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ITINERARIES

Through the Traces of Tirana's Different Authorities

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ITINERARIES

Through the traces of Tirana's different authorities

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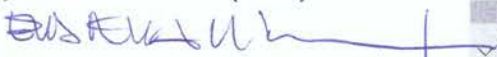
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Abstract

This research is built upon the analysis of the spatial manifestation of authority in Tirana. Adopting a phenomenological approach, the author analyses the relation between authority and space, passing through Tirana's main itineraries and the centralities that connect them, in different points in time.

The history of Tirana is made of subsequent historic layers, juxtaposed, often antagonizing or negating each other. They belong to different authorities that have placed their respective signs in the urban fabric, in the places and architecture of the capital, probably once carefully designed remnant traces.

The research is organized along the main itineraries of the city in four specific moments, in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the regimes that shaped them. Successively, the traces of the ottoman rule, of the first years after the independence, the first historicist structure designed by the Albanian king and the consequent [again historicist] structure envisioned and partially implemented by Italy during the World War II, are analyzed.

The itineraries, describing the actual state of the city in a determined period, are narrated in first person and present tense. This is a conscious choice aiming to a more vivid expression of the sensation experienced by the viewer along the walk through Tirana's itineraries.

The objectives of this thesis are:

1. The understanding of the evolutionary process of the complex constellations of spaces making the center of Tirana;
2. The analysis of interconnected pieces of the city in continuity with each other, seen as contiguous systems inside the city, as itineraries rather than separated centralities;
3. The un-concealment of the symbolic behind the signs and traces along the capital's main itineraries.

The traces of the past and sign of the present will help a better understanding of Tirana and of the relevant influential authorities that have shaped it.

This work will not be only a mere remark of the symbolic of power expressed through signs but also an analysis of the potentially limiting influence of political ideologies and signs on the extensive use of the public spaces by the citizens.

This thesis will try to shed some light on the unfamiliar past of Tirana and to contribute to a further understanding of the universal relationship in between man and authority.

Keywords

Sign | Trace | Space | Place | Authority | Everydayness | Tirana

Sommario

Questa ricerca si sviluppa in torno all'analisi della manifestazione spaziale del potere [politico/economico] a Tirana. Con un approccio che ha aspetti fenomenologici, l'autore analizza le relazioni tra autorità e spazio, passando attraverso gli itinerari principali della città, e le centralità da loro connesse, in tempi diversi.

Tirana è fatta di stratificazioni storiche diverse, sovrapposte, spesso in mutuale antagonismo e perfino negazione. Questi sono segni del passato, divenuti tracce del presente, appartenenti alle diverse autorità e da loro posti sulla città, nei suoi luoghi e architetture.

Questa ricerca si organizza lungo gli itinerari principali di Tirana in quattro momenti specifici nel periodo immediato al crollo dei regimi che gli hanno dato forma. In successione si va lungo le tracce del domino turco-ottomano, i primi anni del dopo indipendenza, lungo la prima struttura storicista disegnata per il Re Albanese, e l'ultima struttura [sempre storicista] progettata durante gli anni dell'occupazione Italiana. Gli itinerari che descrivono lo stato di fatto della città nei diversi periodi vengono raccontati in prima persona e nel presente. Questa è una scelta voluta, con lo scopo di dare un'impressione più vivida delle sensazioni che il passaggio lungo i luoghi di Tirana scaturiva sul osservatore.

Fra gli obiettivi della tesi sono:

1. La compressione dell'evoluzione della complessa costellazione di spazi che compongono il centro di Tirana.
2. L'analisi interconnessa delle parti contigue della città. Loro verranno considerate come sistemi continui dentro l'abitato, come itinerari e non come centralità separate.
3. Lo svelamento delle simbologie e significati latenti nei segni e tracce lungo gli itinerari principali della capitale Albanese.

Le tracce del passato e i segni del presente, evidenziati negli diversi itinerari, aiuteranno una migliore compressione di Tirana e delle autorità di rilievo che l'hanno plasmata.

Lo studio vuole essere più di una semplice osservazione della simbolica espressione del potere tramite segni costruiti ma anche un'analisi di una influenza che ha il potenziale di limitare l'uso dello spazio pubblico dalla parte del cittadino.

In fine, questa tesi cerca di gettare luce su un passato poco noto di Tirana e di contribuire ad una ulteriore compressione della relazione universale fra l'uomo e il potere.

Parole Chiave

Segno | Traccia | Spazio | Luoghi | Autorità | Quotidianità | Tirana

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1. INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

This thesis is about Tirana. About its center made of subsequent historic layers juxtaposed, often antagonizing or negating each other. They belong to different authorities that have left their respective signs in the urban fabric of the capital's places and architecture. This thesis suggests that many of these traces, were carefully designed.

This study will go through the understanding of the evolutionary process of the complex constellation of spaces that make the center of Tirana. The analysis of interconnected pieces of the city in continuity with each other, seen as contiguous systems inside the city, as itineraries rather than separated centralities. The Concealment of the symbolic behind the vestiges placed along the capital's main itineraries.

By analyzing Tirana through the influential authorities that have shaped it, I will try to define the potentially limiting influence of these ideologies and their signs on the extensive use of Tirana's center by its citizens. I think of the public spaces of the city as places *"where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things, but to make their appearance explicitly"* (Arendt, 1958). Who has the control over these venues of appearance has the control over society. A better understanding of these dynamics, to which this thesis tries to contribute, will surely help in the activation of a process of re-appropriation of the capital's declining public places by its citizens.

1.1. The Social Construction of Space

The discussion starts with the broader topic of society because it's within its domain that our existence happens. In this part of the introduction, I will try to make a link in between the human society and its built environment. Suggesting that similarly the features of society, its structure, differences and hierarchy are impressed in the way we build, organize our streets and place our signs of power. This first part of the introductory chapter is preparatory, to the final definition of the thesis objectives and to the other chapters treating in detail the city of Tirana.

Society and Difference

Our human organization in society seems a natural and unavoidable part of life, whether a universal truth meant to be or just a situation that came by chance in the process of the human history, at the present state *"Man's specific humanity and his sociality are inextricably*

intertwined" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Within its domains occurs everything concerning our life, our birth, the birth of cities, death - of both – the diffusion of knowledge, from wars to space exploration. For these reasons, looking at it closer, given that the main subject of this study generates within the dynamics of society, seems necessary.

However, because this is not the main topic of the research, I will limit myself to a general overview of the drives that brought humans together turning them in "*Social Man*", different from each other, and to the consequences arisen by this concert.

Society

What is society and what are its components? I will start with a question that is familiar to common sense. Society has been thoroughly studied, it belongs to the present; we are components of the society. Society is given to us and we are capable to at least have an initial say on it based on our everyday experience, even without first consulting reputed definitions from sociologists and philosophers. We can describe "*what we 'know' as 'reality' in our everyday, non-or pre-theoretical lives*" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 27), we can describe what we experience and reflect on it: "*The theoretical formulations of reality, whether they be scientific or philosophical or even mythological, do not exhaust what is 'real' for the members of a society*" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 27).

Our belonging to the reality of society starts way before our birth. We become part of its mechanisms, within our mother's uterus. Since there we are being observed, measured and analyzed carefully, within patterned *institutions of healthcare*. At this point our existence is already controlled by written regulations. By the first months we are considered, just embryos, is easier to get rid of us, if unwanted, and after that we start becoming pertinent to a larger social domain with growing rights to exist. Our parents are obliged to take responsibility, and if they will refuse some mandated institutions will take care of us. Unless we present disabilities, that will compromise our possibility to be mentally or physically deign to the proper conventional characteristics of a regular citizen, our path, toward the full integration into the social structure, is already decided.

After our birth the process continues, we are given a name, and within a very short period we are obliged to acknowledge and be acknowledged by *civil institutions*. Most of us will have to be

inserted in the mechanisms of other types of institutions, religious ones, through complex rites as that of baptismal or circumcision we will so become part of relevant sub-circles of the society that will decide our spiritual belonging and at least influence our future conception on many things regarding life. Shortly after, with the growing awareness of our conscience, we are taken over by *education institutions*, that initially in the form of funny nursery rhymes and later in more structured ways, will teach us how to behave, that having a bath or eating vegetables is good or “*that to pour rivers of blood for our country*”¹, is as better.

At some point in life we are considered adults, we have to take direct responsible for our actions – meaning that we shall acknowledge the *law authority* and eventually come to terms with the *juridical institutions*. We have the right, often obliged, to choose the representatives of our hierarchically structured *governing institutions*. We can choose not to go to school anymore but we have to make for our living and pay our share for sustaining the *common order*. In the journey our social role is defined, not chosen by us because we were *thrown into the world* (Heidegger, 1962) alone [Figure 1]. At least in this process we have our unique individual and *different* perspective, of our body and a complex conscience.

In the very same journey, we are simultaneously not alone, since birth we start building intense nets of relationships, constantly struggling for achievement, within our family, friendship circles, school classes, work community and within the overall structure of the society. Thus, this is what makes our everyday living and what *Society* is, a community of individuals, with a social role, whom relationships are regulated by laws, mutually decided, and institutions operating accordingly and granting their rightful observance. In the laws, usually evolving, is assembled what is called *the culture of the group*, how the community life shall be organized and operate, the contributions and revenues for the members and the prevention and the grade of the punishment for the actions harmful to the public good.

The first *Primitive societies* where based on informal relationships created by family and kin affinities, community and leadership where naturally, accepted and experienced as “*a child experiences his family and his home*” (Popper K. , 1945, p. 149). The growing ability of collecting

¹ This is a verse taken from a Patriotic song, entitled to the love towards the country’s flag taught in the Albanian kindergartens.

and producing resources transformed its inner dynamics. Communities grew in size and complexity, the correlations in between their member's became increasingly formal, and the first "Social Contracts" appeared. Plato in his *"The Republic"* gives us the first allusion to this formal transformation in relation to Justice: *"Those unable to flee the one and take the other therefore decide it pays to make a pact neither to commit nor to suffer injustice. It was here that men began to make laws and covenants, and to call whatever the laws decreed "legal" and "Just"* (Plato, *The Republic*, 1979, p. 32).

The increasing complexity opened the community to a later stage of development, the *"spoiled city"*, as Plato defines it, made of citizens searching for more than basic needs and becoming interested in more sophisticated forms of thought and enjoyment. A larger community meant further specialization of the different members, more restrictions and eventually, *the Institutions* bridging the increasing culture and individuals made their appearance. These institutions carried on them a surplus of authority - delegated by the other members of the society, becoming the guardians of the inner order through the enforcement of laws. Apparently, all these components - individuals, laws, institutions - interconnected to the present day, form the dense structure of relationships of society. The social structure, within which our existence takes place, is ordered and organized, *"one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure"* (Derrida, *Structure, Sign and Play*, 2001).

Survival and Order

I just went through what society is. It is not enough, for a better understanding is equally important to know why society is. *Why humans found themselves organized under the structure of Society?* A reason for this, quite basic, and hence hardly deniable can be found in one of the essential instincts, common to men and the animal world, that is to survive as long as possible. Surviving meant protecting oneself and the own progeny, granting thus also a genetic survival beyond the individual bodily existence, from life treating dangers. Plato considered man an imperfect being unable to survive alone and as such compelled to live in a community. Through Socrates character, he tells us: *"I think a city begins because the individual is not self-sufficient but has many needs."* (Plato, *The Republic*, 1979, p. 41). Herbert Spencer gives more insights, linking this need for a common society or context to human biological and evolutionary features.

Man unsuited for basic survival skill at birth has to develop them within its family (Spencer, 1960). He develops his surviving skills inside the structure of the society becoming therefore dependent on the culture of the group.

Survival seen as one of the triggers of the human societies eases the passage to another point of the discourse. It introduces another element connected to both man and society, which is *Order*. For Arnheim, *Order is a prerequisite of survival*. According to this thought, order would logically be what a human unconsciously and then consciously searches. Society, apparently, is one of those “*orderly arrangements, inbred by evolution*” (Arnheim, *Entropy and Art, An Essay on Order and Disorder*, 1971) intrinsic in the human nature. Order is in us and for this in any human creation - “*...be it a crystal or a solar system, a society or a machine, a statement of thoughts or a work of art. Subjected to the tendency toward simplest structure, the object or event or institution assumes orderly, functioning shape.*” (Arnheim, *Entropy and Art, An Essay on Order and Disorder*, 1971). It is in the cycles of nature, in the ongoing metabolism of our body and in the things, we produce. The ordered models that are supposed to make our life easier are a response to the very same individual needs in a social scale. Popper himself an opponent of the *closed society*, “*...the magical or tribal or collectivist society...*” (Popper K. , 1945, p. 147) and thus of any argument that could justify it as a model of reference, as for example the “*organic or biological theory of social structures*” (Popper K. R., 2013, p. 37) , admits that the biological models can be applied to “*a considerable extent*” to primitive and less complex societies.

Hegel gives another perspective that can explain how self-consciousness and society might have initiated. In his definition of the thing as an object of truth he designs for us a process where things - within them and in relationship to other things are determined by the negation of opposites. In this twofold dynamic of opposites, we can trace the passage from sense perception to consciousness to thought. This very same process distinguishes man from animals and gives rise to the *Social Man* and society. In the mutual recognition between two individuals, “*Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged*” (Hegel G. W., *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1807, p. 111). We are one and many, we are in our self but also in the others, the awareness of our self exists in the contradiction of this plurality of our identities, in their difference.

