

RETHINKING GJIROKASTRA



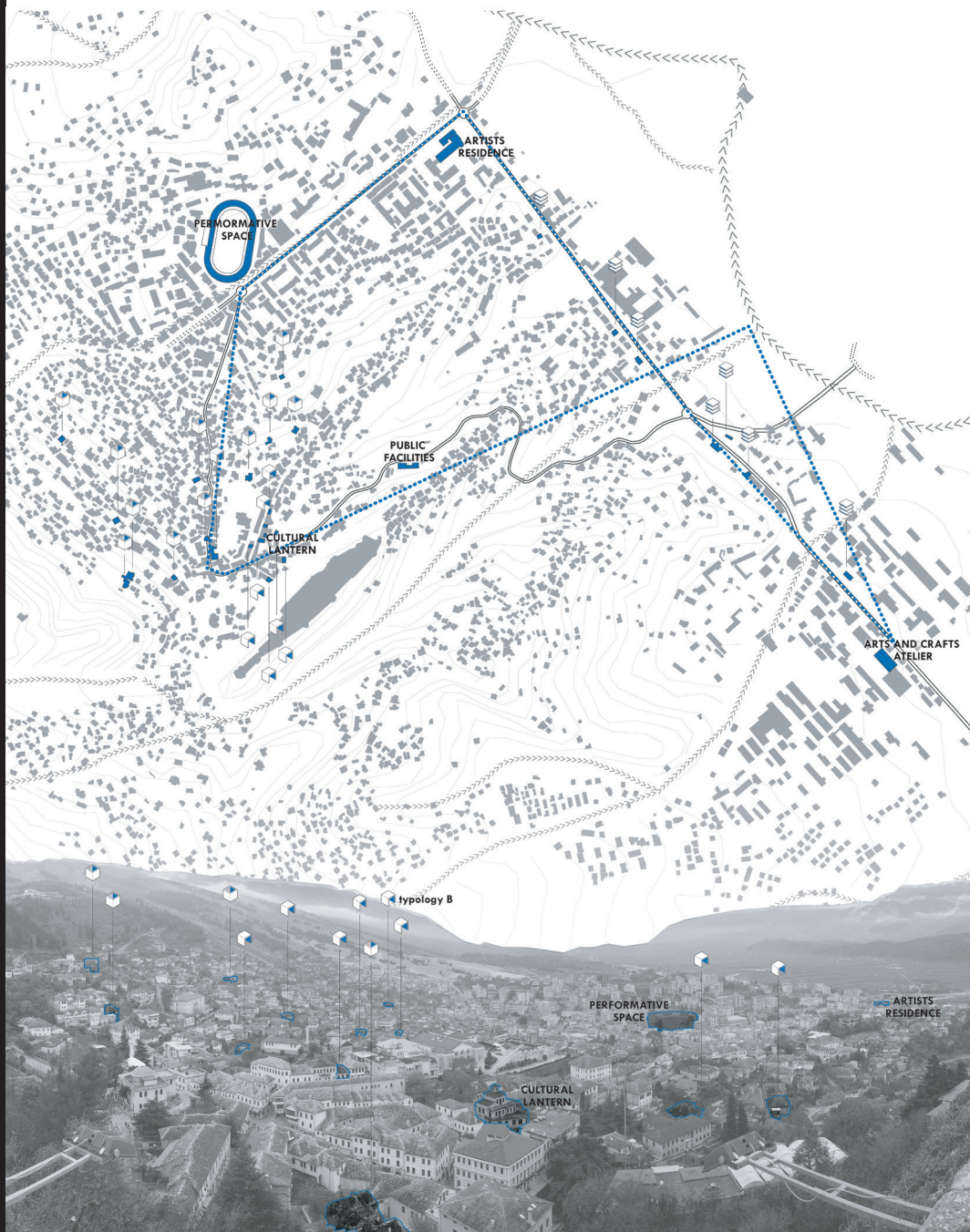
Observatory of the Mediterranean Basin
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RETHINKING GJIROKASTRA

Can architecture and city planning stimulate hope and growth for shrinking cities?

A Project of the
Joint International PhD Program IDAUP

POLIS University Albania / University of Ferrara Italy



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RETHINKING GJIROKASTRA Can architecture and city planning stimulate hope and growth for shrinking cities?

