countries the principal engine of territorial transformation has been the economy which has pushed toward land speculation, and the interest of professional figures has been purely for profit. This means that there hasn't been any *Planning program* to guide this territorial transformations. What has happened in China in the last decades is the icon of this unavoidable urbanization guided by free market economy. In every city of South-East Europe is very evident also how uncontrolled expansion after 1990 has changed the entire urban form of cities and has brought with it the death of local architecture. The negation of traditional architecture has brought to a *tabula rasa* of all local existing trends instead of protecting and emphasizing it. Travelling from Tirana to Durres we can see pyramids, towers, medieval castells of the 90s. In only 35 km we can see the worldwide architecture history.

The expansion model for the city during the last 20 years has been *squatting*, spontaneous constructions in abandoned or unoccupied space. Albanian squatting has many characteristics in common with other Mediterranean metropolis. For example, a description of Athens squatting modes described by Lila Leontidou fits to Tirana's model too; "Spontaneous, in the sense that they are not the result of any systematic educational activity on the part of an already conscious leading group, but have been formed through everyday experience illuminated by common sense... ." (Leontidou, 1990)

To sum up, I should say that global and regional forces will always influence strongly the development of Tirana and our role is not to stop external forces but to use them for future benefits, aiming to a metropolis able to sustain the whole region's development. And, at the same time, we should press for a sustainable and identity evolution as these characteristics directly influence social and economic development. It is time for us to change the spirit of architecture in our cities (guided by the lessons of Wang Shu, Hassan Fathy, Jan Gehl, Jaime Lerner etc.) as it is now more important than ever to push for sustainable and contextual urban environments made by thoughtfully sited architecture.

