URBAN AND ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE IN TIRANA HOW TO IMPROVE PUBLIC AWARENESS

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Abstract - I will try to show a situation where "urban identity" is made of memories and feelings, while previous build tissue is slowly disappearing. Tirana is under a lot of pressure, deriving from an unthinkable desire to build and develop.
One of few places, where you can still get perceptions of what life in Tirana used to be, is the area between "Rr. Dibrës" and "Rr Hoxha Tahsim", a neighborhood where on some days', time seems to have stopped, with cats and old people getting warmth from cold days Sun, before their old gates and stone sofas.
What is special about this area is, that there are few buildings with real architectural or historical value; taken each one apart, old houses seem worthless, but together they create an urban scenery of spiritual heritage, with historical identity set on items difficult to explain that derive from human scale, narrow cobbled paths, full of little treasures but also degradation, lack of accessibility and threat from buildings of no reference beside themselves.
The modern movement and the traditional methods of development have failed in creating new identities, also in space character conservation during urban regeneration, thus affecting life quality and memory of places.
Urban growth can be considered a major cause for Tirana's loss of build identity, while the existing urban morphology and intangible dimension constitute the last remains of its space singularity. The preservation of what remains, but also if its memory, is not possible without the people understanding its value, its immaterial quality that makes a bunch of houses feel like home.

Keywords - Urban Identity, Places of Memory, Intangible Dimension, Public Awareness;

I. INTRODUCTION

Heritage of all kind is important all over the world, together with its preservation. In the developing world, the past is preserved primarily as a tool for generating income through tourism; while in developed countries, saving heritage is generally seen as the antithesis of development or modernization [1]. There are many reasons why heritage needs to be protected, but one of the primary goals of heritage conservation is to highlight the historic environment and its continuity, thereby connecting societies with the past, the place and the culture [2].
I will try to show a situation where "urban identity" is made of memories and feelings, while previous build tissue is slowly disappearing. Tirana is under a lot of pressure, deriving from an unthinkable desire to build and develop. One of few places, where you can still get perceptions of what life in Tirana used to be, is the area between "Rr. Dibrës" and "Rr Hoxha Tahsim", a neighborhood where on some days', time seems to have stopped, with cats and old people getting warmth from cold days Sun, before their old gates and stone sofas.
What is special about this area is, that there are few buildings with real architectural or historical value; taken each one apart, old houses seem worthless, but together, they create an urban scenery of spiritual heritage, with strong identity set on items difficult to explain, that derive from human scale, narrow cobbled paths, full of little treasures but also degradation, lack of accessibility and threat from new constructions of no reference.
The modern movement and the traditional methods of development have failed in creating new identities, also they have failed on space character conservation during urban regeneration, thus affecting life quality and memory.
The purpose of this paper is to get the public to understand the importance of Tirana's Urban Heritage, to raise awareness at all levels of society and to enable them to recognize, adopt and preserve these values, as important part of their past. There is a need involving authorities, specialists and civil society to promote and aid inhabitants into absorbing this knowledge, ability, and attitudes which is still present, before it is transformed without recognition, so they can pass it on to the next generations. It is not just about structures declared by low and institutions as "Cultural Monuments", but in this case, for a way of building and living, that will have to change, but its essence, its reason and spirit needs to be remembered and protected.

II. HISTORY

Tirana holds footprints of early history, with castles used from centuries IX-IV BC, fortifications used by the Illyrian tribe of Parthinians between IV-III centuries BC, later defenses build by Justinian the Great and so on to modern era. The heart of the actual city starts in 1614 by the will of an Ottoman Pasha called Suleiman Bargjini from Mullet, a village still in the suburbs of the city. Ottoman neighbors named

"Lagja e Pazarit" and "Lagja e Mujos" reside partly visible in the area from the present center to "Elbasani" road. [3]. In 1920 Tirana is declared Capital of the young Albanian Republic, a position it still keeps.