A project developed in the framework of the
International Doctorate in Architecture and Urban Planning IDAUP
POLIS University, Albania / University of Ferrara, Italy

This publication is about a critical analysis of certain local situations which you can find also in other countries: the shrinking cities phenomenon. POLIS and their Italian partners, UNIFE, go through a sequence of "geography, place, history and culture" approaches. This publication scrutinizes a variety of issues, including established techniques and methodologies, when it comes to the reading of space and place, under specific social, economic, and political contexts. At the same time, they are opening up a spectrum of possibilities provided by all available sketches, drawings, etc., aiming at mapping and documenting regional realities and investigating the municipal potential. Top-down, centrally imposed planning schemes have long now shown their limitations and essential limited ends. The collapse of the centralized economy and planning brought new opportunities and new problems as well. Nowadays, some regions as capital cities grow fast and beyond their limits. Some other cities and regions are shrinking in terms of demography, urban importance, and economy. How to deal with it in a situation like South Albania? The publication of this case is systematic, rich in a body of scholarly, scientific work that leads to a direction of articulated public spaces, functions, and infrastructures that surpass the built environment and all obvious structural connotations. It is a promising work investing in systems and collaborative networks that bind the area to policies of cohabitation and sustainable choices, allow bottom-up, grassroots approach to bloom, and secure a resilient, inclusive vision for the area than in short term low-capacity assignments.

Dr. Fabrizio Aimar
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POLIS University is a pioneering institution in the fields of higher education, innovation and research. It is unique both in the Albanian and European contexts. Its joint International PhD Program with UNIFE - Ferrara University, Italy, has been for years and still is, an original scientific program in the international panorama. During the last decades, POLIS and its planning institute, Co-PLAN, have been developing a national vision and a methodology of spatial planning translated into two important documents: "Albania 2030 Manifesto" and "Regionalization of Albania". Since then, POLIS and UNIFE are further elaborating "regional puzzles" (<https://ombresearchseries.org/>). Saying this as a background, it can be said that their last publication on "Gjirokastra", is one of the latest elaborated pieces of the above-mentioned puzzles. The text represents good documentation of an alternative planning process and scientific speculation under the circumstances of the "shrinking cities" phenomena whilst showing - at the same time - how a university cannot be merely a theoretical institution but also have a clear social responsibility and mission. A team of city scientists, professors and students of POLIS University and Ferrara University has been mobilized during the last years in the region of Gjirokastra, aiming to assist bottom-up processes of municipal envisioning and territorial planning, as well as strategies and instruments to cope with demographic and economic depression. Accepting the existence of such a problem and dealing with it, is the first positive action to inspire serious improvements for the future. The experience shown here demonstrates how municipal and city planning cannot be treated simply as a developmental and governance instrument, by 'simply obeying' to the existing standard legislation, but it can also be transformed creatively into a smart tool for a local "developmental leap", and promote further regional coordination as well as local improvements.

Dr. Valerio Perna
University of "La Sapienza" Rome, ITALY



Preface

Gjirokastra.

Between the "UNESCO City" status and the phenomenon of "Shrinking Cities".

Gjirokastra is one of the most beloved cities in Albania and beyond in the region. The city with extraordinary historical values, and with unique traditions and landscape, is rightly included in the UNESCO list. Gjirokastra has always been, and continues to be, among the main settlements that serve as a reference for the development of southern Albania, and the cross-border area of northwestern Greece.

After the 90s the city has entered a demographic and economic recession that is typical for those inhabited centers that face the global phenomenon of 'shrinking cities'. Often this has been considered a local shortcoming, typical of this city. In fact, the phenomenon occurs everywhere in the world, where there are dramatic social, economic, and political changes, such as those in Albania after the fall of the 'Berlin Wall'.

Meanwhile, the phenomenon is typical for developed countries in terms of market economy, especially when a certain city, region, or country goes through the process of 'de-industrialization'; the transition from industrial development to services and other sectors.

The opening of Albania's borders in 1991, the introduction of free movement and market economy, the closure and privatization without criteria of local factories and manufacturing industries, the fact that they did not go through a technological transformation in accordance with the new economic-political conditions, etc., - all these together stimulated a depressive atmosphere in the city. As a result of this situation: i) many families and individuals emigrated to Greece, Europe, and the USA; ii) many others moved to the metropolitan area of Tirana; iii) mountain villages were almost emptied both by the emigration abroad, and by the migration to big cities or the capital; iv) departure especially of the youth.

Beyond that, local, regional and central authorities and certain international partners have tried to curb the phenomenon as much as possible. The inclusion of Gjirokastra in the UNESCO list was a turning point. Already investments in infrastructure, agriculture and tourism have increased.

Today it can be said that Gjirokastra is a tourist destination, but suffers from a lack of human resources, especially young people. Institutions such as the County, Prefecture, courts, university, hospital, or other regional services, are one more reason to give more importance and a regional and cross-border development function to this municipality. The project of

transforming the historical-museum center into a 'business district' has given hope that things can be different and better.