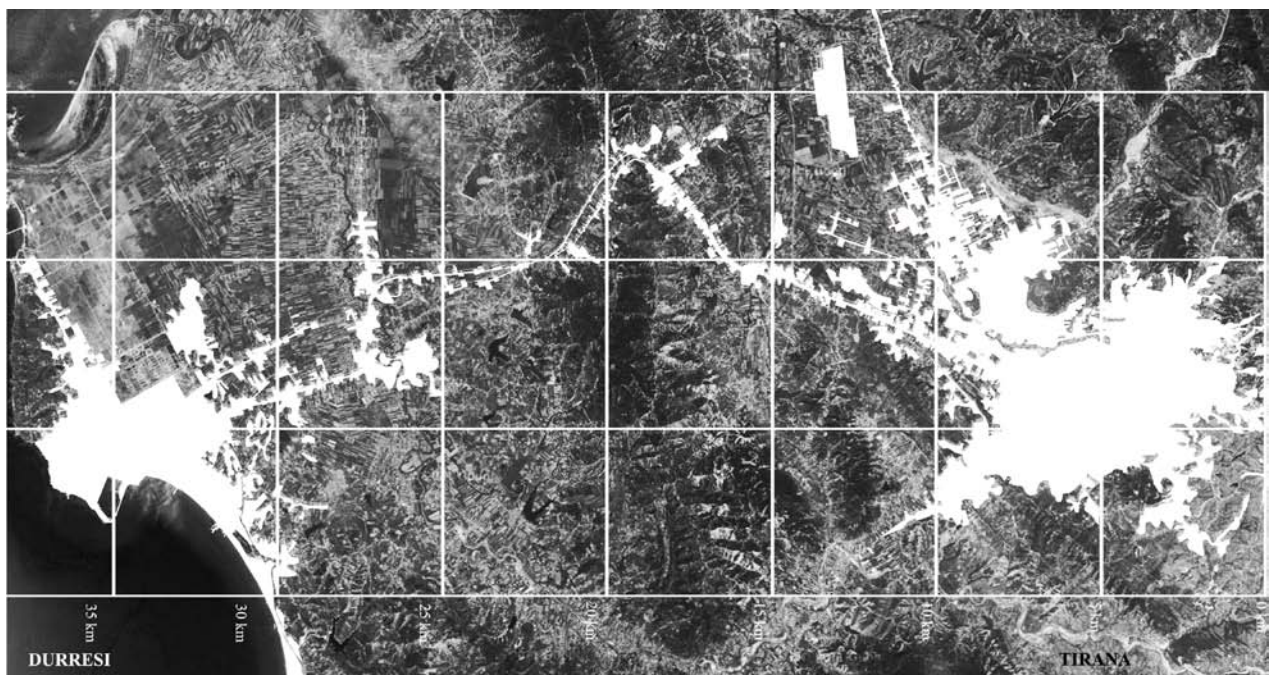


Fig. 4: the extension of Tirana-Durres territorial city

## 7 Conclusions

Phrases like “*think global, act local*”<sup>11</sup> or “*act fast and make it happen*”<sup>12</sup> express fully my conviction that to intervene in Tirana one might be aware of the whole picture of the city and its regional relations and consider it as part of a bigger panorama. We have to act with targeted strategic sites, previously analyzing the entire human settlements within the metropolitan area, guided by a multidimensional consciousness that considers history, geography, biology, physiology, economics, sociology, social anthropology, aerodynamics, mechanics etc.

When I think about regional planning the recent *modus operandi* of the challenge of Gran(d) Paris comes to my mind. The research that the 10 international architectural studios have made, under the initiative launched by French President Nicolas Sarkozy, for “*a new global plan for the Paris metropolitan region*”, is also very interesting and it is considered as an avant-garde way of studying contemporary metropolitan regions. This kind of study is not the one to put into practice of course but serves as a general guide, a *polar star* that shows us the direction toward prosperity.

“...One says that the city is too big, the other tells me that we do not have funds, but I can tell you from my own experience that every city in the world can be improved in less than 3 years. It is not a matter of scale or financial resources, every problem of the city must have its own equation of responsibility and also its own design... And two issues are becoming very important: mobility and sustainability. The main thing I'm trying to say is that automobiles are responsible for the release of 50% of CO2. So, when we depend on private cars, is not enough to speak of sustainable materials, green - buildings or new sources of energy but we should review the concept of the city and its design... So in a city, you have to work quickly. Planning takes time. “*Urban Acupuncture*”<sup>13</sup> should be used, focused and concentrated on some ideas that help the planning that will bring development. Innovation is beginning and we cannot have all the answers. When we start we cannot be so arrogant to want instant answers but it is important to start and get contributions from people who would help you when you go astray.” (Jaime Lerner, 2007)

Questions like: What are generally the propensities of individuals to use urban public space? What environmental factors are more relevant for the carrying of certain recurring activities? How can be designed a satisfactory public space of a city in relation to certain preferences recognized in its use, and compared to the knowledge of environmental factors particularly relevant?, added to the above message of Lerner assess the genre of planning programmes I intend.

The interventions should be thought of as urban acupuncture in small and strategic areas, preferably in intermobility nodes. The use of *isochrone maps* [ iso (equal) and chronos (time) - of the same duration] is highly recommended because these maps have the capacity to put together different kinds of transportation based of travel distance in a certain amount of time. This instrument is helpful to individuate those areas of the city that most of all other spaces need immediate intervention. In this way, encouraging displacement by public transport, by walking or cycling, we solve many other problems such as;

- street security
- socialization and use of the city (*Socializing is more possible in the light-traffic streets* – Gehl, 2004),
- pollution and noise (*When the noise exceeds 60 decibels or so, as it is in the case of roads to vehicular and pedestrian traffic together, it is virtually impossible to have a normal conversation* – Gehl, 2004)

---

<sup>11</sup> This phrase has been attributed to Scots town planner and social activist Patrick Geddes by Barash David, *Peace and Conflict*. California, 2002

<sup>12</sup> Jaime Lerner, TED Conference, 2007

<sup>13</sup> “*Urban Acupuncture* is an urban environmentalism theory which combines urban design with traditional Chinese medical theory of acupuncture. This strategy views cities as living, breathing organisms and pinpoints areas in need of repair. Sustainable projects, then, serve as needles that revitalize the whole by healing the parts. ...it views cities as complex energy organisms in which different overlapping layers of energy flows are determining the actions of the citizens as well as the development of the city.” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urban\\_acupuncture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urban_acupuncture)