Difference and Hierarchy

Differentiation is among the “*determinants of social relations*” (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952, p. 191). So was for Plato: “*people are quite different by nature and each is naturally fitted for a different job*” (Plato, *The Republic*, 1979, p. 42). Without entering the discussion if people are born equal, for Plato they weren’t, it’s at least unquestionable that they have different roles inside the social structure, their contribution is not the same, nor do they have the same revenues. It has been this way in the past, and so it is today; someone had to deal with food, someone with the defense of the community and someone else had to take care that everybody was doing the due in the right time and place according to the rules of that particular society.

The differentiation process concentrated more power to certain individuals or groups, that very surplus of power mandated to the institutions. From advisers they became leaders and from bearers they became holders of the power the community vested on them in the first place. Societies are made of differences, men and women, farmers, auxiliaries, nobles, erudite, priests, and classes. For Rousseau Society was the *Heard of Men* (Rousseau), implicitly suggesting the existence of a differentiated shepherd having a superior social role. In describing the concept of *lordship and bondage* Hegel explains that the Lord is he whom has control on both his *self-consciousness* and of *itself conscious belonging in the other*. Therefore, he is entitled to the role of leader by controlling the others consciousness (Hegel G. W., *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1807).

While in primitive societies authority was exercised, without changing the basic structure of the organization, a clan chief acted as such only when requested from time to time, in larger and more complex societies more efforts were needed. So the group needed more common efforts, common laws for internal organization, a common army to confront external dangers; a militia for the inner dangers, a court to guarantee that the common laws were followed and that justice, meaning what is written in the laws, was done. All these common efforts introduced necessary fund-raising efforts, taxes that led to the formation of common treasury. This large, at times enormous, amount of money led to further imbalances of power, normally weighing toward the treasury custodian. On a larger scale, a well-known example was the arbitrary transfer of the common treasury of the *Delian League* from the island of Delos to Athens. Pericles entitled to himself the common wealth of the other Greek city-states, founded for raising an army in case of

another Persian incursion. The event unfolded in 454 BC marked the development of the Athenian Imperialism, and among the many things contributed to the edification of the important architectonic signs of the Parthenon.

Divine Authority

While treating the topic of society, the concepts of *difference* and *hierarchy* were also introduced. An increasingly hierarchical structure was the response to the growing complexity of the social structures. Individuals were holding different positions in the pyramid of power, some entitled with the role of enforcing the law, that of protection from external enemies, or the administration of people's money. Gradually it became imperative to have someone that would assume the role of the center of the structure of the village, of the changing primitive society, into a state.

The members had to ensure that people or groups of them, topping the hierarchy, were wise, strong and trustworthy, bearing characteristics that were the closest possible to that of the divinities, a concept laying also in the definition of the world hierarchy, from the Greek, *hierarkhia*, "rule of a high priest", from *hierarkhes*, "leader of sacred rites". The men that were in the highest ranks of the organized structures had a special connection to the divine; they were supposed to hold a knowledge that was limited for the many, a knowledge that was coming from outside the structure of the society.

After all they were man, maybe more talented but prone to corruption and the seduction of power. They were conscious that their privileged position at the top of the hierarchy could grant them better chances of survival as well. Their high standing names and deeds could survive beyond their generation and commemorated by future ones. Their wealth and authority transmitted to their progeny. These leaders of the main institutions, the leaders of other minor leaders and of the entire community, of the society and of the state at some point became kings. From guardians of the sacred rites they became rulers *by divine right* (Spencer, 1960). The rulers often won their leadership in battle, for this they were considered more than human, invincible, and capable of achieving great victories for the entire group, "*war father of all and king of all; and some he has shown as gods, others men; some he has made slaves, others free*" (Heraclitus & Kahn, 1979)

Divinity was not solely for the King, but for all the components necessary for controlling the structure of the society. For example, to Heraclitus the laws governing the society were not just random, they all had a divine origin, and for this they were partially unchangeable. *“For all human laws are nourished by a divine one. It prevails as it will and suffices for all and is more than enough.”* (Heraclitus & Kahn, 1979). The king and the laws, and hence the state had a divine origin, they were predetermined, waiting to be introduced to the human history. In the Hegelian thought the idea of the state was already there, it was within nature, lying as a *dormant spirit*. Along the process of being acknowledged by society, *“Only when it is present in consciousness, knowing itself as an existent object is it the state”* (Hegel G. W., Elements of the Philosophy of Right, 1991).

“Sovereignty is the ideality of every particular authority “, writes Hegel, for him the center of the social structure was the authority, that in an ideal society it is absolute and belonged to the King. It served as the keystone giving stability and immobility to the whole. For Derrida the center was the only element that did not have to conform to the laws of the structure, the center was *“that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality.”* (Derrida, Structure, Sign and Play, 2001, p. 352). The King and its apparatus were capable, in the eyes of a manipulated society, to transcend the structure and to connect to the divine, to that “God” that for most of the human history was simply accepted.

Preserving Authority

For Plato people were not born equal and thus the ideal form of state was a strict, class based, entity. For him the ideal state, also its original form, changed by the inherent degradation of our world of particulars, was Aristocracy. Aristocracy was based on the *“divine progeny” ruled by a “Philosopher King”* (Plato, The Republic, 1979). *At least to its ruling members, slavery, caste, and class rule were ‘natural’ in the sense of being unquestionable”* (Popper K. , 1945, p. 149). Plato’s Aristocracy was supposed to be after the models of the world of forms, and thus perfect.

For most part of the human history, the basic center of the society was the authority of the king and of his superior class, supported by a transcendental connection to higher divinities. This connection could justify its leading position and actions; he was a walking god, and thus an unmovable and eternal center. The King was untouchable. Foucault provides a very detailed

description of Robert-François Damien's execution who attempted to take the life of King Louis XV on March 2, 1757. For the crime of regicide, death was not enough. The perpetrator's body had to pass an exhausting procedure of horrific tortures. At the end he was burned and his ashes thrown to the wind (Foucault, 1995). However, this fundamentalist belief in the King had to be justified. After all any authority in order to provide solid grounds for their systems needs the approval of their subjects *All political institutions are manifestations and materializations of power; they petrify and decay as soon as the living power of the people ceases to uphold them*" (Arendt, *Crisis of the Republic*, 1972). The philosophers often quoted in this first introductory part, Heraclitus, Plato, Aristotle's and Hegel have also sustained and inspired absolutisms, dictatorships and historicist approaches (Popper K. , 1945). They were the architects that constructed the philosophical supports for these systems. Already in their ages, they were conscious of what Derrida disclosed for us only in XX century, how the center operated in the past and in many contemporary societies still does, *"The function of this center was not only to orient; balance, and organize the structure...but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the free play of the structure."* (Derrida, *Structure, Sign and Play*, 2001, p. 352). In Heraclitus and Plato's thinking, arresting change was impossible but necessary to stop degradation. So far, even the most powerful of the totalitarian regimes, of the empires, after the rise have had their fall. They did not arrest change. Nevertheless, they tried.

A mean to prevent the free interplay of the structure was the application of a teleological model to the changing processes by considering it as a necessary passage toward a *final cause* (Aristotle, 350 bc). The history and the future were given a meaning and a goal. In modern times, even more sophisticated concepts as that of historicism² where introduced within the human *"finite provinces of meaning"* (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 39), so they would become immediately intelligible and reachable for the subjects of authority, for the citizen. The perfect state, domination over other nations or the classless society became predetermined and projected as a final cause.

² The belief of historical determinists that the historical course can be rationally and scientifically predicted.

Signs over Space

So far, I went through a general perspective of society as a human creation. Gradually I will enter into the domain of the manufactured world. *"Space is social construct – yes. But social relations are also constructed of space"* (Gregory & Urry, 1985, p. 12), and this thesis is interested in the social content, but even more so, in the spatial containers and architectonic signs conceived in order to influence society. Ricoeur describes the shaping of a dwelling and does so by using terms as protecting, demarcating, controlling, specialization of the parts and assignment of places, activities and rhythms (Ricoeur, 1998). With ease, this terminology can be used to describe the roles of society, state or governing authorities. The Greek expression, "Whenever you go you will be a Polis", discloses that the space of society precedes the built space. First there is the space of Society where discussion, interaction happens, where ideas were first conceived. Then of course, the Polis was translated in the consequent architectural form.

The same terminology is applicable to society and the individuals structured through the organization of the state. Definitively, there is a connection between man's sociality and its built living space. For the same reasons, the characteristics of society, its differences and the antagonisms of centers are embodied in the spaces that it has constructed.

Among the immediate means used to convene historicist ideas serving the objective of preserving authority, is certainly architecture. Its potential immediateness due to its materiality, visibility and scale, was broadly exploited by regimes for their own preservation. One of the quotes of Heraclitus states: "The people must fight for the law as for their city wall" (Heraclitus & Kahn, 1979), equating the state, the social role and divine origin embodied in the laws to the manmade edifications.

Again from Heraclitus to Hegel both have explained the relevance of the sign, "The lord whose oracle is in Delphi neither declares nor conceals, but gives a sign" (Heraclitus & Kahn, 1979), and apparently this has been followed by the countless rulers succeeded in the human history. Hegel gives a detailed explanation of the strength of taking position by designation, *"If I seize a thing or give form to it, the ultimate significance is likewise a sign, a sign given to others in order to exclude them and to show that I have placed my will in the thing. For the concept of the sign is that the thing does not count as what it is, but as what it is meant to signify"* (Hegel G. W., 1991, p. 80).

The pyramids are manufactured signs left by the pharaohs. I already wrote before about how the Parthenon was a sign designed by Pericles. The Port of Athens itself became the imperialistic symbol of the Athenian democracy. Even Plato's *Republic* setting was in the Piraeus. This place and its walls become the venue of the conflict in between the Athenian demos (people) and the supporters of the Oligarchic party. Popper, based on the work of Thucydides writes, "*The Long Walls were completed, which meant that the democracy could enjoy security as long as it upheld its naval supremacy*" (Popper K. , 1945).

The importance of the signs of architecture transpires not only through the will to build them but also by the will to destroy them. In antiquity, Herostratus burned the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus only to seek fame for himself. This has not changed to the present days. The well-known events of September 11, were all directed to important signs of the United States, to the *Twin Towers* a symbol of their economic supremacy or the *Pentagon* the symbol of the military might. The inertia of this disastrous event activated a series of armed conflicts, led by the Americans first in Afghanistan and later in Iraq. The apparent conclusive event of the conflict was again on a manufactured place, in Baghdad, over a sign of the antagonist authority. On April 2003, on Paradise (Firdos) Square, a metallic chain was wrapped, around the neck of the bronze Statue of the just discharged Iraqi despot³. The monument, and with it a sign of the fallen regime, was dragged down by an American military vehicle, surrounded by an agitated local crowd.

The imageries of Baghdad are too similar with those of 1991 Tirana. On February 20, large crowds violated the central space of Tirana, "Skanderbeg Square", and they did not leave until they brought down the statue of the dictator, Enver Hoxha. This event symbolically dismantled the fundamentals of the Albanian Socialism. Less than 2 month later, on April 2, in the subversive northern city of Shkoder, another protest occurred, even more violent and again directed over one of the architectonic symbols of the regime. The local headquarter of the Labor Party were assaulted, occupied and set on fire **[Figure 2]**. From there on, the fall of the regime was just a matter of time. I recall, from my personal experience, a family visit in Shkoder on July of the same year. While walking on the City's Boulevard on a hot summer afternoon, there was this building, empty and incinerated. Its darkened façade was the strongest sign on the whitish buildings of the

³ Saddam Hussein

street. The symbolic of the burned party headquarters was probably stronger afterwards than before the protest.

The last unquestioned signs were left by the renaissance Kings of France, and Europe. Until the *rupture event* (Derrida, 2001) occurred, that according to Benevolo symbolically marks also the end of Renaissance. Its opening act was the discourse of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, on the “*Art and Sciences*”. He described society, as social contract based on the will of people. The consequences of this idea were soon manifested and immediately understood by his contemporaries. The first was Hegel. He resisted to the ideas of Rousseau that were dangerously harmful to the theories centered on the sovereign and a determined vision of the state. A union based on the free opinions of the people could “*destroy the divine [element] which has being in and for itself and its absolute authority and majesty*” (Hegel G. W., 1991, p. 277). Despite the efforts of Hegel the fundamentals of the idea, that the center was within and outside the structure soon crumbled; “*it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function*” (Derrida, Structure, Sign and Play, 2001, p. 353).