It is now clear that the Municipality should be better acquainted with the phenomenon of 'shrinking cities' and learn from other cases in Europe and in the world: how other settlements have been gradually transformed and turned for the better? How investments, enterprises and residents have been gradually assimilated? It is evident today that Gjirokastra from a municipality with an 'industrial-agricultural' character, should make a 'shift' towards a services center with an 'administrative-touristic-transitory' character. The villages need to be reactivated to bring life to the whole territory where there is real potential, authentic churches, and natural resources, to revive tourism and the agriculture with unique products.

The purpose of this publication is to demystify the phenomenon of 'shrinking cities' in the context of Gjirokastra, and to identify strategies and instruments that will help the city out of this transitional state. The publication in question is part of a series of visions developed over the years within the International Doctoral Program (PhD) between POLIS University, Tirana (Albania) and the University of Ferrara (Italy).

For more see:

<https://ombresearchseries.org/>

This series which is also documented by the Library of Congress in USA, has first built a territorial development vision for the country and a proposal for its regionalization in the framework of European integration. Furthermore, each year a region has been selected and detailed with projects and specific development instruments to each region. The most recent region to date is Gjirokastra. Previously, development programs have been drafted for the regions: Durrës-Tirana metropolis, the southern Riviera region, the Seman watershed area, the cross-bordering municipalities of Shkodra (north) and Dropull (south), the regions of Prishtina (Kosovo) and Tetovo (Northern Macedonia), etc.

We hope you will find this study valuable both for communities and local authorities in the processes of local regional development, but will also it can hopefully serve as a reference for academic, student and research communities in their daily scientific work.

Prof. Dr. Besnik Aliaj
Rector of POLIS University, Tirana

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1.1

Demystifying the concepts
of "shrinking cities & urban
depopulation".

A theoretical review that could be
useful to the case of Gjirokastra,
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Besnik Aliaj
Sotir Dhamo

Demystifying the concepts of “shrinking cities & urban depopulation”.

A theoretical review that could be useful to the case of Gjirokastra, Albania.

Prof. Dr. Besnik Aliaj

Dr. Sotir Dharmo

Polis University / Tirana, Albania

The shrinking of living settlements in general is a concept that refers to the cities and towns that experience a sharp loss of population. Such loss could come because of depressing social, economic and political contexts in a given region or country, or because of massive (e)migration towards capital city or other and neighboring countries. As infrastructure and services in such living settlements were planned and invested to support bigger population, its own maintenance becomes a serious problem and very expensive exercise.

When talking on “shrinking cities” in Europe, often are used concepts like: urban decay, or urban flight, or counter-urbanization. The origin of the phenomenon usually refers to the dense and urbanized areas that face problems of population loss within a short time. This is often defined as de-concentration or as the contrary effect of urbanization. The theory gained ground especially in the Eastern Europe countries during the “post - Berlin Wall fall” decades, especially within industrial regions and cities that went under harsh shock-therapy economic treatment, and fast privatization policies towards the newly established market economy.

Shrinking cities concept in the USA became more evident during 2006-2008 because of the global economic recession that hit also the country. The main target for such negative effect have been dense urban centers. As result of that, external suburban areas continued to grow. The main factors that encourage shrinking of the cities in the U.S. might be considered: sub-urbanization, de-industrialization and the related human migration. Nowadays,

statistical data show that 1 in 4-6 cities worldwide are shrinking. This is more typical for countries with economic growth or in the phase of de-industrialization. Other factors might include: aging population, shifting industries, shrinking by purpose - aiming to increase quality of life, etc.

There are many **theoretical references** for the phenomena of shrinking city. Hollander (1 & 2) and Glazer (6) mention suburbanization as one of the reasons behind the reverse-urbanization. Another factor for them might be lack of appreciation on national infrastructure, such as highways, while there is an increase of interests on the cities with railroads and ports.

From the other side - Pallagst (3) - thinks that shrinkage is a reaction against de-industrialization. In other words this means that more jobs move from city center toward periphery with cheaper land and properties. In Detroit, for example, most of employment opportunities of the automobile industry reallocated toward suburban areas because room for expansion was less costly.

Bontje (5) also proposes four main factors contributing to the shrinking cities effect:

i) Urban development model – which refers to the Ford-ist model of industrialization in US. It suggests that “urbanization” is a cyclical process, and urban and regional decline will allow for increased growth;

ii) One-company town or Mono-structure model – which refers to the idea that cities that specialize on certain branch

of economic growth, instead make themselves weak to the radical process of quick declines (such as the case of automobile industry in USA, etc.);

iii) Shock therapy model – that are typical for Eastern European post-communist countries, where state-owned companies did not survive privatization. This leads to the closure of most factories and industries, and generates as result massive unemployment;

iv) Smart decline – that is a term used by city planners and local authorities, to intentionally encourage the decline of population or “freeze it from any growth tendencies” (for example: the case of historic-touristic city of Florence, Italy). This aims a pragmatic political philosophy of “planning for less – less people, less buildings, less land uses – in order to maintain or increase the standard of living”. However, such strategy is often criticized for neglecting local residents’ needs, resulting in pushing more people out of the city center.