From a city of only 17,000 inhabitants and an area of 3 square kilometers in 1920, the urbanized area of Tirana covered 12 km² and its population had grown to almost 300,000 in the late 90s, while in recent decades, Tirana has seen a construction boom and has undergone a rapid and unregulated process of urban development. The city footprint is now over three times the size it was in 1957 [4]. Tirana has gone through important transformations during its short modern era, which can be divided in three phases:

- From its proclamation as the capital of Albania, in 1920 until 1944.
- The time from 1944 to 1990, also called the period of communism.
- The time from the fall of the totalitarian system to the present day (April 2023)

Modern center of Tirana starts taking shape from 1923 through several plans that follow each other, by Austrian architects Weiss and Kohler, Albanian architect EshrefFrashëri and finally by famous Italians at the time, Florestano di Fausto and Armando Brasini. They were the designers of the main central square, still a strong note of urban tissue, which bears the name of the Albanian National Hero, GjergjKastrioti Scanderbeg, the grand boulevard, ministry buildings, the national bank, the city hall and Palace of Brigades (former royal palace, today Presidential Palace). Another Italian architect GherardoBosio, continued to work during the Italian occupation on WWII with the southern part of the main boulevard and the surrounding buildings, now "Mother Teresa" square [3].

During the communist era, the city was stripped off some of its most important characteristics. Scanderbeg Square was revised and surrounded by some dry empty buildings that reflect a Soviet inspired architecture, several important buildings were demolished like the old Municipality, the old Bazaar, and the Orthodox Cathedral, to make space for the new pompous edifices. Fortunately, some neighbors like the one has picked for this paper were saved from the march of socialist apartment complexes, which transformed the face of most of the city[5].

Apparently, the worst came in contemporary times. A strong population movement towards the capital was accompanied by the expansion of the city into formal and informal areas, with suburbs developing faster than the city's ability to provide sustainable development parameters, and the striking densification of existing neighborhoods through the appropriation of former public spaces. This transformation occurred within a short period, leading to a condensed urban structure.

The area in question is currently under a lot of development pressure which is causing loss of history, of natural environment and degradation of urban tissue. Besides a strong historical identity, architectural and spiritual heritage, the area could be a real-life laboratory for the study of urban morphology in recent times.

III. WHAT IS HERITAGE

Many people consider heritage to be money, territory, gold, and silver. Yet heritage is not limited to these. Historical and cultural artefacts of our country delivered from past to present are also considered as heritage[6]. Heritage is understood and described in many ways, most commonly [7]:

- Tangible cultural heritage (buildings, historical sites, monuments and all kinds of archaeological, architectural, technological and scientific works made by human hands).
- Movable Cultural Heritage (sculptures, paintings, manuscripts, coins, archaeological artefacts, etc.)
- Immovable cultural heritage (archaeological monuments, sites, historic city tissues, etc.)
- Underwater Cultural Heritage (shipwrecks, underwater ruins and cities)
- Intangible Cultural Heritage (rituals, oral traditions, performing arts, etc.)
- Natural Heritage (natural sites with cultural dimension, cultural landscapes, biological, physical and geological formations etc.)

Some of this heritage, mostly the physical one, is threatened by urbanization, industrialization, large-scale agriculture, mining, erosion and an increasing number of visitors to cultural heritage sites. Intangible cultural heritage on the other hand is under attack from globalization, time and new values. Modern societies are more easily influenced by each other, especially young people who tend to follow the same trends, are in contrast with the preservation of this heritage, and the belief that these values should be protected by past generations is diminishing through time. Also, technology makes most of these rituals or traditions unnecessary, therefore the protection of intangible cultural heritage becomes more difficult than the preservation of concrete cultural heritage[8].

Despite the significance of the cultural heritage of this area of Tirana, it is witnessing many threats and problems due to some real issues. One of them is accessibility, which is a real problem, deriving from the way this quarter is built in time. It appears to be quite complex on the map, which presents a challenge for the designers. We were aware of this while trying to reorganize the area with students of the fourth year some time ago. Complexity is an internal impetus of every city, an often poorly organized energy feeds this growth, the technology we have developed over the years has the same effect, it responds to a problem coming from an outdated technology, with an increasingly complex technology, until the latter becomes a problem in itself[9]. While architects and urban planners tend to simplify this complexity,

nailing the city to clean geometric structures.

IV. WHY RAISE THE AWARENESS

How does society affect space, is a specific social order responsible for creating a spatial model, or vice versa, is space primary and as a shell it gives shape and potential to a society born within it? Are cities different in time and space because the societies that produced them change, or was it the space available to cities, the concrete opportunities and constraints that produced societies with different values and ideals? [10]. These questions have yet to get a final answer, but they are necessary to understand how a city and the people living in it are connected to each other.