Eventually what was initiated by Rousseau is still in process, making the topic of the seizure of the society and its space by the center, still relevant. “*The great political superstition of the past was the divine right of kings. The great political superstition of the present is the divine right of parliaments.*” (Spencer, 1960), so even today under the parliamentary umbrella, for many the will to leave their own vestige still remains. Such contemporary symbols belong to the modern totalitarian regimes, as is the large *Juche Tower* in Pyongyang, honoring the founding father of North Korea. The monument during the nineties crisis, locally called the *Arduous March*, was always lighted up even during the extended energy shortages. However, even the western democracies, are not immune to the phenomena. The president of the United States of America, Donald Trump, while favoring a project for a wall separating America and Mexico disclosed that his idea is not simply functional to the illegal immigration issue. He declared, “*China built a wall that’s 13,000 miles long 2,000 years ago. My ambition is for ours to be much higher*” (Nixon & Qiu, 2018), revealing his will to leave at least a touchable sign in its 4 years of presidency. Even in the small Albania in need of major economic reforms, the most propagandized political

program is *Urban Renaissance*, a national project of urban reconstructions and beautification interventions all over the country's urban centers. Our cities seem intertwined with the societies dwelling in it, in many of their aspects. Difference, hierarchy and the resulting centers are embodied in our social structure and similarly signs are inseparable from our settlements. Apparently, having a sign-less space free of ideology is impossible, perhaps utopic. The visionaries of the utopias had to create the theoretical presuppositions for their society to function. The fundamentals of society, the family, had to be changed. Thomas Moore society of "U-topia", "Non-Place" [Figure 3], was structured through communal families. The roles were given by the community and accepted, placating beforehand any discrepancy and individualism. Similarly, the structure of the Utopian city, of Amurot, was relatively simple and utilitarian; there were no leisure gardens or monuments, or perspectives finalized by landmarks; the city was organized by an orthogonal grid. The Rectangular orchards were enclosed within parietal dormitory blocks. The streets were strictly for the circulation of goods and people. On a territorial scale, the city was on fecund lands with abundant water, on an island, in a secure valley along a large and unsurmountable river (Moore, 1516). Any prerequisite for conflicts, which could trigger differences, was removed. Thomas Moore Utopia was a sign less space lacking a distinctive authority or a ruler that was in need of leaving his symbols. The author's model is an *objet trouvé*, free of war, famines or social conflicts. However; our reality has been and is different.

The utopian thinkers that tried to implement their ideas all failed. Robert Owen a British manufacturer and Social reformer tried. He envisioned a society as a *living machinery* (Owen, 1913-16), and saw in man the victim of random circumstances. In his opinion by eliminating the randomness of the man growing process, since the early years of his life through education, the society as a whole could have a better performance. After experimenting his social principles in his New Lanark institution, he finally founded *New Harmony*, in Pennsylvania. The community based on the equality of its members failed only three years (1828) after the foundation (1825). Conscious that society is mirrored in our spaces and that authority is exercised through built in symbols, I will proceed through some concrete examples that I have experienced directly. These examples have a similar scale and dynamics with those of my case study of Tirana. Such is the case of Riga in the Baltics, located in a small state surrounded by larger nations. Or the case of

the neighboring Macedonia that is going through a delayed process of nation-building. The third case is that of Rome, that has a universal valence.

The Verticals of Riga

The Latvian history bears the complexities of the particular position of the country. A small nation bordering larger powers that found in its territory expansionist grounds. Its size and particular position bears similarities with that of Albania. Furthermore, it is a context that I have experience directly, in a visit in 2016.

The German and Swedish rule gave to the Latvians Lutheranism while the Polish and Lithuanian rule introduced Catholicism. The XVIII and XIX were the centuries of the Russian tsarist rule, while in the XX century and exactly the end of the First World War Latvia became for the first time independent. Its sovereignty was brusquely interrupted by the Second World War, when the country became part of the Soviet Union. Since 1991 independence was restored and Latvia is now part of the European Union. All its different stages and actors' part of this small nation's history are evident and imprinted in its urban fabric.

The city is situated in a plain, along the banks of the Daugava River and in proximity of the Baltic Sea. The town, as all the country, has a very low elevation, surrounded by forests and lacking higher points that would be visible from greater distance. The old city without natural defensive features was once surrounded by two fortified perimeters of large stoned walls. They were demolished during the subsequent stages of Riga's development. The old fabric within the first wall is well preserved and has still its original appearance while the buffer area in between the two walls, similarly with the Viennese ring, has undergone large transformation. In this part of Riga are located the large public gardens and the important institutional and cultural buildings of the capital, built during the XIX and XX century.

Rising Signs of Capitalism and Signs of the Collapsed Socialism

In the relatively flat skyline of Riga the verticals are particularly noticeable. Through them an attentive observer can understand the political and religious conflicts and the competitions that have occurred during the city's long history. The scarcity of natural landmarks that could have been appropriated and exploited has originated the phenomena of man-made-signs oriented

toward the sky. These presences are immediately noticeable from the first kilometers of the short drive from the airport to the city center. Immense and isolated newly built skyscrapers emerge at far distance, clearly introduced during the recent decades of capitalism, that here signifies more than the freedom from the failed socialist economic system but as a national liberation from a half century soviet dominion.

Nonetheless, the landmarks of the past regime are still strong and imposing. Just before crossing the river and entering the proper center of city, laying on an island the visitor is accompanied by the gigantic *Radio and Television Tower* build in the last years of the soviet regime. The structure, one of the highest in Europe, is designed to be visible and clearly a powerful and longstanding mark of a regime with its roots deep in the Russian empire and in the omnipresent neighboring Moscow.

The ideology of the structure lays there disguised by its rational function as an antenna and by a carefully engineered structural design. It mirrors the very same regime that erected it, a regime that professed rational and scientific bases, the so called Scientific Socialism, that *“by virtue of being scientific, was immune to systemic failure”*. (Neimanis, 1977, p. 23). As demonstrated by the events that followed, few years after the finalization of the structure, this wasn't true.

Religious and Stalinist signs

Inside the old city the impressions left by the sign of the large river and soviet antenna changes. The spaces of the old town are compact and more intimate, different from the openness of the surrounding city. They are still dominated by the older Christian cathedrals, even those crowned by exceptionally high towers **[Figure 4]**. The sky line of this part of the city is outlined by the Lutheran signs of Saint Peter's church, the Riga Cathedral and by the Roman Catholic Saint James' Cathedral. All these religious buildings and their bell towers have origins going back to the XIII century, and even today are among the most widely accepted symbols for the Latvian⁴ inhabitants of Riga.

The monumental bell towers get slenderer as they climb the sky. The strength of these vertical urban elements is especially evident in the Lutheran Church of Saint Peter. The effect of its bell

⁴ According to the 2011 data only around 305 117 inhabitants of Riga's are of Latvian ethnicity. The second ethnic groups are Russians, with 264 808 individuals (Latvia, 2011)

tower skeletal wooden structure rising from the center of its frontal facade, the tallest of all the other towers in the city, is enhanced by the narrow alleys leading to it and by the massive and opaque bricked walls of the religious object. The tower has a double role, in its base it's placed a large portal leading toward the sacred space of the church while its top is in the heavens, visible from all over the city. The same solution and effect is replicated in the Riga's Lutheran cathedral, in the catholic cathedral of Saint James, and in the other minor churches of the old town. The higher structures though belong to Lutheranism, the dominant religion among the Latvians.

The bell towers of Riga are astonishingly beautiful, and their effect is only partially lowered by the new verticals that have been raised in the periphery. Looking at them, I can only imagine the effect that these structures might have had on the visitors of the past. Of those approaching the city, walking along its alleys or passing through the threshold of the churches. The encounter with these gigantic structures must have been impressive after having crossed the deepness of the forests or after a long navigation through the Daugava's delta. The view was probably carefully planned and best fitted for the characteristics of the context.

The newer vertical signs have been kept in considerable distance from the verticals of the old town **[Figure 5/Above]**. Besides one. At walking distance, from the cities Train station, Bus Terminal and the old center with its Lutheran churches is located the *Latvian Academy of Science* **[Figure 5/Below]**. It is an archaic skyscraper, heavily decorated with neoclassical elements and symbols of socialism. The building follows to the book other contemporary buildings erected in the fifties, in Moscow and all around the capitals of eastern bloc. The building is a remnant of Stalinism, and is clearly, even today, a trace of the will of the dictator on the Latvian capital, as were the famous "*Seven Sisters of Moscow*", or the *Warsaw Palace of Culture and Sciences*.

I visited the building accompanied by a resident of Riga, an architect of Latvian ethnicity born in the capital. That was his first visit in this building, only a 5-minute walk from its office. He and the other Latvian inhabitants of the capital seemed to have an innate aversion toward its sign and of other symbols leftover by the Russian domination. However their antipathy was cleverly hidden. Somehow, they had learned to coexist with them, as they had learned to live together with their large Russian minority. After reaching the elevated panoramic platform at the rooftop of the Academy, all the other verticals over the otherwise even skyline of Riga were disclosed to my

sight. I was in one the most important centers of the city. Even though slightly lower than the summits of the Christian bell towers, its massive body gave supremacy to the *Latvian Academy of Science*. Even though unloved the skyscraper was clearly the dominant visual center of the capital, until it was surpassed by the newly build signs of capitalism, encountered in the drive from the airport.

Opposed Obelisks along the same axis

Another antagonism of Riga's man-made signs was unconcealed to me, soon after my arrival to the city. It was expressed through verticals as well. At the city center, in a large square in between the older and newer part of the town, surrounded by the parks located in the former outer fortified perimeter, lays the *Freedom Monument* [Figure 6]. The tall monument honoring the martyrs of the Latvian War of Independence was erected in the mid-30s almost two decades after the proclamation of the country's independence⁵. The location is highly symbolic and it's the same where the equestrian statue of Peter the Great was once laying. The obelisk is clearly a sign of a nation that gained confidence in its statehood and was ready to go forward on its path. Its significance was so strong, it still is, that even in the aftermath of the World War II and the successive loss of the Latvian independence the Soviets didn't interfere with it. Despite its subversive nationalist meaning, in antagonism with the universalism of socialism the obelisk resisted there, at the heart of Riga. The soviets kept distance but they did not remain passive. Rather than removing them, they tried to exceed the existent signs of Riga. Following the same idea, of the Radio and Television Tower meant to visually dominate the Metropolitan area of Riga, or the *Academy of Sciences* in counterbalance to the cathedrals of the old town, they opposed another landmark to the Freedom Monument, entitled Victory Monument [Figure 7] and honoring the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany. This antagonism in between these two centers is clearly visible from an elevated perspective [Figure 8]. A straight and kilometric line that starts from the central obelisk square, passes through the old town, continues above the half-kilometer long Stone Bridge (originally named October Bridge) built during socialism and it proceeds deep inside the other bank of the river, until it meets the other landmark.

⁵ 1918

This was my experience of Riga, an important city of a smaller nation filled with juxtaposed signs that found their expression in the most congenial manner to the natural horizontality of the landscape, that is, through contrasting verticals. These built symbols are the simulacra of the Latvian society dynamics through time.

The New Neoclassical center of Skopje

Another context that I find particularly relevant to my topic and to the Albanian situation is that of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The country has gained a complete independence only few decades ago, in the 90s, after the first dissolution of Yugoslavia. Macedonia was first created as a distinct republic and nation after WWII within a socialist state and federation. Before, in between the two World Wars, it was part of the Serbian and Croatian kingdom, and prior to that part of the Ottoman Empire. While the modern Macedonians seem to be descendants of the various Slavic tribes that settled in the Balkans at the beginning of the medieval ages.

The present territory of Macedonia and its people were always in a place in between, at the heart of the Balkan; surrounded by other more well defined nations, as were the Bulgarians, Serbs, Greeks and Albanians. Apparently they never had the chance to redefine fully their own distinct national identity, their individuality was always melted with those of the other nations of Yugoslavia, first under a Serbian King and later under a Socialist structure where nationalism, as in the Latvian case, was discouraged.

The Macedonians orthodox religion autocephaly is contested especially by the Serbian church (Murzaku, 2017). The Macedonian language and distinct national hood is contested by Bulgaria, which considers the language a Bulgarian dialect, and the nation a Yugoslavian invention. The Macedonian name is contested by Greece. According to Greece it belongs to an ancient Hellenic state and the same name is held by a Modern Greek region. Greece insists in calling the country *Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia*. And finally its homogeneity is contested by Albanians, which pretend that their conspicuous presence in the country has to be translated in a multiethnic character for the state. This is the complex situation with which Macedonia entered in the world stage only in the early 90s. In their territory there are roman ruins, byzantine

monuments, ottoman towns and the functionalistic buildings of the socialism era, but it lacks layered signs, which are distinctly Macedonian.

An earthquake in 1963 destroyed the capital Skopje. The event became global. The world, separated by the Cold War, was united in its attempt to assist to the reconstruction of the capital. Kenzo Tange, a renowned architect that considered the continuity in between the contemporaneity and antiquity mythical and chauvinist (Zevi, 2012, p. 428), categorized a *modern mannerist* by Bruno Zevi, was commissioned to design the reconstruction master plan. The created dynamics gave Skopje a further rationalist character. Apparently, all this was too generic and globalized for a nation seeking its own uniqueness, after all the *modernist abstraction is an unsatisfactory manner to represent the ideology of the state* (Frampton K. , 2007, p. 210). Its politicians, after the independence, opted for more populist strategies of nation-building, easily approachable by the man of the street, and politically exploitable. The key became its name, Macedonia, an ancient definition that since the late ottoman times was gradually appropriated by this territory and then its people. The Nationalist political class of Macedonia decided to build the identity of their state centered on the Macedonian Myth. In the national flag, the Vergina sun of Alexander the Great was imprinted, and soon the chosen ideological path was engraved also in the spaces of the capital.

Skopje 2014

The XXI century for the Macedonian state started with severe, even armed, conflicts having a strong nationalistic matrix. From mid-2000s, a right wing, and nationalist, party dominated the political stage⁶. The coalition led by this party governed the country for a decade. The country was practically ruled by one man⁷, who deliberately tried to transform the capital according to his own will (Marusic, 2015). During this relatively long political stability was envision and initiated the controversial plan *Skopje 2014*. The project **[Figure 9]**, with costs of at least 560 million Euros (Jordanovska, 2015), has given to the capital a new look.