Main **effects** of the “shrinking cities” phenomena could be summarized as below:

▪ **Economic effects** – The shrink of urban population demonstrates the change of economic and planning conditions in certain living settlement. Cities, indeed shrink because of social-political changes, conflicts or war situations, etc. Such conditions result in economic decline, increase of debts, lack of production, and of course loss of labor force. The decline in population affects many communities, including those that are far removed

in periphery, or those enclaved within the large urban centers. The shrink of population lowers production potential and quality of life in those neighborhoods, thus forcing the decline in employment and productivity aspects.

▪ **Social and infrastructural effects** – The living settlements that are losing population experience nowadays dramatic social-demographic trends, because of several aspects, including: aging of population, transformation of household structure, changes in life expectancy, as well as lowering fertility rates. Such shift in population is often pushed further by job-driven migration. This imposes new household demands, as well as the creation of new housing markets. The up-mentioned trends stimulate further new land markets and new urban planning demand, associated by the sprawling effects. In few words, the loss of population in certain living settlement, damages the trust over the city in itself, and deteriorates the quality and interest of local governance. When economy goes down, than the city, public spaces and its own infrastructure, also deteriorates, as local population losses their own interest.

▪ **Political effects** – Cities with loss of population are always a political taboo. Local authorities often ignore the existence of the “shrinking” problem. They almost refuse to deal with it! Local population and entrepreneurs also start to believe that the problem does not exist! We like it or not, the “shrinking cities” phenomena is a reality and fully acknowledged. Instead, most of urban planning consultancies, are nowadays strategizing how to fight

the 'shrink' implications, which affect the daily life of people, businesses and communities.

Cities of the **Eastern Europe and Central Asia** regions are the most impacted living settlements as regarding de-industrialization and population decline. East European cities (especially in Germany where contrast between east and west after unification was so sharp), former Yugoslav countries and Soviet countries (including countries like Albania), have been heavily affected because of their weak economic situation and social-political turmoil after the fall of communism. Even the unification of countries within EU resulted with benefits in some cases, but also in problems in some other ones.

With the unification of Germany, cities such as Leipzig or Dresden, faced dramatic population decline. Meantime, many people immigrated towards western cities, such as the capital Berlin. Hamburg also experienced population growth by early 90-s. And this is exactly the reason why Leipzig or Dresden parallel suffered by the 'shrinkage' effects. This was visualized to people by the ruining of economy and worsening of infrastructure. Nowadays such cities are growing back again, but mainly via peripheral smaller towns and rural areas.

In the case of **USA**, the shrinking cities face different problems. Most of migrating population there, moved out of their origin cities to other states and cities for reasons of better safety and higher economic opportunities. In countries of big population and advanced economy, such shift have not been a big issue. Indeed, USA historically showed more political willingness to rehabilitate cities of population decline. They still invest in the revitalization programs. San Francisco and Los Angeles, for example, often face population dynamics because of earthquakes, which are addressed with quick and specific recovery plans by local authorities.

This is not the case of **East European cities**, where the shrinkage effect does not take the same attention, while city planning processes take longer time to draft, approve and implement. The European attitude is somehow different, and could be summarized in two point: i) first stabilize population; ii) then work on attracting population back into the city. In short, **"de-industrialization"** in the West, and **"fall of the political-economic**

system" in the East, seems to be the determining factors encouraging the "shrinking cities" effect.

It is because of dramatic and instable demographic trends, and lack of investments in infrastructure and services, that it also stimulated academic research into the reasons of urban decline and "shrinking cities" effects. However, other issues such as: racism, justice, economic and health unfairness, etc., are also additional factors of the phenomena.

Academic sources today identify as main causes of urban decline three historical influences: *i) de-industrialization, ii) suburbanization, iii) and globalization:*

- The theory of **de-industrialization** means in few words the process of investment-reduction from main industrial-urban centers. For example, because of war damages in Europe, during post- 'World War II' times, Western Europe declined in manufacturing while United States grew. This caused shift of global economic power to the United States. Western European industrialization in meantime diminished and stopped, while new and alternative industries were also born. UK for example grew thanks to the economy of service sector. The decline of industry, reduced job opportunities and encouraged further urban-population decline. As result of that massive demographic movement happened from industrial-urban cities -towards- rural and suburban living settlements.