Tirana, like many other cities, has a characteristic functional structure, with a central area, where the main commercial, administrative and civil activities are located, together with the main business buildings, and around these concentric circles have been developed in time, like loops around a tree. With a bit of a "kick" near main axes of the main roads lie residential areas and social nodes, and still further extend the suburbs, each with its own character, which derives more from the geographical position and the road system than from the architectural or urban solutions.

When the suburbs have come as an expansion and densification of existing structures, they have a center of their own, which plays a role in the life of the whole neighborhood, while the new areas are in complete absence of this activity node. In all cases, there is a reversal of existing urban fabric patterns, or confusion in the case of new districts. But existing old quarters like the one in question have their own identity, built step by step before the arrival of modern planning. The spirit, that new urban design lacks at time, is quite obvious in this case and needs to be understood, protected and transferred.

The last stroke is given by modern norms and urban regulations. What has been constructed piece by piece from father to son, small additions attached to the main house, roads sprouting from one node to create the next one in a "fractal" generation geometry, came to confront strict regulations made to accommodate modern residences with distances to each other that allow maybe better sunlight, but that have nothing to do with this kind of development.

V. UNDERSTANDING IN ORDER TO KEEP GOING

Urban morphology views human settlements as generally unconscious products, over long-time segments, through careful observation of the construction activity generation. This activity leaves traces that serve as a structure for other phases of construction and provides opportunities and constraints for the ongoing construction process of the city, such as land allocation, infrastructure development or erection of buildings[11]. Articulating and analyzing the logic of the laws that guide these traces, in order to keep working with them, would be the first step into the path of awareness that this paper is developing.

These monsters, which we call cities, seemingly incomprehensible and chaotic, are living organisms, and consequently obey invisible codes and laws in their functioning and especially in their growth. Man builds the space in which he lives according to certain rules, which stem from his social behavior, such as the result of the latter and the motives according to which he operates. Whether the structure of the city comes as a project or as a joint effort in time, the city represents a social order, a model by which society limits and defines itself. [12]

Urban fabric summarizes current physical complexes (open space, buildings) and functions (human activity). Each complex has distinct regularities in the placement of buildings, functions (themes) and spaces and within these motifs appear a series of organizational principles. This approach challenges the common perception in deconstructing the structure and process of urbanization, where the unplanned environment is considered chaotic or semi-organic. The sciences that study complexity and chaos, have provided successive evidence on the emergence of urban structures from multiple actions uncoordinated by various factors, preserving the flow of energy and materials, in ways that seem arbitrary at first glance. [13]

Cities and buildings will not live if they do not function for the inhabitants, and if these inhabitants do not share a common language, if they do not share the same values, if they do not have similar patterns in the conception of the city, and if these patterns are not clear and functional, the city will be defective and lifeless.[14]

The elements of this common language are called patterns. They define a city or a community, cannot arise from nothing, cannot be drawn or created by a drop of a pencil, cannot come out of the mind of an individual or design group. In order to be sustainable, to be recognized and embraced by all of them, they must be studied and modelled step by step, with patience and care, so that the whole society is part of this process. These models, which affect so much the structure of the city, cannot be created by centralized authorities, or master plans.

A vital and complete society has its own language of these patterns, unique and distinct. The language of our cities today is somewhat brutal, fragmented and often meaningless, so much so that a part of society does not know it at all, does not distinguish it when it sees it in the city as its own. By not relying on the society to which it belongs, our urban motives are detached from naturalness, from human values, in the name of artificial and non-existent ideals. [15]

The objective of this paper is not to promote stopping development in the name of preserving heritage, nor to

advocate freezing this area in time (that ship has left the port), but to promote a new style of design and construction, in order to keep that intangible dimension, the neighborhood has transmitted to us, and hopefully we will to the next generation. The best way to do this is by understanding, expressing and promoting the values and attributes this zone has brought to our time. The more inhabitants and architects are aware of this heritage, the more they will love, protect and keep on to its preservation and continuation. [16]