New buildings have been erected, facades transformed. All of them with a neoclassic and old-fashioned appearance **[Figure 10]**. Classical orders, columns flutes, capitals, moldings,

⁶ VMRO-DPMNE

⁷ Nicola Gruevski, was the leader of VMRO-DPMNE and the Prime Minister of Macedonia

pediments, cupolas, pavilions, white marbles and monumental steps abound in the present small center of the Macedonian Capital. The inner itineraries were articulated around newly erected simulacra's of national heroes, classical ancient Macedonian characters and triumphal arches. What has occurred to the center of Skopje is a process more congruous to the European renaissance centuries rather than the present. Nevertheless, the important question is, how was the new backward trace juxtaposed to the existing town?

The development of Skopje seems interconnected to the natural corridor of the Vardar River **[Figure 11/Above]**. Originally, its center was the Castle, placed on the northeastern bank of the river, and the organic neighborhoods, developed around the bazaar street. Later, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, and especially after WWII, the city expanded toward the southwestern bank of the River. The newer fabric spread only partially toward the edges of the old part of the town, leaving a quite undefined area in between the ottoman bazar and the Vardar. From the castle, the path descended along the narrow alleys of the bazar, passed through the relative openness of the northeastern bank, crossed the Stone Bridge on the Vardar and reached the modern Main Square, located on the southwestern bank. From the semicircular plaza, a series of radial streets spread through the rest of the modern fabric.

The New Itinerary

Skopje 2014, preserved the same spatial itinerary, but it vested it with a new narrative **[Figure 11/Below]**. The ottoman part of the city on the northeastern extremity of the path was left untouched. Only its northwestern edge facing the new center, was partially refurbished. The modern city centered around the main plaza remained the same as well, but altered, on an eye level perspective. This part of the path remains the focal center of the city and the culmination of its main itinerary even today. Its effect was enhanced by the gigantic statue of Alexander the Great.

However, the radical change happens in the intermediate segment of the path connecting the Ottoman and the Yugoslav fabric, the very same area that previously had a vague character. Here the transformation goes beyond the surface of the existing buildings and squares. A strong spatial modification was shaped. To the structure of Skopje was added a new layer, previously missing, made of monumental squares, of deeper perspectives. A classical look was conferred to its civic

buildings, symbolizing an enhanced central role of the state, and a dubious link to the ancient past.

Entering the new stage

Today the descending of the principal path from the castle and the bazars opens uninterrupted toward a large square, articulated with fountains and gardens, and surrounded by refurbished and added buildings. The last ottoman presence are the Turkish Baths while among the new buildings are the Holocaust Museum and the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, clearly associating the events in order to glorify the later.

A newer elongated fountain placed at the edge of the old town narrates of an almost mythical older past. The structure has a plan made of two centers. The first center of the fountain, and of the square, is occupied by the monumental statue of Phillip the Great. The Macedonian king that conquered Greece, formed the Corinthian league, and prepared the path for Alexander's the Great conquest of Asia. On the base of the cylindrical pedestal is represented a scene of a young Alexander and family, clearly symbolizing the envisioned inception for the modern Macedonians, from ancient Macedonia rather than the Ottoman Empire. The other minor center sustains the sculpture of Alexander's mother, Olympia. The straight line transiting through the two points indicates the direction of the path.

At distance in a contiguous space, deflected from the main itinerary, lays the statue of Skanderbeg, the national hero of the other nation of Macedonia, the Albanians. The statue of the Albanian national hero, is connected to the old town and at to the edge of the modern city as well. Nevertheless, the itinerary leading to it is only one of the secondary streets of the bazar, and after the statue, it goes nowhere. Certainly, this capital, and *Skopje 2014*, tries to represent only one of the Macedonia's nations.

The Monumental River Front

The path leads to another square, at the edge of the stone bridge. Here the former buildings have been completely refurbished with new neoclassic facades and also a completely newly built front has been constructed on the riverbank. A neo-baroque *National Theater* resembling the national theater of Belgrade, a hard to classify museum of the *Macedonian National Struggle* and the

neoclassic façade of the *Museum of Archeology* [Figure 12] all aligned along the Vardar make the new image of Skopje. Especially the *Museum of Archeology* seems the best architectonic representation of the new capital. In it are embodied all the contradictions of its society. The building is approached through a dedicated bridge, resembling the perspectives of the Parisian *Palais Bourbon* along the Seine, now the *French National Assembly*, refurbished with a neoclassical façade by the Napoleonic administration.

The perspective of the bridge is closed by the center of the building that mimics a classical temple. The pediment rests on six ionic columns. The first oddity of the scheme is the entablature linking the pediment and the columns. There is a mish mash of overlapped systems of entablatures. The epistyle has an ionic Fascia's while the frieze is made of Doric triglyphs and metopes. The sequence that according to the classical canons should have transited into the pediments surface, continues with two other layers. A Corinthian cornice adorned with minute dentils, and another bare fascia. The last fascia, that is also the base of the triangular pediment, is articulated with Corinthian modillions. The effect of the whole is unfamiliar and seems inspired by, but unaware of, the classical canons. The exaggerated entablature doubles the proportion of an orthodox Doric system, weakling further the bearing effect of the slender ionic columns at the base. The pediment, the cornices and entablatures outlining the structure are an excessive burden for this building. Excessive as the historical burden of Alexander's the Great Empire placed on the small modern Macedonian state's contemporary populist politicians.

The last incongruity of the Museum are its domed flanks. The temple becomes a quasi-Palace. However the extremities are excessively marked by the domes, the whole is too short, and the effect of the abnormally tall entablature is not of help. The structure has become a strange agglomeration of vectors, in which the vertical and the horizontal are in perennial conflict. The Museum of archeology is neither a linear palace nor a univocal temple; it is just a façade, interposed in between an existing building on the riverbank. Its whole body, no just its skin, is a neo-baroque urban refurbishment of this part of the city. Beyond the white columns of the wings, there are uninterrupted dark glazed walls, clearly of contemporary technology, highlighting further the discrepancies of the monument

The Final Act

The Stone Bridge leads to the final place of the sequence, the *Macedonia Square* [Figure 13]. The path is oriented toward the deep recess of the plaza on the southwestern side of the Vardar. The ostentatious architectonic spectacle initiates already on the hump of the gentle curve of the Stone Bridge. The statue of Alexander the Great dominates the whole. The already giant monument is erected on an even taller pedestal, making the structure visible already from the other riverside. After descending the bridge the main center of the capital is there. The statue of Alexander is not alone; around it, there are other statues, commemorating historical figures or events and there is even a pavilion. The surface of the square is paved with white marbles and fountains. The whole is framed by a series of Yugoslav era facades in the process of being hidden beyond the thin layer of marble and plaster coherent to the new spirit of Skopje.

The preferred radial departing from Macedonia Square, is the pedestrian street named also after Macedonia; along it lays the Post-modern reconstruction of mother Theresa house. The Internationally renowned Albanian nun, probably the most important figure born in the multiethnic city, on the contrary of Skanderbeg, has been included in the sequences of the new main itinerary of the city. The whole path is concluded, by *Arch Macedonia* [Figure 14]. The white structure resembling the triumphal arches of Imperial Paris and Rome is the last sign, of a sequence that has traced a contrived path in between Alexander the Great conquest of the east, and the Macedonian politically driven conquest of a western identity.

Today a political shift, in the country has arrested Skopje 2014, already in advanced state. After decades of misunderstandings a new political agreement with Greece was reached. Now, the Macedonian society, perhaps will be asked to renounce their projected grandiose past. The name and the statue of Alexander the Great, previously given to the International Airport of Skopje, were removed. To the new monuments within the capitals center will be conferred new meanings and new names honoring the *Greek-Macedonian Friendship* (Marusic, 2018). The Giant statue of Alexander the great in the main plaza still resists but it has now more of a trading value in the talks with Greece rather than a symbolic meaning (Marusic, Macedonia's 'Alexander' Statue Faces Uncertain Fate, 2017). Just a ten year long political authoritarian rule of the former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, have left Macedonians with an enormous bill and architectonic

signs that will remain there for decades and maybe centuries. The white archaic monuments of the capital appear unnaturally white and polished. For the moment they lack the patina of time which might legitimate, at least visually, their permanence in the capital. Even the older functionalist buildings, leftovers of Yugoslavia, seem more familiar in this environment because although generic they don't have the apparent sense of flashy falsity of the contemporary historicist center created by *Skopje 2014*. The former make the environment where the inhabitants of the capital grew up, and for this they are the real places of the city (Schulz C. N., 1979).

The Humanized Signs of Rome

The last theme of this very first part, on the differences of society and their subsequent translation into the man-made environment is about Rome. The city that perhaps has seen the larger multitude of social structures, of ruling regimes and of consequent traces. Rome is the city that I am more familiar with after Tirana, and that I have learned to appreciate during an eight year's long stay. The Urbe is the original motivation force of this thesis with its many signs integrated in its fabric.

There Is Something in the Pantheon...

The Pantheon is one of those buildings of Rome that are able to move the visitor, just with its presence. It has the same effect, even on the umpteenth visit. It is special to discover the building from the narrow streets of Rome, or to stay under the large dome. It is hard to remain unmoved knowing the history of the place, of the people that made it and of those laying there, of Raphael's resting place just meters away. What gives this specialness to the pantheon? Does it derive only from its rich history or from something else as well?

I remember when I first visited it, on September 2000. Then I had little clue about the making of the Pantheon but I was equally moved by just attending its space way before reading the inscription, "*This is Raphael. In his life great Mother Nature feared defeat and in his death she herself feared to die*". The presence of the mere and bare building was enough despite the lack of a related cultural background. Emotions were initiated directly and simply by its bodily presence. It is hard to stay emotively distant while you are at the same time: under the oculus,

the hollowed surface of the dome and near the intangible diagonal pillar of light piercing the otherwise obscurity of the interior, within a building which *encloses* rather than *closes the space*. (Zevi, *Architecture as Space*, 1974, p. 79) .

One of the reasons for the specialness of the pantheon is the idea behind it, that structuring together different architectonic devices, as the zenithal light or the scale of the space, has constructed a sign able to impress its contemporaries and resist the millennia's. The trace of Pantheon is so strong that impresses also the contemporary man. Based on the relative and limited human perspective, it has escaped time. "*The Verbum remains, the verba disappears*" (Ricoeur, *Time Narrative*, Volume I, 1984, p. 24), and the Pantheon appears as a unique word filled and surrounded by a multitude of voices.

The former Sign of imperial Rome

The Pantheon is the main character of *Piazza Della Rotunda*, but it doesn't stand alone. To its homogenous, impenetrable, windowless, convex walls are opposed fragmented, permeable, porous and planar facades of adjacent buildings. The dramatic skyline outlined by the myriad of sloping roofs contradicts the serene curvature of its unparalleled dome. Opposed are one work of art in front of many equipment thought as houses and workshops.

Though it looks like isn't just the Pantheon that does make the surrounding contexts visible (Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, 2002, p. 21), the latter is perceived also as a character of this place. The figure ground relationship in between the two aspects (context and building) seems randomly created. The contested dominance of the former temple is noticed also from the way it is approached. It isn't orchestrated by a linear axis or a deep perspective, it happens by surprise and has the impermanence of an instant. While wandering through Rome, there isn't any dominant break-through leading to the square. I could have randomly encountered the main facade with its grand pediment and porch as well, from one of the peripheral southern backside corners.

Standing in the shapeless square, it's hard not to notice the decay of the Pantheon. Exposed by the midday sun, the outward surface looks uneven, the spacing's in between the old bricks, instead of thin and straight shadowed lines look like minuscule valleys eroded by the weather. There are holes in the façades because the wooden bars filling their empty recesses have long

time decomposed. Time has been harsh even on the marble works. Incisions of the moldings appear deformed. Their corners have been rounded by an apparently slow but relentless decline. Compared to the Pantheon the facades of the counterpoised, inhabited houses, shops and bars look recent and well kept. In the contrast created, to the viewer it's fully revealed that the Pantheon is ancient but not eternal. The discrepancies with the surrounding have highlighted its longevity and at the same time its decay. It is a building that is long-lasting, made of long-lived earth and stone, of the ancient "*opus cementum*", but at the end a *particular* of this world not immune to the hardships of time. Obviously its designer has lost its power, and has left its sign unattended.

The importance vested on the Pantheon by Hadrian's high empire has not vanished but has diminished a lot. The rectangular columned plaza surrounding the temple is no longer there **[Figure 15]**. The pantheon and its static and symmetrical surrounding space used to announce that the *Empire Is* (Zevi, *Architecture as Space*, 1974), now announces that the *Empire Is No More*. The building that used to be the protagonist of the *Urbe*, now is barely the protagonist of the related square. Even in the neighborhood, his supremacy is questioned. The dense masses of dwellings have hidden it away. A visitor unaware of Rome's layout, might be passing very close and dodge it. Centuries of subsequent Papal, Regal and Fascist influence on the city have erected dozens of other respectable monuments. As part of Rome's urban fabric, the Pantheon has eventually become one among the many.

Juxtaposed Signs of Rome

In order to find a stronger center in the present city **[Figure 16]**, I have to leave *Piazza Della Rotunda* and turn west of the Pantheon. After walking by the side of the dome of Borromini's Saint Ivo, intersected Saint Agnese in piazza Navona and reached San *Giovanni Degli Fiorentini*, it can be fully seen. It is the refined Dome of *San Peters basilica*. In order to be at its foot I have to walk for at least one more kilometer. Standing there, in the middle of the elliptic square, in front of Maderno's tall, opaque and sunny façade, surrounded by the long porous and shaded Bernini's colonnade, under Michelangelo's dome I notice that I am in a place with almost no discrepancies, of only a carefully orchestrated series of complementing contrasts. Apparently what has been lost in the space leading to the Pantheon, is still here at *Piazza San Pietro*. The sign of the Roman

authority has vanished from the Pantheon's surroundings, while the sign of the Christian authority is alive in Saint Peter's Square.