Post-war policies stimulated rapid privatization, thanks to the economic-aid policies of the "Marshall Plan" and "Lend-Lease Program" financed by USA, in order to ensure the establishment of the market-economy across the Western European economic landscape. The direct result of such actions caused the shift of capital from Western European industrial-urban centers -into- US manufacturing and financial markets. This somehow undermined Soviet-allied Eastern communist countries. The logic of "Cold War" economic power-structure continued the inertia even latter (during 90-s and further on), up to the present-time trends of European urban decline. Examples of post-war "deindustrialization" cases include London (UK), Leipzig (Germany), Detroit, Michigan (USA), etc.

Detroit, Michigan in USA for example is clear proof of the correlation between the "deindustrialization" and the "shrinking cities" phenomenon. Known as the "Motor City" thanks to its own famous automobile industry sector, it reached its population

peak during 50s. But the American automobile industry could not maintain its global monopoly status, as European and Japanese industries recovered from the WWII damages. Because of the introduction of the new global market competition, Detroit also lost its privileged position of "global Mo-Town". By losing its own production demand, production rates also dropped, while investments shifted to other locations outside Detroit. This encouraged a process of de-industrialization as well as demographic and urban shrinkage.

- **Globalization** – The sciences of political economy and demography pay special attention to the global flows of capital and investment, seen this in relation to population stability. Bretton Woods Conference prepared the world for a new globalized age of trade and investment. The latter establishment of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank (WB), in addition to the US economic aid programs, made Bretton Woods a turning point for the global economy and respective relations. This momentum pushed the birth of concepts such as: i) the developed; ii) and the developing nations. Therefore, the trends of capital investment flows and urban population densities followed the global financial reorganization.

The **"product life-cycle"** theory developed further as **"urban decline" theory**, dealing with economy, demography and political elites, accepting the premise of the "shrinking cities" as a direct result of the economic decline and urban (e)migration. Therefore the root cause of "shrinking cities" nowadays is seen at the lack of industrial diversification within certain urban area facing the problem. The situation indeed, increases unfairly the political and economic power of few big companies, while reducing the ability of local population to react against the lack of investments and de-industrialization process in the city. Further on, lack of urban economic diversity, kills the growth of industrial center and empowerment of local population. This allows few old-industrial elite cities (in the so called "developed" countries) to re-invest in less-regulated and less-cost industries of the "third world".

The theory of "shrinking cities" however, focuses also on the effects of globalization on urban decline through the critique of neoliberalism. Such contextualization highlights globalization and internationalization of the production

processes as a main cause for the "shrinking cities" and other "destructive development policies". Today, could be used as a case study of such argument the economic relationship between USA and China. The neoliberal critique of globalization argues that the main reason of the shrinking cities in the "developed countries" is because of the outflow of capital toward developing countries. The outflow happens because of the inability of cities of the "wealthy" nations to find productive "corners" in the international economic system. Therefore, as capital flows outward almost all cities eventually shrink.

- **Suburbanization** – The migration of wealthier families from the industrial city centers into the surrounding suburban areas, is a dominant trend nowadays especially in the USA. The two prevalent cultural phenomenon are: i) the **"white flight"**; ii) and the **"car culture"**.

"White flight" generally refers to the movement of large percentages of "Caucasian" Americans out of racially-mixed US city centers toward "homogenous" suburban areas. The result of such migration has been the loss of money and infrastructure from urban centers. This is because wealthier and politically powerful population flea from cities. The funding and government interests also followed them. As result of that, a collapse of urban health service happened all over USA. The main outcome of such trend was the stratification of wealth among the poorest (usually minority) groups in the city-centers and the richest (and mostly white) outside the city in suburban locations. As suburbanization began to increase during 20th century urban health and infrastructure quality dropped, and urban areas in US started to decline.

"Car culture and urban sprawl" – The American "car culture" also pushed for further suburbanization and urban sprawl. The car culture became a key cultural aspect of "American-ness", thus making the suburban context an "ideal landscape" to live during the 20-th century. As result of that urban decline only worsened. The phenomenon of urban sprawl in American cities, such as across Los Angeles, happened under the pressure of a "car culture". There are three main impacts because of such situations: i) the sprawl in the declining cities has been more rapid than in growing cities. ii) there have been no differences of suburban areas, among the declining and the growing

living settlements. iii) there have been similar intervention strategies to control sprawl from the perspective city planning. Therefore authorities in USA tried to adapt to the needs of the existing population of the cities, rather than promoting economic incentives to the supposed newcomers.