The main urban motives of Tirana and many other similar cities are still visible, certainly more distorted in Tirana, as a city under strong social, demographic and technological pressure, but much present in this quarter, from which we have a lot to learn. By analogy part of Albania, in lack of better administration, has been governed by the "Kanun of LekëDukagjini" as a constitution known and accepted by all, which regulated the life of Albanian territories without legislative bodies, without external authoritarian structures, but as a model that was part of the life of these people daily, who was molded and lived with them for centuries. Of course, I'm not promoting the kind of self-justice this system endorses, but the same way of incorporating the fading urban design, as a product of our society, values and way of living, which is authentic and will be lost in case we cease to observe. In a way, I'm trying to consider the art of city building in the same way we consider old rituals or better yet, manufacture of rustic objects.

VI. AWARENESS STARTS WITH THE PEOPLE

What seems to be a common denominator through the literature, is that heritage is faced by threats and problems due to the lack of community's cultural awareness, which brings danger of commercialization, loss of authenticity and damage. One of the basic causes for damage of heritage is again due to lack of awareness to the public at large and non-involvement of people in the process of conservation as well.

"Heritage awareness is a crucial part of any heritage conservation and management. The creation of awareness is time-consuming and it requires commitment and local support. It is often the most recognizable component of a heritage management. One of the most effective ways to build and maintain respect for community's heritage is through a selection of activities that raise public awareness and increase appreciation. The success of heritage conservation initiatives depends on the understanding and participation of the local community".[17]

Cultural awareness is a critical issue for achieving heritage understanding and conservation. Without understanding the meaning of heritage there could be no preservation in the country or in a city. Being aware helps locals to feel familiar with their history and background, which sometimes they might not know and apprise [18]. Also, it's difficult to recognize and value other cultures, while there isn't enough knowledge about their own heritage and civilization and behave positively towards it. Improving locals' knowledge regarding the cultural heritage is required to promote their sustainable behavior at heritage sites. So, heritage preservation needs commitment and support from local community. [19]

A key role in this process is played by the residents of this area. Their participation in heritage protection has recently become a major concern also in the tourism industry. [20]Cultural awareness is one of the main factors influencing residents' successful involvement in heritage conservation process. It drives them to take responsibility for the heritage which their fathers and grandfathers have built. Residents usually are not able to participate in preserving areas where they live- as long as they don't appreciate the historical value of these sites. The efforts made by official bodies and key actors to develop and preserve heritage sites, even if they are based on a top-down planning approach, will be futile without the real cooperation of the community out of sensibility and attention[21].According to a list of similar literature the connection between residents and heritage goes through three steps:

- First there must be cultural knowledge about the value (tangible or otherwise) of their heritage.
- Secondly, they must be ready to participate in protecting and passing on this inheritance.
- Thirdly they must gain something from this process.

This area might not become a significant tourist attraction and an important generator of income in the most common way tourism destinations do, but it could still be a source of pride for its inhabitants, knowing that generations of their forefathers created something with more identity than the actual city. Cultural awareness is the way through which this identity sites can be preserved transmitted to the next generation.

In the given context we could underline the market value that this kind of area has due to its unique development. This type of urban structure will have to change, but it can be done in respect to previous patterns, considering it an attribute that will affect real estate prices. There is no better way to make neighbors cooperate, that understanding that their respective houses will influence their respective selling rates. It would be wise to try to preserve part of this felling, not by traditional means of conservation, but following three steps:

- Comprehend the real physical state of build environment and "always changing heritage"
- Estimate the relation between the market value, time and physical state of the build environment
- Prepare and advise for suitable developments on proper portions of the quarter

VII. WAYS TO CREATE AWARENESS ON HERITAGE

Growing recognition of the importance of cultural heritage has resulted in the formation of strengthening of international culture heritage organizations whose goal involves protection, promotion, management and dissemination of the cultural heritage [7].

Action plans must involve several actors and groups of interest, between which the residents will bear the most of the weight. The strategy must be organized through topics that include Management, Legislation, Local Authorities, Coordination and Participation of Residents.