The two domed temples of Rome, one of the Roman and the other of Christian liturgy, linked together, equally represent Rome. The Christian church was an adopted daughter of the late Roman Empire. While the Pantheon was adopted by the church but conceived by the former Empire. The Pantheon is a Christian object but has a Roman subject. It is pervaded by the Roman spirit. (Zevi, *Architecture as Space*, 1974)

Donato Bramante's new Saint Peter Basilica was inspired by the Pantheon; he found his model in the "*clarity of the proportions and spatial simplicity of Pantheon*" (Lotz, *Architettura Classica a Roma: Bramante*, 2002). Ancient architecture and the clarity of the Roman Temple were fused with the Christian liturgical use of space. The desire to emulate was also the desire to give to the Papal authority, in the age of Renaissance, a monument equal or superior to those of the so much admired classical age.

Saint Peter's Roman Christian Basilica, belongs to the age when the papal authority had finally the possibility to imprint its dominant sign in Rome. It was so important that the other monuments of the city had to indulge to its needs. Both centers were strong, but Saint Peter was superior. When the bronzes of the Pantheon were removed by the papal authorities, of Urban VII, the citizens of Rome were not happy. In those days an expression spread: "What the barbarians did not do, the Barberinis did"⁸, disclosing the attachment of the Romans to the moment. The Pantheon was loved, but the importance of the new rising center was so overwhelming that in its name any doing was justified. The bronzes were forged for building the canopies of the *Castle San Angelo* but the officially divulged version, stated they were used for the Bernini's baldachin in Saint Peter.

What has happened in the rivalry of these architectonic protagonists of Rome is the very same process that has dominated the human history until the rupture event mentioned before, *thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center* (Derrida, *Structure, Sign and Play*, 2001, p. 353). Saint Peter took the Pantheon's role in the Urbe. In addition, with the fall of the authority that conceived it, The Pantheon, has

⁸ "Quod non fecerunt barbari, fecerunt Barberini"

received *different forms or names*. (Derrida, *Structure, Sign and Play*, 2001, p. 353). During its long existence, to the former roman temple were even added two lateral towers, later removed, and was given a Christian name, dedicated to “Saint Mary and the Martyrs”.

Saint Peter lays solitary on its Vatican hill, surrounded by an enormous empty square. The cathedral is almost entirely *ready-made* (Merleau-Ponty, 1945) for us. On the contrary, the lost importance of the Pantheon has allowed the fabric of Rome to grow free around it. Creating the present situation of a Roman structure that has to be discovered. Moreover, in this aspect maybe lies its best quality.

The Urbe that has become a place

While looking for or discovering the Pantheon, from the very firsts partial view of it closing the prospective of the approaching streets, to the moment I was in front of its totality, I went through one of the most distinct experiences of walking across old Rome. That is the encounter with an ancient Roman building. Traveling in a city were almost everything has the patina of history, any visitor soon runs into these buildings, which are similar to their surroundings, but different. Their dimension and proportion looks awkward in their setting. They appear as stacked in a place that was not theirs or that has slowly become alienated to them. As if, the fish became larger than the hosting tank, or in this case, the tank, the surrounding space, has grown smaller. The ruins of Rome have traversed the irreversible process of *World-withdrawal* (Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, 2002). A world to whom these ruins belonged, a world that is no more or that has changed so much to become irreconcilable to what it was. In this discrepancy in between the environment and another thing, that visibly antecedes the other, can be traced the new qualities of spaces and buildings released from the obligation of being a sign.

The process of discovering the pantheon **[Figure 17]** brings it in another light, through other emotions inspired not by the strength of its sign but by the multiplicity of sense-perceptions gradually shaped in the visitor while wandering through the narrow alleys. In discovering surprised the Pantheon, the perceived contrast in between its first glimpse and subsequent wholly appearance I understood the troubled past of a monument, that it could have been surrounded by plenty of space and that is actually embraced by other buildings. In noticing the discrepancy with the emerging context I realized the vulnerability of the Pantheon. In the serenity

of Piazza Della Rotunda pervaded by the everydayness of hundreds of Rome's dwellers and visitors I felt the dignity of a monument that has metabolized its re-contextualization.

When describing Rome, Norbert-Schulz discloses the quality that makes Rome eternal. According to him the apparent *eternity* of the Urbe isn't in the multiple recollection of leftovers from the past but in the capacity of the city to absorb and metabolize buildings belonging to different periods. He calls this quality the capacity for *self-renewal*. The "*abstract "absolute" order*" of the Roman city isn't in Rome, it never was. Although this order irradiated from the Urbe becoming the origin of hundreds of cities, in Rome itself it could be founded only fragmented in the layout of different urban entities – forums, temples, and thermal baths- but not in the city as a whole. Rome Antiquity appears as "*a cluster of different spaces and buildings of different sizes*"; this makes it special. This very same quality can be traced in the self-renewed space around the Pantheon.

The dethroned Pantheon has still its dignity, I am aware of it even though it has lost the power to intimidate. Time has humanized the Pantheon, and for this, I feel it closer. It is possible to build a direct relationship with it. The Pantheon is open to my perception and my perception is free to define the "*according-to-me*" of the thing, Pantheon (Derrida, Caste Filozofike, 1999).

1.2. Tirana

*"For the mind expects, it attends, and it remembers;
so that what it expects passes into what it
remembers by way of what it attends to. (Ricoeur,
1984)"*

This thesis is about Tirana, and specifically its center. The city I was born in and that I have seen tacitly changing so much. A brusque process contained in a very short lapse of time. This transformation, as experienced by me, starts in the 90s, it goes on through the first decade of the XXI century and it keeps going nowadays faster than ever.

Childhood Street

I vividly remember my street **[Figure 18/Above]**, a carless space where children played ball in its very middle, the wooden gates of the houses, the hand shaped metallic door knockers, the bricked walls and the abundant greenery of fig, plum or persimmon trees almost hanging out from them. Despite those older layers, there were also newer apartment buildings, made of even and squared windows, up to five floors high. I grew up in one of those building.

I can recall the view from the modest elevation of my childhood apartment. An almost boundless panorama was revealed to my view. Standing on the second floor of the balcony, I could look at the gardens and orchards hidden beyond walls, the large stretch of reddish tiled roofs and the low verticals of the chimneys sketched on them. At distance I could see the upper part of other apartment's blocks too similar to my own or the vertical volume of Hotel Tirana, the tallest building in the country (15 floors) standing alone above the low horizontal skyline of the city. Faraway I could gaze at the hills, the mountains surrounding the city and their spotless green bodies covered by wild Mediterranean shrubs.

While remembering this very recent past, I attend a very different present **[Figure 18/Below]**. Along the same street, there are other protagonists. While the children stay mostly at home attracted by an ever-growing digital reality or within trusted institutions managing their school and free time, I see cars moving on the street, more cars parked on its sides and tight sidewalks fragmented by added steps and cafe tables. The pedestrian space of the sidewalks is shaded by protruded balconies. They are ramifications of newer buildings elevated on the vanished space of the former orchards. In front of me, there is an ongoing and uncompleted process.

Anonymous high-rise building, often matching even the once unmatched height of the central Hotel, lay in front of the rare, low and old houses still standing. The aged apartment of my family is still there but unrecognizable. The former abundant communal space in between the building and the street has been occupied by a new addition informally made by the residents. Their homely space has increased to the detriment of the space once belonging to the community.

I enter the transformed building after finding an entrance that seems misplaced in the present reality of the street. I ascend the darkened communal stairway space toward the apartment located on the second floor. Behind the private door there is a refurbished interior made of

commodities once only imaginable only through the glass of a television screen. Its enhancements though are not paralleled by the view about to be disclosed from the balcony. The old balcony lays steady at the same place, but the childhood panorama has gone, hidden by the tall façade of a recent building. Where once there were picturesque roofs, dense foliage and the beautiful mountains there's just another balcony of another apartment on the other side of the narrow street.

90s

It is not just my street, the same happened to the city, Tirana, and all over the country. It started in the early 90s with the suburbs, in a period that saw the governing authorities almost disappearing. The agricultural periphery of Tirana was occupied and built by thousands of families coming from other provinces of the collapsed country. The initial huts, helped by the international emigration remittances, slowly became villas and the original slum slowly turned into an expanded suburban sprawl. These areas are now under a legalization process that while resolving a social burden for the newcomers have dragged to an uninterminated time the problem of the original land owners.

The urban areas weren't free of this phenomena. The urban courtyards of the socialist housing blocks, tiny pieces of land in between existent buildings and streets, neighborhood gardens and sport fields were seized and built. The biggest manifestation of these happenings was the almost annihilation of Tirana's largest urban garden [Youth Park] **[Figure 19/1]** and the ordered riverbed of Lana **[19/2]**, both close to the capitals boulevard. The very center of Tirana, its straight void, the former locus of military parades, of the evening promenade and of the protest that deposed Socialism, was flanked by an odd space. Labyrinths of bars and restaurants, of discotheques and casinos, transformed the former green lawn into a place of decadence, criminality and dishonesty but also of amusement, escape and freedom. It was the opposite of what the boulevard was supposed to be. The totality of the boulevard and of the channeled river, their quality to penetrate deep into the adjacent urban grid was obfuscated.

2000s⁹

With the new millennium, something changed. There was a partial return of legality and things that only months before were almost unhoped of, occurred. The river, the park and many other areas of the capital were cleared. The authority reclaimed some of its former domains and gave them back to the citizens. These actions became from emotional to more rational. The first clearing out and façade beautification operations of the early 2000s were followed by more organized cultural movements, that incepted the first art biannual, and the first urban planning attempts since the fall of Socialism.

In between 2003- 2004 for the first time a new type of event was introduced to the inhabitants of Tirana, a Design Competition concerning the central stripe of the capital. It was won by Architecture-Studio **[Figure 20]**, a practice based in France. In their generic description of the project, they wrote, *“This urban project extends from North to South in the city. Tirana’s main features are there preserved and respected while establishing the dynamism of a modern European city”* (Architecture-Studio, 2003). *Modern European* it’s a self-explanatory combination of words that have infested the Albanian political discourses decades ago. It bears the seed of a new idea, not conceptualized yet. The Integration in the European community was then, as it is now, the new purpose of the Albanian Society after the past disillusion of the never reached Classless Society, of another Roman Empire, of an Albanian eternal kingdom or of a happy after life after a properly led terrestrial existence guided by the Sultan. The phrase from Architecture-Studio is a spatial embodiment of a new Social goal.

Looking at the proposed plan of this project, there are different novelties that stand out. The city is extended to the north. The idea of a new sign appears, mirroring and continuing the former sign of the boulevard of Tirana. This sign though is different; it isn’t just a line but a rectangle. It has plenty of space within and seems as a natural domain restored within a man-made structure. This space is not another boulevard but a park. Apparently the process of seizure of the public domain, initiated in the 90s, was about to be reversed.

⁹ Here are described events having as protagonists the then Mayor of Tirana, Edi Rama

Nevertheless in the master-plan's drawings another unfamiliar novelty for the capital was introduced: the skyscraper. The space around "Skanderbeg Square", the city's main plaza, and its perimeter were framed by enormous towers, high verticals stretching from one side of the city to another. At the time it seemed a fair compromise, an enormous park to the north and the preservation of the green spaces along the existing boulevard in exchange of some towers placed on the then empty spaces around the central square.

After all, those fashionable verticals were a direct reference to the attractive imageries from those *Modern European Cities, of which Albanians were desirous of*. The events that followed though weren't loyal to the drawings. The first novelty (park) was about to be squeezed by the other (skyscraper).

New Centralities

The Tirana of these years was not only paper architecture, indeed in the first decade of the new century the city started changing again. Construction activities proliferated all over the neighborhoods, and around the center **[Figure 19]**. Many of the spaces around the boulevard were assigned, to different private actors, international and local investors or religious institutions.

Hotel "Europa Park", locally known as Rogner **[19/3]** was one of the first structures added to the boulevard in the early 90s. The hotel was raised on public gardens and around an underground cold war era bunker.

In the early 2000s the so-called Twin Towers **[19/4]** were built, a complex of shops, bars, offices and apartments. Behind them, other high-rise constructions followed. The footprints of all the new additions were projected on exiting green areas. Furthermore for the first time the elevation of Tirana's center, was violated since the edification of Hotel Tirana **[19/5]** in the 70s.

Later on, in the southern extremity of the boulevard was added another hotel, "The Sheraton Tirana" **[19/6]**. This building besides interfering with the front of one of the most important plazas contiguous to the boulevard and Tirana's National Stadium **[19/18]**, once opened to the Main Park of the city **[19/7]**, eradicated an important piece of the park itself. Years later another building was constructed in between the Sheraton and the plaza. This intruder was a glazed box

designed to host a fast-food restaurant [19/8], high as the adjacent institutional buildings designed by Italian architects in the early 40s [19/9].