Other aspects of dealing with the phenomena of "shrinking cities" include:

▪ **Green retirement city** – The concept is used in Europe as a strategy to deal with the shrinking city strategy. The idea means that abandoned or vacant properties could be transformed in green spaces for the retired people migrating from other cities or countries within EU. The newcomers bring their own savings and knowledge in favor of the city revitalization, so they must be encouraged to participate in the community life. Such approach could also have benefits on social inclusion of people and provoke "a process of urban renewal in shrinking conditions", by stimulating upgrading of parks, housing, urban and health care community facilities, etc. Mixing their accommodation with other social and age groups, it is also important to avoid the creation of the "forgotten enclaves" or "high criminality areas".

▪ **Right-sizing** – The idea is to adjust the amount of land available for development, in order to stabilize the deformed/non-functioning markets, and reduce stress over the neighborhoods by considering more the needs of existing populations. Instead of revitalizing of the whole city, residents are stimulated to relocate toward denser neighborhoods, which are followed by the presence of more private services, businesses, and public amenities. The abandoned buildings and areas are often cleaned and developed or reserved for future green infrastructure. The city of Detroit, USA, for example, adopted right-sizing approaches via its "Detroit Work Project" plan, which included: reallocation and prioritizing public safety, providing reliable transportation and demolition plans for vacant structures, etc. In this cases special attention must be paid to the risk of segregation for low income groups, because exclusion contributes to the so called "psycho-social stress level" in the shrinking cities, adding more problems to living environments of such communities.

▪ **Smart shrinkage** – The idea for local authorities is to be initially realistic that the city can hardly return to previous population levels. It takes time otherwise to rebuild qualities and trust among people. In this case local government must accept the shrinkage as a reality, and have a smaller population in the city. This

allows authorities to focus on diversifying local economy and prioritizing budget over relocating people and neighborhoods towards most sustainable neighborhoods. From other side, "tax incentive" programs can assist the existing population, and encourage retaining investment all over the city to promote a vibrant destination. Again it is important to avoid creation of the so called "forgotten enclaves", especially when new investments in the city do not respect the environmental rights of local and poor people.

▪ **Land bank** – This are municipal structures or semi-public authorities that manage the inventory of vacant lands, and the profit generated by the redevelopment. They easy, facilitate and allow local authorities to sell, demolish and rehabilitate abandoned properties. The easier and faster redevelopment procedures, the more they discourage speculation with the newly developed properties. A good example is the case of Flint, Michigan, USA. The shrinking of the industrial city of "General Motors" led to the reduction of the city's labor force. To avoid negative effects of property foreclosure system, Land Bank there provided a series of programs aiming to revitalize the shrinking cities, including: i) "Brownfield Redevelopment" type for polluted lands via tax increment financing; ii) A "greening" strategy to use abandonment as an opportunity for isolated communities, and to involve them in the maintenance and improvement of vacant plots. However, careful analysis must be undertaken to avoid: the increase of land prices and taxes; income disparities among residents; loss of authority of local governments to stop projects, when they fall out of their objectives; etc. A good approach of dealing with vacant land is to work with non-profit local community groups in order to construct more open and green spaces within the shrinking neighborhoods; to reduce vacant plots; and create stronger community commitments.

▪ **Wächterhäuser or 'guardian houses'** – This technique is used in East Germany, where temporary so called "guardian houses" are built within the shrinking areas and neighborhoods, aiming to provide temporary rental-free accommodation/leases. Therefore in such cases it is encouraged the temporary use of private property as public spaces. Partnership with civil society organization is also used for the integration of immigrants. Another type of intervention is the revitalization of vacant plots and abandoned properties for art-performances, art-development purposes, and artists' interactions, as well.

▪ **Environmental justice** – Rapidly shrinking cities, clearly promote misbalanced socio-environmental impacts on the excluded ones, resulting often in critical aspects of the "environmental injustices". Such paradigm in the USA has to do mainly with the problems of income and race, which are critical in understanding the formation of suburbs and the phenomena of shrinking cities there. Therefore it is impossible to avoid interventions responding to the shrinking city phenomenon without confronting the social and environmental justice aspects. This is not usually the case for Europe, where suburbanization has been less extreme, and main factors pushing for the shrinking cities phenomena, are also more closely linked to the aging demographics, de-industrialization (in the West), and the collapse of the communist regime (in the East).

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Dynamic Heritage: the case of Havana

Alessandro Massarente

Dynamic heritage: the case of Havana

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Abstract

This text discusses some practices and theories related to urban planning and architectural design in a UNESCO listed city, promoting a shared approach on the theme of Urban regeneration in Historical contexts. The practices and theories derive from researches and didactic experiences that I have developed with other professors and students in Havana, Cuba.