Initially, awareness programs should implicate policy makers and key actors through various methods, such as roundtable discussions, press conferences and meetings with experts, to discuss policies and procedures that ensure the protection of heritage. Furthermore, students starting from high schools should be educated about the cultural heritage and its importance. Curriculum must be designed to include subjects related to heritage, such as cultural heritage and heritage protection, with regular visits to this site and similar, in lack of more complicated academic tools. Students of Architecture and Urban Design can be even more involved by participating in actual experiments of design through these quarter and similar ones. We have already tried for this particular site with good enough results at the Facultyof Architecture and Urbanism. Making the general public and especially the residents to understand and embrace this process is a bit more complicated and requires various methods.

"Informing the people to the persuasive requirement of promotion of the cultural heritage, awakening the mindfulness and interest people to make them feel apprehensive by the promotion of the cultural heritage can be done in different ways such as; heritage festivals, freedom walk, heritage trails, heritage walk, heritage awards, street plays, heritage newspapers and promotion of heritage in education can be undertaken under the stringent supervision."[22].The most useful among these activities I would note below.

Heritage festivals have the potentials to captivate people, display cultural traditions and educate general public about rich culture while creating economic opportunities, when organized properly [23].Heritage festivals are an important element to involve residents and promote development. Cultural heritage festivals can generally contribute to the economic development of the local organizers by providing employment, attracting tourist and promotion of heritage [24].There has been a lot of research on heritage festivals and similar special events, with specialists highlighting the combination of impact analysis and economic influence on the area. Festivals could be held on special dates for Tirana, or even more recognizing important historic points for the quarter, like commemorating dates of building some of the important structures in it. Practice shows with a little traditional food and homemade jams from the residents, these festivals could go a long range in time and interest for a growing public.

Heritage Walk is another way to create awareness among the public, maybe not to residents, but certainly the best way to make known this particular area to help understand the urban web to students of all kind. In time these walks will have fixed stops for tasting some homemade "byrek" or "dhallë" refreshments, together with some shops maybe retaking the art of old artisanal leather and pottery for which Tirana was once famous. For several researchers' heritage walks were evaluated as one of the best ways to create awareness amongst the public about their heritage. For sure it seems to be the finest system to educate youth. Heritage walk enables to obtain knowledge on one's culture, customs, philosophy, traditions and rituals. It also enables the public to recall their rich culture and history [25].

Street Plays have an intermediate role, connecting the players, usually young, to viewers somehow older generation, through the use of architectural and urban heritage as scene, background and living stage. These event act as a common platform for awareness that could involve all kind of youngsters to indorse heritage awareness. [26].

Projects and Case studies could be organized by specialized faculties, like those of Architecture or History, as has been previously planned by the Polytechnic University of Tirana. This works in more than one way of raising awareness for the heritage of the area in question; first it makes students research, work, improvise and design on the space given, secondly the results prepared as an exposition with wide participation might work for the local authorities and especially the residents as examples of possible development, as reminder and illustration of possibilities and practical exercises. [27].

VIII. CONCLUSION

There is a strong link between Memory and old quarters of Tirana, especially like the one between "Dibrës" and "Hoxha Tahsim" roads in north-east of the capital, which is seen as part of tangible and intangible heritage of this city.

It is important to raise awareness to the general public and its inhabitants in order to understand better and then preserve, improve and transmit this heritage coming from centuries towards new generations.

This memory can be used through education to enhance the kind of heritage awareness that helps professionals understand how our society build towns, in order to use these identity patterns as mediums of to provide a better design for the city and producing recognizable, authentic urban tissue. Since there is no doubt the area will change under urban pressure, as it has changed even through time, to bring to us what it is now, it is considered paramount to understand this

language of space structure in order to reproduce it in the future.

Design experiments can help as long as they are involving urban initiatives of larger scale, considering alternative scenarios of development, evaluating effects and possibilities, and highlighting the most important territorial perspectives.

Promoting cultural heritage is even more important for raising awareness to the public and especially the inhabitants of the area, as key factors for preserving and protecting the actual heritage, or build it in a similar syntax when time comes.

Increasing awareness for the residents could be successfully achieved through two mayor ways, first by showing the people the true value of their inheritance, by studies, promotions and evaluations of real estate prices and the intangible value it is related to. Secondly cultural awareness can be promoted by a series of organized events like Heritage Festivals, Heritage Walks, Street plays and Expositions focused on the life and special events of the quarter.

Due to the particular situation of this case, we recognize the local authorities mostly as participants or organizers of events, rather than factors in changing regulations or education curricula.

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