More detached to the space of the boulevard, other centralities were added, volumes vested with religious meaning. The first, the catholic cathedral of *Saint Paul* [19/10], was built in between the late 90s and early 2000s, along the central creek of Lana. In the second half of 2000s the *Reborn in Christ Cathedral* [19/11] was built, an orthodox temple. In addition, after a long-standing persistence of the local Islamic institutions, the construction of the new *Main Mosque of Tirana* [19/12] started, an immense structure of six minarets again along the Lana. The mosque is still under construction¹⁰. All these three religious structures have in common the large and compact volumetric, attached tall verticals and the fact that they were build one former public gardens.

An intense argument over the Pyramid

“We can’t leave that grave at the center of capital...the final solution is the construction of the parliament” (Berisha, 2012), this phrase gathers the basics of the debate that heated the atmosphere of Tirana in the winter of 2010. The government of Albania had summoned a commission charged to organize an international competition for the new parliament of Albania. The plot of land selected was not empty. The new parliament of Albania was foreseen over *the Pyramid*, the building along the boulevard [19/13] [Figure 21/Above] built in the 80s to honor the then just departed dictator, Enver Hoxha. Even a publication was prepared ad hoc about the ongoing debate bringing the quality of the discussion on issues of architecture on levels never seen before. The argument saw two fronts opposed.

The first was aligned around the then Prime Minister¹¹, which wanted the Pyramid demolished. Many reasons were given for this choice, from its sinister symbolic to the noncompliance of its rigid spatial structure to other needs, as to that of a theater for example proposed by the other front. *“It should be demolished, first because it is the ugliest building, without any charm, in one of the most beautiful boulevards of the Balkans...second because it’s today the most*

¹⁰ 2018

¹¹ The then Prime Minister of Albania was Sali Berisha.

nonfunctional public building in Tirana...third because the maintenance costs of such building are extremely high...It should be demolished because it was designed as a mausoleum serving the individual cult of the most negative figure of Albania's history" (Fevziu, 2011), writes among other things one of the most renown sustainers of the anti-pyramid front .

The other front was for the Pyramid, and was aligned around the then Mayor of Tirana¹². Among the reasons sustained from them, were the immense costs of the new parliament, the incongruity of the proposed introverted function of the parliament with the openness of the boulevard and the squanderer of public money already invested for the conversion of the pyramid to a theater (Klosi, 2011). Besides the functional, economic and ethical arguments, another way of looking at the issue is introduced here for the first time. During this debate, a number of voices were heard, appealing to the sentiments, pro or against the building, on issues of heritage, memory and Place. This awareness began to appear through the phrases of some published articles. Through those lines was finally expresses the concern that *"A place of our historical memory is (was) disappearing in front of our eyes"* (Shkreli, 2011).

The argument over the pyramid went on for several months. The design competition was organized. It was won by the de-constructivist architecture office Coop-Himmelblau [**Figure 21/Below**]. Their proposal though was never implemented and the Pyramid is still in place. However, what seemed important in this process was the elevation of the discourse concerning the city. Since those days, despite the prevalence of the authority, buildings are not seen just as *equipment* and their relevance finally encloses more than their *serviceability* (Heidegger, The Origin of the Work of Art, 1950).

Signs of the Present Authority (2010s)

The events now take place in the last decade, approaching the present day. Today while attending this Tirana I can already see the materialization of the ideas traced in the previous decade but also of others about to be conceived. During the current decade up to date, the will to intervene on the cities has become evident and operational. It has already been materialized through political programs of several millions of euros. Under the denomination *"Urban*

¹² The then Mayor of Tirana was Edi Rama.

Renaissance” (Kryeministria, 2014), that saw a major public project being designed and implemented all over the urban settlements of the country, or “The One Billion euro Project” (rtsh.al, 2017), another, ongoing publicized program based on public construction works.

A New Boulevard

To the north of the city, there are ongoing works on the New Boulevard of Tirana [Figure 19/14]. The original idea of the park resisted until 2011 and actually went even further. During the intense electoral campaign of that year, for the municipal government, the same political faction that backed the master plan of Architecture-Studio¹³ reintroduced the idea of the northern park under the important title “*New Center Tirana XXI*” (Tirana E. , 2011). The new proposed center was counterpoised to the existing, “*The existing Center has two strong features: It is the historical center of the city; it is implemented as a “museum” of the Albanian state epochs. It is monumental...The New Center Tirana XXI is a possibility for a new identity, a contrast to give life to an idea...a chance to write the history of the development of the new century*”. The new center was first charged with an ideological symbolic and then presented as an “*Incentive...to earn public space for the use of the citizens*” (Tirana E. , 2011).

Despite the rich descriptive contour, the most important component of the strategy was the revelation that New Center Tirana XXI could be a Park that “*will have the functions of the central plaza of the New Center Tirana XXI*” (Tirana E. , 2011). Anyhow another faction won the elections¹⁴, and with that result, the idea of the enlargement of the city around a new park went lost.

On March 2012 a new competition trended in the Capitals environments, on its televisions and journals this time under the name “*Northern Boulevard and Rehabilitation of Tirana River*”. It was organized by the new administration of city, the winner of the 2011 elections. The competing projects were presented in a public venue, in the theater of Tirana’s Academy of arts, along the old boulevard, originally conceived as an “*Opera Dopolavoro*” [Figure 19/15], an institution committed to the organizations of the fascism workers free time. To the people was disclosed

¹³ The electoral faction mentioned is the Socialist Party that governed Tirana from the early 2000 to 2011.

¹⁴ The Democratic Party won the 2011 local elections.

the future of the new Tirana apparently similar to that of the old “New Tirana”¹⁵. The spaces in the middle seemed alike, the sign as well, made of a straight the line traced on empty, agricultural land.

A major difference was to be found in the introduction of the new concept, the Construction of “*Tirana mall*” (Tirana M. , 2017)¹⁶. A Mall though not be confused, with “*The Mall*” of Washington, similar to the old boulevard. The mall of Tirana was intended as a space “*created to provide consumers every need in a single self-contained shopping area*” (Kent A. Grayson, 2018). The new site was envisioned as an open-air commercial center, a shopping street flanked by high-rise edifications and as the proper locus for the capital’s developing consumerist society. Tirana was about to rediscover the same events of the XIX and XX century Europe shopping axis, covered or not, contiguous to the old centers.

In 2013, the faction backing the idea of the park won the central elections. In 2015¹⁷, the same faction also won the local elections. Despite this, the original ideas brought through the 2003 master plan and the 2011 electoral program were left behind, they were simply forgotten. The unified central and local authorities proceeded forward with the construction plan of the boulevard. In 2017 a first segment was opened and now a second one is about to finish. Tirana’s center is being furnished with a new refurbished boulevard, whose final shape looks more aligned to the interests of a businessperson rather than to that of a citizen. The processes originated in early 2000s, reclaiming the public domain, here seem to take a different direction.

A New Implemented Concept for “Skanderbeg Square”

In 2011, the day before the local elections the ongoing works for the new design of “Skanderbeg Square” [20/16] stopped. The process of implementation of a new natural grass carpet was arrested marking the beginning of a transitory period. On one side, the smoother green surface, on the other, just arid earth [Figure 22/Above].

¹⁵ The neighborhoods along Tirana’s existing boulevard are known for the public as New Tirana, probably inherited by the original name of the construction site established in the 30s and 40s, first by the King’s Zog administration and then by the fascist regime. The large construction site was named “Nuova Albania”

¹⁶ The term mall is taken from the announcement of the tender for the implementations of the Northern Boulevard, based on the designs of the competition winners Grimshaw Architects.

¹⁷ The Socialist Party led by the former mayor of Tirana, now Prime Minister, Edi Rama won the 2013 central elections. The same party won also the following 2015 local elections.

The interrupted project was for the faction about to lose the elections, together with *New Center Tirana XXI*, the battle horse of the upcoming challenge. The idea behind the square was in coherence with the urban events of the decade.

The winner of the Design Competition organized in 2008 was 51N4E, a Belgian practice, partnered with Anri Sala an internationally known Albanian visual artist **[Figure 22/middle]**. A large pedestrian space and a low pyramid were the two main components, *“the projects installs a generous pedestrian area...The oppressive monumentality of communist architecture is counteracted by the ample and low pyramid making up the square: when standing at its tip, the citizens find themselves at par with the authoritarian architecture of the past”* (51N4E, 2008). Those were both statements for the public domain. The space was partly separated from the ideology of the surrounding architectures, and even the recent conquest of the private automobile was thrown away. The center was left empty for the citizens to claim it.

Several months after the Election Day, it became clear that the design for “Skanderbeg Square” was going to change. The complex engineering works already completed were simply buried underground to clear the path to the new proposal. The new actors were a garden, a lawn and a plaza, and a trafficked road going all around them. The car becomes, again, the protagonist of the square. The engineers, architects and specialist of the new municipality joined their efforts to *“liberate the traffic”* (Basha, 2011), from the deceiving attack of the pedestrian.

Apart from the fragmented pedestrian areas, there was another shape that unified the whole. A large elliptical island large almost as Navona square in Rome. The island contained the previously interrupted lawn of the previous project and other asphalt surrounding it. “Skanderbeg Square” became a large transitory roundabout. An almost impassable lower wall underlined the separations even more. Beyond it, in the middle of the grassy extension, was the statue of Skanderbeg, alone encircled by void and traffic jams.

On 28 November 2012, the completed “Skanderbeg Square” was filled with citizens celebrating the centenary of the Albanian proclamation of independence **[Figure 22/Below]**. The overfull space of the squares perimeter contrasted the likewise large void of the center. The low wall had become a temenos embracing the national hero of the Albanians and excluding almost anyone

else. The center of the square was for Skanderbeg, its perimeter, besides special occasions, for the automobile. Obviously this square was not meant for the citizen.

In the 2013 and 2015 elections, the events took again a reversed turn. The original project, from 51N4E was revived. The pedestrian area breached through the temenos of Skanderbeg and the car was again excluded.

I will describe this space from another perspective later on in this study but for the moment, at least one conclusion is deductible. This time the final project aligned toward the average citizen. On the 10th of June 2017, the municipality of Tirana announced the opening of the space to the public with the status: *“Skanderbeg Square” a gift for the citizens of Tirana* (Municipality, 2017).

A New Idea for the Old Boulevard

On 15 October 2015, only 2 months after the local election that unified local and central authority within the same political faction, a new competition dealing with the space of Tirana’s main boulevard was announced.

Its space was a leftover of the brief lapse of time that saw Italy and Albania joined under the crown of Vittorio Emanuele III. Its finalization coincided with the capitulation of Italy and hence its space was mainly used by the regime that followed. Socialist Albania with minor adding has made it the avenue for its rites, for the pompous military parades **[Figure 23/Left]** and the colorful 1 May celebrations.

This space though had also another aspect, less documented but equally important. It was an almost mundane place. Every evening the citizens of Tirana would peacefully occupy its void for their daily promenade **[Figure 23/Right]**. Families, fiancés, groups of friends would all meet there at the end of the day. The people transiting through its spaces, up and down, all had their share of that space. There, next to each other, minding their own and others’ business transited party officials and factory workers, football heroes, actors, university professors, students, or late in the evening even Ismail Kadare arm in arm with his wife. The linear void of the boulevard, carless, in those two hours was set free of the totalitarian ideology of Socialism. It was a place of display, of glances, of meetings and conversation.

Behind the boulevard, there were other places. In the ample gardens on its sides people would stop, seek more privacy or group together. In semi-darkness, they would be talking about sports

or simply sit around a self-taught guitar performer. These venues were perfect for meeting people otherwise difficult to approach or for timidly breaking taboos. Partially hidden from the large street, these were places for gossiping, for exchanging a first kiss, for proposing or for just resolving a trivial dispute through brute force. The novelties, even subversive, shared behind the boulevard would have reached the attendees of the promenade in no time. The day after gossips would spread further all over the city's work places, schools and households¹⁸.

"Tirana Park of faith, Contemplation gardens along the boulevard "Martyrs of the Nation" inspired by holy books and religious cohabitation" (AtelierAlbania, Tirana park of Faith, Contemplation gardens along the boulevard "Martyrs of the Nation" inspired by holy books and religious cohabitation, 2015), was the name of the competition entitled to the transformation of this space. The competition introduced, from the title, another contemporary ideological component, *Religious Cohabitation*.

To understand the particularity of the idea above, it is relevant to look back to at least two preceding events. The first occurrence was On 21 September 2014, the day the world's religious leader of Catholicism, Papa Francisco visited Tirana. It was only his fourth visit since his instalment, and the first visit to a European country. The Pope himself explained the reason for this apparently strange selection: *"this country has suffered so much under a terrible atheist regime and now is achieving a pacific religious cohabitation of its diverse religious component"* (Grana, 2014). The Pope applauded by the crowds paraded along the main boulevard envisioned by fascism and adopted by the atheist communism. The Space was dressed with photos of religious martyr's victims of communism [Figure 24]. On that day a process that could potentially assign to the boulevard a new meaning was initiated.

On 7 January 2015, in Paris, the other event took place. It was the day of the terrorist attack on the Charlie Hebdo satirical journal headquarters. The shooting that had very strong religious motivations shocked the world and especially the European (western) societies. On January 11 a march of solidarity was held in the streets of Paris. Merged to the millions of people marching there were four Albanian religious leaders, of the different, Islamic and Christian, religions of the

¹⁸ The events described in the last two paragraphs are contributions from this thesis supervisor Gezim Qendro. Slices of personal memories that he shared during our invaluable conversations.

country. *“The Albanian delegation at the Paris anti-terror march made a particularly powerful picture.”* (Crear, 2015), in a world of instability, sick of the growing intolerance Albania appeared as the unexpected place of tolerance holding the remedy.