The first one with CUJAE Instituto Superior Politécnico José Antonio Echeverría was the international cooperation program PatrIndArch on Water Heritage (2013-15), in which CUJAE Cuba, University of Alicante Spain, University of Padova and University of Ferrara were involved.

From this pedagogical experience came the opportunity to program an international Seminar dedicated to "Water, Architecture and Landscape in Europe," held in November 2014 in Instituto Universitario del Agua y de las Ciencias Ambientales, Universidad de Alicante, where I participated with professors and researchers from the Universities of Ferrara, Padova, Alicante, Coimbra, Bucarest, Valenciennes et Hainaut-Cambrésis, with proceedings published in 2015.

This text is mainly derived from the PRIA research program "URB_HE Urban Heritage Conservation as vector of social equity," in which I participated (2015-17), and which was financed as an "Interdisciplinary research project" by the University of Ferrara under a call for proposals dedicated to defining new international fields of research. This research and pedagogical activity was related to the concepts of rehabilitation, regeneration, heritage conservation, which were considered like "moving concepts". The emblem of this dynamic is the evolution of the concept of heritage: from tangible to intangible, from monuments to cultural landscape. Havana and its territory represent a privileged case study from which to observe not only influences of European and North American culture on the Global South cities, but also original hybridizations deriving from the intertwining of different practices related to urban planning and architectural design in UNESCO cities.

The prevailing polycentric structure of the city of Havana, outlined in the phases of its development and in the plans preceding the Revolution, is radicalized through policies implemented in the decade of consolidation (1965-1975) and in the following so-called Five Year's Plan. According to the concept that '... the city is a territorial collectivity, a human

community, both considered in its totality and at the level of each of the parts that compose it' (Segre R. and Lopez Rangel R., 1982: 217)¹, there is the possibility to observe how some of the most complex transformation actions of the modern city are articulated.

First of all, actions linked to a first phase of demolition and thinning of historic centers

that evolve towards opposing policies of conservation and reconstruction of the built heritage, partly result in the relocation of inhabitants and gentrification. Secondly, the permanence of the urban plans for Havana – from those preceding the Revolution to the most recent ones – and in contemporary regeneration projects environmental systems along the waterfronts play a strategic role, tend to infiltrate the urban fabric in sectors relevant for the development of the city. Thirdly, the flexible hierarchy of the urban structure favored by the existing sensitive orthogonal grid in some parts of the city of Havana – in particular in the Vedado district – allows different conditions and situations to coexist, both from a morphological and settlement point of view, and they are recognized over time as heritage values by communities and institutions.

From demolition to reconstruction to displacement

The theories of the avant-garde developed in the CIAM, which in the 1920s and 1930s proposed the demolition of ancient and obsolete areas in the historic centers of European cities, reverberate in some plans and transformation projects of the central areas of Havana² starting from the late 1940s. In those years the area of La Habana Vieja was considered unhealthy, and the concept of rehabilitation was used to justify demolition projects and thinning plans. In 1955 the Junta Nacional de Planificación de Cuba was established

with the main objective of drawing up a master plan capable of guiding the urban development of the city. The development of the Master Plan was carried out under the direction of José Luis Sert and his studio TPA Town Planning Associates, in which Paul Lester Weiner and Paul Schultz also worked³. Settled in the United States, Sert was at the time president of the CIAM and this plan, while evidently affected by some of the theories that had been developed in previous congresses, presents interesting innovations in the ways in which it defines, for example, the relationship between city and water.

Starting from a zoning by social classes and functions, this plan takes into consideration the tendencies that different parts of the city had shown, including tourism in particular. This plan, while providing some radical replacement interventions at the heart of the historic city and in the Centro Habana area, it modifies the road layout and also the number and size of the urban blocks (manzana) in the historic center much less than what was foreseen through the application of CIAM's principles. After the 1959 Revolution, the plan was not carried out and some of the demolition interventions that had been proposed in parts of the historic city were not followed up.

In the last decades another practice was developed which, starting from the competences of the Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad de La Habana directed by

¹ / Institute for Physical Planning, "El esquema del Plan Director de La Habana", Habana 2, in *Arquitectura/Cuba*, 34/1/2, 1973: 30; in Segre R. and Lopez Rangel R. (1982) *Architettura e territorio nell'America Latina*, Milano: Electa.

² / Zardoya Loureda, 2012: 16-18.

³ / Lester Weiner, P., Sert, J.L. and Schultz, P. 1959.



Fig. 1 / Focsa building and public market, Vedado, Avana, Cuba. Source / Massarente, 2014.