This kind of intervention puts out “*the capacity of the physical environment to create perceived zones of territorial influence: mechanisms for the subdivision and articulation of areas of the residential environment intended to reinforce inhabitants in their ability to assume territorial attitudes and prerogatives. And The capacity of physical design to provide surveillance opportunities for residents and their agents: mechanisms for improving the capacity of residents to casually and continually survey the non-private areas of their living environment, indoor and out.*” (Newman, 1973).

Examples of excellent urban governance, which brings social, environmental and economic improvement testify how market-based instruments could be introduced for environmental services making possible the transformation of the urban form based on a green economy.

Last but not least, taking into account the indications of *Kyoto's Protocol* for climate change and gas emissions, the attitude should be oriented versus constructive interpretation of the “*rule*” rather than the identification / repetition of a foreign socio-spatial “*model*”, for the addressing of the urban development of Tirana versus a *people-friendly city* which gives the maximum of importance to the public space as the principal machine able to start a regenerative process overall urban fabric.

## 8 References

- Adem Tamo, Theodhori Karaj : Research of Human Development Center , Tirana , 2006
- Aldo Rossi, “*L'architettura della città*”, Macerata, 2011
- André Corboz, *The land as Palimpsest*, California, 1983
- Anthony Giddens, *Europe in the global age*, Cambridge, 2007
- Bartolomeo Pietromarchi : *Il luogo (non) comune. arte, spazio pubblico ed estetica urbana in Europa*, Actar 2005
- Besnik Aliaj, Keida Lulo, Genc Myftiu, “*Tirana - The Challenge of Urban Development*”, Tirana, 2003
- C. Alexander, S. Ishikawa and M. Silverstein : *A Pattern Language. Towns – Buildings – Construction*, New York, 1997
- D. Held, A. McGrew, D. Goldblatt, J.Perraton, “*Global Transformations: Politics, Economics of Culture*”, Cambridge, 1999.
- D. h. meadows, J. randers, D. meadows: *Limits to growth: the 30-year update*, Chelsea, 2004
- F. E. Ian Hamilton, Kaliopa D. Andrews “*Transformation of cities in Central and Eastern Europe: towards globalization*”, United Nations University Press, 2005
- Françoise Choay, *La regola e il modello: sulla teoria dell'architettura e dell'urbanistica*, Roma, 1986
- Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *Social foundations of postindustrial economies*, Oxford, 1999
- Jaime Lerner, *Acupuntura urbana*, Rio de Janeiro, 2003
- James Steele: *Architecture for a Changing World*, London, 1992
- Jan Gehl , “*Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space*”, New York. 1987,
- Jan Gehl and Lars Gemzøe , “*New City Spaces*”, Copenhagen. 2000,
- Jan Gehl and Lars Gemzøe , “*Public Spaces, Public Life*”, Danish Architectural Press. 2004
- Jan Gehl, *Cities for People*, Washington, 2010
- Jane Jacobs : *The death and life of great American cities*”, New York, 1961
- Michael Day and Jacqueline Tivers, *Catastrophe theory and geography: a Marxist critique*, London, 1979
- Nederveen Pieterse, J. : *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange*. New York, 2009
- Oscar Newman , *Defensible Space. Crime Prevention Through Urban Design*, New York 1973
- Paul Brown: *Tirana, pollution capital of Europe* , Guardian Weekly, London, 8 April 2004
- Peter Bosselmann , “*Urban Transformation. Understanding city design and form*”, Washington, 2008
- Saskia Sassen, *Territory, authority, rights: from medieval to global assemblages*, Princeton, 2006
- Saskia Sassen, *The global city, New York, London, Tokyo*, Princeton, 2006
- W. P. Cunningham, *Environmental Encyclopedia*, Second Edition, Gale, 1998