Thirteen months after the visit of the pope and 10 months after the march of Paris, Tirana was ready to vest its boulevard with new meaning. *“How to develop landscape design solutions that ensure the urban and landscape continuum along the boulevard?”* In this first competition question is contained the main objective of the competition and the means through which it have to be realized. It's through the introduction of nature, through series of gardens that the spaces of the boulevard will be integrated in a continuous public space. The park that was excluded in the New Norther boulevard was about to be introduced in the existing old one.

The last question of the competition brief was about the Pyramid, the lone monumental museum originally honoring Enver Hoxha, the former Communist dictator. *“Could the structure of the ‘Pyramid’ be transformed into a Center of Europe in Albania, and how?”* (AtelierAlbania, Tirana park of Faith, Contemplation gardens along the boulevard "Martyrs of the Nation" inspired by holy books and religious cohabitation, 2015). With this conclusive question, the competition was about to bring to a conclusion a cycle initiated more than a decade ago. The Idea of the European Integration, the pillar of the plan from Architecture Studio, and the Idea of the Religious Cohabitation were merged together in the same space.

The manifesto of the competition opened with a phrase from the Albanian Prime minister¹⁹. Besides, being quoted all over the competition brief, he was portrayed as the mind behind the idea of this boulevard. The prime minister was also the man that paraded together with the religious leaders in the street of Paris and that welcomed, saluted and cured the visit of Pope. He was there placing the first stone of the New boulevard and “Skanderbeg Square” and the protagonist in the respective inauguration ceremonies. He was the mayor of the 2000s Tirana that initiated the master plan from Architecture-studio and the urban design of “Skanderbeg Square” of 51N4E.

¹⁹ This part of text describes Edi Rama the prime minister of Albania since 2013 and previously the mayor of Tirana for a decade.

Obviously behind the transformations of the present Tirana, the new spaces of its citizens, lays the will of one man. This simple fact, besides the qualities of the man, is a risk per se, *“Building is the means by which the egotism of the individual is expressed in its most naked form”* (Sudjic, 2005).

The winning project for the *Park of Faith* was from UNSTUDIO [Figure 25]. A green grid juxtaposed to the existing gardens and open spaces. Through the *“neutral, isotropy of the grid”* a park was projected, a common space that, as the authors describe it, will *de-monumentalize* the space of the boulevard.

The presentation of the project introduced a framing of Noli’s plan for Rome representing the space of Navona square. The accompanying text of the drawing, wrote, *“Piazza Navona was built on the vestiges of a stadium, the circus of Emperor Domitian, which demonstrates that heterotopias can over time develop into public spaces”* (AtelierAlbania, 2015). The Architects appeared very aware of the ideological mish-mash of the space they were re-designing, although the symbolic example of the circus did not seem to fit the case of the boulevard perfectly. The stadium of Domitian was essentially and originally thought as a place of amusements; the boulevard of Tirana not. The stadium was probably a place where the Citizens of Rome would be cheering, shouting and insulting to the contesting athletes. Furthermore, the heterotopias of imperial Rome did not vanish in a day or by the hands of one architect and politician, indeed some of those heterotopias are still there.

Besides these ideological burdens, left by the past and reframed by the present, the essence of this competition was robust. An immense space, underused in the middle, at the heart of the capital was about to be delivered to the citizens²⁰.

Behind the boulevard

Since the early 90s, much has been happening in Tirana. I briefly described the seizure of the city’s once agricultural suburbs, how the transformation process infiltrated deep in the urban fabric of Tirana, in my street mostly to the detriment of the public domain, space and propriety.

²⁰ The description of the present center of Tirana, actual and projected, is an introduction that intends to give some insights on the dynamics of the recent years. I will return to this part of Tirana, to its central itinerary of the boulevard and its centralities later on in the conclusive part. After having constructed the body of my research.

The Northern Boulevard of the Capital after a back and forth process is being installed as a Commercial Street, not as the public park proposed in the beginning. Eventually the existing axis of the city, “Skanderbeg Square” and the boulevard are being reshaped as contiguous and unconstrained public spaces, centered on the idea of de-monumentalization, the common and of the citizen. Nevertheless, the panorama does not seem complete yet. There are some more places, which need to a discussion. They are indeed more of a *constellation of places (Arneheim)*. Some paragraphs before I jumped back on the past of Tirana, in a time I barely remember. It was the boulevard invaded by the evening walk, and the spaces behind it. I described how some of these spaces were immediately assigned to different entities in the first decade of XXI century. *Tirana’s park of faith* deals with some of remnant areas but it does not venture within all of them. Its common space, envisioned as a park, does not include all the former public spaces, gardens and sport fields gravitating in proximity of the boulevard. It is as someone deliberately omitted them.

Here my introduction on what happened to Tirana enters fully into the present. While the above mentioned interventions seem to belong to an era, known in the local speech as *the Transition*, a period characterized by brute actions, informality, indulgence toward the private sector, by politics of Laissez-faire and almost an inexistent *civil society*²¹, the last projects are being developed in an entirely new setting.

National Arena

In these days, the silhouette of Tirana is changing again. Looking south, close to the recognizable volume of the University Campus²², day after day, a new tower is under construction. Its lightened structure makes the process even more un-believable to the human eye, because a volume of that range changes with the same speeds of the human rhythms of the everyday. The building still osseous and skinless, is already visible from almost everywhere. It is unconcealed to the eye, while being in the central square of Tirana, walking along the canal of Lana or driving on

²¹ Indeed organized Civil Society movements have been active in Albania since the early 2000s as it was the “Mjaft” (Enough), movement. But at that time the discussions were mainly on social, political and economic issues rather than heritage, architecture, urbanism and territorial planning.

²² The former Casa dell Fascio

the hills of the capital. The other recently added high-rises are not tall enough to shade its appearance.

The massive structure is the dominant protrusion of Tirana's new football stadium [**Figure 26/Above**], being elevated above the trace of the old [**Figure 26/below**], named "*National Arena*" The size of the tower is justified by the introduction of a new mechanism that is practically tested here for the first time, the so called "*public, private, partnership*" (PPP). There were polemics about this project but they did not seem very convinced. After all the improved green lawn and the steps were staying to the public. The private was getting the former inconvenient space underneath the steps, now multiplied, and the vertical space of the high-rise that once belonged to the neutral sky. A minor price to pay for a city and citizens already used to the loss of thousands of square meters of walkable space.

Discussions on where the threshold in between public private could have been placed, that the stadium lost its running track, gradually faded before the impressive renders, and supporting marketing efforts, of the project designed by the Italian architect Marco Casamonti. Oppositions were continuously dismantled by the constant advertising put in place by local and central authorities and the Albanian football federation through social media and news portals. The authority seems confident that the finished product will pacify any one, and the remaining sign "*will impose itself with its emanation*" (Opinion, 2016).

One of the more heated notes of the opposite voices, regarding the original façade of the stadium, was hastily managed. The renders with the original stoned structure incorporated in the hallway of the new stadium appeared immediately afterward. At the end the communist bas-reliefs of the facade were destroyed, considered *valueless* (Opinion, 2016), while the rusticated stones placed by fascism were dismantled and catalogued for the later re-introduction in the new stadium.

The process and debate over the stadium, beside its relevant political and symbolical connotations, looks as testing ground, a minor battle, in preparation of future more relevant arguments over the city and the public domain. The process was tested in an area where only 25% of the land (Exit, 2016) was owned from the state and on an obsolete building. A victory over the skirmish regarding the façade, was in part conceded to the opposing front. The central authority

avoided here the public showcase and informatory role of the design competition, and opted toward the more to the point and result oriented PPP, made of a tender and an offer. Looks, as there is an urgency to build the present Tirana, to venture into everything concerning its space. Nothing in the capital's center is left untouched, as if there is no tomorrow.

In this rapid escalation, the impressive body of the new monument deflects the attentions from the voids around it. Behind the emanation of the *National Arena* lays a once large plot of land, attached to the old stadium and randomly dedicated to the sport activates. Its lawn, that for a short time hosted even unusual activities of Equestrianism, is being quietly build. Under the shadow of the Tirana's new *jewel* (javanews, 2017), a series of skyscrapers are being raised.

The National Theater and Surroundings

My introductory narrative of Tirana's metamorphosis experienced in the last decades ends with an ongoing event. This newly aroused argument initiated on February 2018, and it is still vital in the summer days of the same year. It is about the National Theater of Tirana. This time in the hodgepodge, it is everything encountered before. A precious public propriety conceded to a private developer through a PPP. An historical building **[Figure 27/Above]**. A Star Architect appointed to design a masterpiece **[Figure 27/Below]** having the role of imposing itself through its emanation (as the National Arena did). An authority that seems more devoted to the strength of the new sign rather than the lessening of a public land. An entire apparatus merchandising the Star Architects work of art and devaluating the old presence. A persistent (until now) civil society increasingly aware on the battles that are worth fighting.

Everything started with a news, circulated in early February that the institution of the National Theater had to relocate to the new facilities. The indiscretion agitated the actors' community first and in general the public opinion. In parallel, the voices of the authority seemed prepared for a potential confrontation as they enacted immediately what looked as a strategy.

Devaluation Strategy

The first arguments, launched by the responsible central authorities, where directed to the inadequacy of the existing facility. They described the old theater as a provisory structure that had already existed way beyond what was originally thought, a leftover of Mussolini's army,

abandoned for entire decades making its actual decadence beyond repair. On February 11, in a declaration the Ministry of culture distributed the fault for the decrepit theater among the participants of the events. A part of it was of the theater itself, envisioned as a provisory ordinary *"dopolavoro"*. To blame were the preceding authorities that in the recent past opened its venues to vulgar uses, *"attracting clients rather than art lovers"* and never addressed the needs of the theater. It was their fault because they blocked the initiative that would have transferred the national theater into the *Pyramid* years ago. In addition, the actors were also given their share in the collective guilt because they remained silent on those days.

Everyone was guilty: the theater, past authorities and any other possible independent voice, except for the present authority. Meanwhile the future of the building seemed already determined: *"The theater where is today will not be destroyed and will be used again, until the day a new project for the national theater will start being raised"* (ATA, 2018). These voices were backed by other voices coming from within the actors community; the director of theater himself expressed his *terror* while dealing with the existing building: *"We don't need a provisional thing but a theater that can resist for other 200 or 300 years"* (tiranapost, 2018)

In the days that followed the local authorities took the lead in the argument by disclosing a report prepared some years ago concerning the old theater (gazetatema, 2018) . According to their interpretation of this document, the local press portrayed the materials used for theater as cheap and of poor quality. The *Populit*, a composite insulating material used in the Theater, was particularly stoned with disdain. While making the report public the mayor itself declared that the *"the mediocre chipboard and matchsticks of fascist Italy cannot be a cultural monument for Albania"*. Soon the theater started being portrayed as unstable, and probably cancer-genic, it was not just valueless but dangerous for the community.

The Compromise

Soon, another variable was introduced to the debate. The local press uncovered an older declaration of the Mayor of Tirana done in one of the meeting of the Municipality Council months before, on November 2017: *"We received a proposal, perhaps one of the most beautiful proposal that I have ever seen, for the national theater"* (Exit.al, 2018). *"The famous architect Bjarke Ingels,*

the most famous and successful architect of the world”, came himself with a proposal. He did not need the mediation of an open architecture contest or a regular public tender. His work was going to please the actors with a modern theater and the citizens with an added space (Exit.al, 2018). The discrepancies in between these and more recent declarations done made by the authority where quickly omitted.

The devaluation of the Theater’s former alleged function, called “dopolavoro”, its modest and problematic fascist origins made of poor and probably harmful materials (confirmed by the Italian report), its present inadequacy caused by the disregard of the former authorities and the omerta of the actors, weren’t enough to bring the argument to a conclusion. It was time for the Star Architect, and its masterpiece to enter actively into the stage.

On March, almost a month after the debate first initiated, Bjarke Ingels presented his proposal for the new theater. The event attracted a lot of attention. The day after the news spread all over the world’s architecture related websites, *“Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG) has released images of its bow-shaped National Theatre of Albania, responding to a thriving performance art scene in the nation’s capital”* (Walsh, 2018). To Tirana’s community an object rather than a space was presented, an iconic volume. The architect besides describing the qualities of his design did not forget to say, *“(that) the existing buildings weren’t capable of hosting a national theater”* (top-channel, 2018). On that day, it became finally clear that the governing authorities were going to reshape entirely that piece of Tirana’s center, as the prime Minister himself declared : *The building will be demolished and on the ruins of the past the new national theater will rise*” (top-channel, 2018).

The mood created by the presentation prepared the ground for the introduction of the other variable. The Prime Minister himself did that: *“The Theater is part of a proposal for a PPP. The Investor guarantees the project for the new Theater, but he is not coming here to lose (money)”* (top-channel, 2018). Apparently, the added value of the Star architect was needed not only for overcoming the values of the historic building but also for justifying the (potential) loss of other public land.

Soon, it became clear that the loss was not just potential, but programed. The bow tie shape of the building, the effort to compress as much public venues in the limited plot of the new theater

and the rhetoric on its architectonic elements (as the transparency of the facades) weren't enough to conceal what was going to happen behind the proposed building. In the render, hidden behind milky natural light and abundant greenery the shapes of what appeared to be a high-rise were distinguishable. Indeed, there were foreseen six of them, raised mainly on public land. The relatively composed PPP tested in the stadium was about to be repeated but with reversed equilibriums. A plot that was mostly public was going to become mostly private. There was clearly a compromise in between private entrepreneurs, a Star Architect and the governing authority. After all, it is reasonable for a private investor to seek a profitable business and it is the *"genetically predetermined destiny of the architect to do anything he can to try to build"* (Sudjic, 2005, p. 13).