Eusebio Leal⁴, established instruments of action through the availability of a real estate fund and by declaring the historical center, i.e. the area of La Habana Vieja, as an "Area of priority interest for Conservation" in 1993, following its registration in the UNESCO list in 1982. Then an urban renewal process started and this was based on new types of planning tools⁵ in addition to the conservation and reconstruction interventions of the buildings in the historic center. This process, while intending to favor business initiatives that adhere to the principles of social and solidarity economies and cooperative forms of associations, inevitably produced phenomena of gentrification and relocation of inhabitants to other areas of the city⁶. The transition from projects of radical transformation of the historical center to plans for the reconstruction and conservation of the UNESCO area of La Habana Vieja leads, therefore, to the phenomena of temporal relocation, displacement and progressive replacement of original inhabitants with international tourists.

Environmental systems infiltrate the city

The areas along the waterfront of La Habana Vieja that face the Puerto and the Bahía to the east form a continuation of the system formed by the Malecón

tradicional, which represents the front of the city towards the sea from the Vedado and the estuary of the Almendares river to the west. The possibility of considering this urban front towards the water as a single complex system allows the intertwining of infrastructural and environmental issues of particular importance for a city like Havana. After the plan of Jean-Claude Nicolas Forestier (1925-1930), which articulates a network of open spaces inspired by the model of parks and avenues of Paris and on which the structure of today's city hinges, the plan directed by Sert identifies a sequence of public parks and pedestrian areas on a metropolitan and urban scale, which infiltrates the urban fabric of the neighborhoods of this part of the city, aimed at strengthening the role of this Malecón / Puerto system towards the waterfront. The idea of the landscape tinfiltrating the city is developed and radicalized in the "Plan Director de La Habana" (1965-1970) developed by the architects of the Institute of Physical Planning, directed by Sergio Baroni.

The plan intends to strengthen the polycentric structure of the city, through the '... succession and alternation between urban landscape and natural landscape ...': 'Metropolitan-level green areas will become a green thorn of the metropolitan structure. [...] The green



Fig. 2 / Walking through Linea, Vedado, Avana, Cuba. Source / Massarente, 2014.

will be a structuring element of the urban design that will strengthen the unitary image of the space' (Vaquero, M., Garnier, J.P., Asquez, E., Gonzales, M. and Garatti V. 2017: 72-73).

The recent "Plan Maestro para la revitalización integral de La Habana Vieja" confirms a unitary vision of the internal waterfront, assuming that the recreational vocation of port equipment, already started with the new cruise terminal, the market and other commercial activities within the pre-existing piers, becomes predominant in the new regeneration scenarios. Considering the eastern part of Havana as a suitable place for the development of the contemporary city and the Bahía as a new 'center without

a center' (Castillo del la Cruz, C. 2013), according to these studies it is possible to convert the Bahía into a large park capable of infiltrating the urban fabric from the edges of its own waterfront. The urban front of the city towards the water, whether rivers or sea, can therefore assume strategic importance for the future of cities where it is possible to intertwine settlements, infrastructural networks and environmental corridors.

Formal variety and flexible hierarchy

The Vedado district of Havana, developed through the model of the garden city for the bourgeois social classes, is characterized by a wide formal variety, a sort of catalogue of buildings that refer to

⁴ / Leal Spengler, E. 2017: 34-41

⁵ / For example, PEDI Plan Especial de Desarrollo Integral, starting from the first edition in 1998.

⁶ / These phenomena were particularly deepen in Alietti, A. 2018: 45-55.



Fig. 3 / Through Calle K towards la Rampa, Vedado, Avana, Cuba. Source: Massarente, 2014.

different architectural styles - neoclassical, Neo-Romanesque, Neo-Gothic, Art Deco, Modern Movement - which coexist thanks to an urban structure based on the orthogonal grid.

This particular character of the Vedado is confirmed by being recognized as "Zona de Protección" of the area of 5ta Avenida by the Comisión Nacional de Monumentos" in 1999. However, the gap between the values recognized in the central urban areas of Habana Vieja remains important, including all the phenomena of gentrification that ensued, as well as the role that other areas such as Vedado have played in the history of the city. In recent years, a series of interventions and investments have tended to enhance individual episodes of the Vedado (as in the case of the Fabrica de Arte Cubano) and have begun to consider, albeit sometimes with questionable results, the global value of this part of the city, as well as other areas such as Habana Vieja.

Along these margins between the city and water, it will be necessary to consider with the necessary attention settlements, infrastructural and environmental issues deriving from this evolving framework, if we want to explore possible sustainable scenarios for the city of Havana in the coming decades, at different scales and between local development and social roots.

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