However, what are the motives that would move the governing authority to build a theater over a theater, unconcerned that in the bargain it is losing thousands of square meters of public land? The official version that the PPP-s are the only way to realize certain projects that otherwise would be impossible for the state budget to finance do not look reliable, especially considering that meanwhile large political programs as the recent *"1 billion dollar project"* have been already implemented. It looks more plausible that the governing authority is entering a phase where building is becoming an end in itself (Sudjic, 2005, p. 13).

An Advocacy for the old Theater

Few days after the presentation of the project the association for the protection of the Theater was formed (tematv, 2018). The opposing voices became more relevant, a process of investigations on the history of the old theater started and more information became available with this regard. Despite the frequent misleading debates, dully comparing the old and the new building or focusing the discussion over thick cost-benefit analysis, in general the opposing front became conscious that the bulwark of the debate was around the issues of heritage, memory and public domain.

Soon it was revealed that the theater was never a *"dopolavoro"*, which was originally programmed in the present facilities of the *Academy of Arts*²³. Furthermore the pompous building of the

²³ Found in the same avenue where the public presentation of the competition for the new boulevard was held

academy of arts all dressed in travertine in the main plaza envisioned by fascism was not modest. Therefore, even the disdain over that function was baseless, and it was probably playing with the spread lack knowledge over the local heritage. The exoneration of the decrepit theater from the negative denomination, “Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro”, an institution specific to Mussolini’s Italy, released it also from the uncomfortable direct connection with fascism.

It became clearer that the past of the old theater was obviously of relevance [Figure 28], important for the city and for the emancipation of its society. The building of the theater portrayed as a valueless provisional piece of Architecture, had left another impression on Indro Montanelli during his visit in Tirana in 1938. While visiting the capital of the Albanian Kingdom, months before the instauration of Italy, he was fascinated by the construction site of the present theater, “*But the Italo-Albanian circle that is being raised monumental (perhaps too monumental?)...is an enormous venture, grown as a mushroom on space in very few months*” (Montanelli, 1939). For the journalist, Tirana that barely had three poor cinemas and no theater at least was going to have this place, this circle called Skanderbeg, hosting amenities never seen before, covered tennis fields, and a luxury restaurant, “*A last finishing for Tirana’s western refurbishment*”. (Montanelli, 1939).

In addition, the pretext over the awful materials of the old facility was somehow demystified. The Italian vocabularies, describe *The Populit* apathetically and without disregards as “*An insulating and isolating material used in constructions, it is a conglomerate of poplar fibers and cement, made non-flammable and shaped in panels*”. Through the progress of the debate was revealed that the Italian report on the theater was indeed a research publication based generically on the *Italian influenced* heritage of Albania. The public process of justifying the demolition of the theater through this document, despite its possible reliability, was a hint of the superficiality of the ongoing devaluation strategy.

In the old photos of the *Luce Institute* the national theater ensemble appears full of life and activities. It is clear by now that the symmetrical ensemble, besides functioning as a cultural circle, was always a theater, named first *Savoy* and then *National*. It is common knowledge that it was the central space of the Albanian indoor public life for most of the 40s, and the center of its cultural life for most of XX century. It was the privileged locus of the many Grand premieres,

were the important theatrical masterpieces where staged and where the great interpreters of the Albanian theater started and concluded their careers. All these elements became public for the citizens, architects, actors and intellectuals that wanted that piece of Tirana to remain in place.

Lastly, to the open-minded observer, it became evident that the proposed covered public space, the many performance spaces of the interior and the rooftop amphitheater imploded within the totemic bowtie of Bjarke Ingels were an unsuccessful effort to hide the explosion the private vertical high-rises over the horizontal public land within and around the old National Theater (TPZ.al, 2018).

Last Reflections on the Theater

On the last days of June 2018, this last chapter of Tirana's urban story is reaching the end of the line. With many polemics, the Albanian parliament approved a specific law on the theater. A methodology randomly used by the authoritarian government of Macedonia for clearing the grounds for *Skopje 2014*. With this unprecedented act, the responsibility for that decrepit and insignificant theater dispersed among the deputies of the main legislative organ of the state, to a group of man directly elected by the few millions citizens of Albania. Apparently, after the approval of the law, the fate of the theater is decided. The old will be demolished and over it, the new sign of the new theater and surrounding high-rises will be elevated. Only ten years later, the protectors of the survived Pyramid, now on a ruling position, have become the executioners of the Theater.

I often include the theater in my walking itineraries. While going somewhere, I choose to pass behind the trafficked space of the boulevard and in front of the theater. It is one of the last places of the capital where I can easily project myself in the past, without strenuous imaginative efforts. Around me, there are the ottoman Mosque of Ethem Bey and the Clock Tower, the ministries of the Albanian kingdom and the lateral fronts of the Socialist Palace of Culture and the fascist Hotel Dajti. Surrounded by these presences, there in the middle the two sequential and identical volumes of the National Theater stand out. In between them, there is abundant space, with an enormous unexpressed potential. In a city whose space is continuously draining, the disclosure

of a square, of an unexpected perspective that is more than a street, has become a quite unusual experience. This makes me think even more on the values of this ensemble. Values that are beyond its volumes or interiors. They lay right there in its large exterior.

Together with the old theater, a piece of Tirana's history will disappear. A building unique in its own way, a memory that is both individual and common to any man that has lived in Tirana, a space that since World War II has been part of the lives of the capital's older generations, an experience that won't be shared with the newer. A corner of Tirana will lose much of its meaning. While explaining its phenomenological view of Architecture and the man-made environment, Norberg-Schulz notes that the environment is meaningful, when, in it, man feels at home (Schulz C. N., 1979). We feel at home in the places we grew up in. With the old Theater one of our homes is about to be demolished.

In his project for the National Museum of the Danish Navy in Helsingor, Bjarke Ingels preserved the old corroded walls of Sixty years old shipyard pool. His proposed building was placed around the void of the basin creating for the posterity one of the most unique archotectonic spaces of our time. He acted differently in Tirana.

Few meters from the theater there's an huge brand new Commercial center. It is named *Toptani Center*, after the dynasty that ruled Tirana during the XIX century. It was desigedn by MVRDV and completed in 2017, again built on a former public garden. The plot of the national theater could have been disclosed already here, just by looking at this building. The very same plot is common to the other stories of the Albanian capitalism described in the previous paragrafs. It combines the story of my street, the lost view of my balocony, the lost agricultural lands of Tirana's periphery, the project for the new boulevard and the disappearance of the gardens that once sorrounded the capital's center.

Tirana's center with its left over traces is the spatial embodiement of the Albanian Capitalism, of the public domain stretched under the pressure of private interests, of private citizens, of fresh made businessmen and recent oligarchs. Of an authority that has become first complicit and now champion of the process.

The size of the common space has decreased, turned into the private space of single citizen and of the oligarchs. The tiny plot of land next to my home, the immense agricultural land of Tirana's

periphery and the large gardens around Tirana's centers have disappeared, constantly under the pressure of the private and the silence and complicity of the authority.

1.3. Research Objectives

In the first introductory part of this thesis, I went through the topics of society and space, both signed by the authority. Through the same perspective, I went through my city's recent history, through what I remember and I am still attending. Nevertheless, my expectations on Tirana are the leading reasons that have motivated this thesis topic and writing.

The objectives that I am about to set are contiguous to the topics presented but conscious of the reach that a research work of this type should have. I will not proceed with all the countless subtopics underlined by the complexity of Tirana's situation but I will focus on the main objects and subject of the plot.

My dissertation will be on the topic of space as the principal matter within which the multilayered human activity is organized. I will consider urban and architectonic space and the architectonic body, not as isolated subjects, anonymous space containers, but as mediums having a social impact, actively enclosing people's daily lives. Moreover, their creators charged them with ideological content and symbolism.

Conscious that a deeper intermingling into the present of the capital might transform this work in a political statement rather than a research work, the reference to the present will be limited to the introduction and the final part of the thesis. On the other side as I wrote before in this text, quoting Ricœur, the process of remembering and attending are not developed in sterile environment. They are processed through the way I experience the present of my city and the way I analyze its facts and history. Definitively I cannot avoid building my own expectations or avoid their influence. After all my personal expectations have motivated this entire PhD process. The least I can do, and I will, is to focus on the past at some distance from the present debates that are too actual to be valued in retrospective.

The spaces shaped in the past of Tirana were political statements in their own ways, they were charged with ideology too. They too confronted with signs of preexistent ideologies or with places of the everyday. I will develop my research through these signs that belong to the past

and settled in an altered environment, by becoming traces or vestiges of the past. I will go through places shaped during the Ottoman Empire the Albanian monarchy or Italian rule. I think that this will not only shed some light on an unfamiliar past but that it will also contribute to a better understanding of the present. Below are enlisted and described some of the main objectives of my dissertation.

Revealing Tirana's past

The first objective of this study encompasses all the following ones. It aims to a better and broader understanding of Tirana's' past and specifically the evolutionary process of the complex spaces that make its center. This will surely mitigate the lack of knowledge on this context; it will add more thoughts to the shortage of information that until now has been negatively exploited. Often even by the governing authorities. The focus will be the city, but not generically all of it, but its center as its more contented place. I will analyze its spaces and buildings. *What are the reasons behind them, phases and evolution?*

An Integral and Integrated Understanding

Paul Ricoeur introduces the concept of narrative in architecture through the analogy: *"architecture would be to space what narrative is to time"* (Ricoeur, 1998). The manmade space has juxtaposed, counterpoised parallel layers that are our places of life. It develops around our body and through our observing perspective it is understood as vested with narratives. It has a Cartesian character, a location and size, but it is also psychological. The impression of an instant through the observer is enriched with meaning and turned in extended psychological time.

Kevin Lynch while writing on the image of the city states that, the image is created in the relationship in between the observer and the environment. In this relationship, the analysis of the elements passes through the immediate indemnification (identity of the object), the analysis of its relationship with the surroundings (structure), and through the further and deeper understanding of what it signifies (meaning). The author identifies the basic vocabulary for reading the city: through paths, edges, landmarks, nodes and regions. However, he explicitly underlines that Path's *"are the most potent means by which the whole can be ordered"* (Lynch, 1960, p. 95)

The itineraries and paths are also the best way to construct the narrative of the city. Bernard Tschumi talks about their complexity, *“there is no single linear path”*. If there is a narrative traced along Tirana’s spaces, it is not an only one, because time and the consequent layering have populated it of many stories, or rather by *“different stories for different people”* (Damiani, 2003). My second objective is to build an integral overview of the spaces of Tirana’s center. For this, I won’t simply focus on a place or a building, but I will make the effort to analyze interconnected pieces of the city in continuity with each other. My understanding of the development of Tirana will pass through areas developed around the city’s dominant itineraries. I will walk through these itineraries; I will experience them helped by the available historical drawings, photos, videos and writings; I will try to trace its ramifications and former state starting from the actual altered state. Through these walks I will reconstruct the main itineraries of Tirana and the centralities interconnected by them, in different times. My objective is to observe, understand and redraw the *skeletons of the city* (Lynch, 1960). *How these itineraries, strips, became important? How their spaces and centralities where transformed and readapted to changing regimes? How where they overshadowed by newer, superimposed structures?*

Understanding Places through the main Actors

Understanding better the past of the Capital’s centers means going deeper into “Skanderbeg Square”; the boulevard; the adjacent spaces connected with them; the various old itineraries of the city. They are the stages where the fates of the Albanian society and the related ideological theater have been mostly played. On one side, there are the places of Tirana, while on the other, there are different subjects, the authorities, the decision-makers, either civic or religious, politicians, private patrons, businessmen or the community. These subjects had mutual interactions, alignments and antagonisms, within their epoch or with antecedent periods.

My final objective is to analyze the capital of Albania through the signs left by the relationship authority-citizen. The spaces shaped by the former and the everydayness of the latter. I want to understand Tirana through the authorities that have shaped it and those authorities through the spaces and buildings they have been conceived or readapted. After all, they are the actors that had and have the power to change more than our urban environments.

Along the exploration of the above itineraries and centralities, I will ask and try to find an answer to several other questions: *Who envisioned these centralities? What was the symbolic that transformed those into signs? What was the original meaning of these signs? What is their meaning today? Where they destroyed, overshadowed, readapted or reconverted?*

Lastly, I will go through the issues of the citizens and of the public domain. *Were there public places devoted simply to the everyday that were free of the ideological meaning? How did the citizens and authorities participate in these places? How did they interact together?*

1.4. Methodology

Literature overview

I will consult a broad literature regarding different topics directly or indirectly related to my dissertation. I will go through relevant philosophical currents: through philosophies that have inspired totalitarianism (Plato and Hegel); or Phenomenology (Heidegger) that underlines the distinct role of the individual in building its own narrative of the living environment. I will consider the theme of space in architecture (Zevi), of Place (Schulz) and various theories of perception (Arnheim, Lynch). The other topic, crucial to this thesis is that of architecture and authority (Sudjic), of totalitarianism, of the ordered structures, of relationships in between society and space and of the transformation of cities (Benevolo). I will make also an extensive use of local authors regarding the Albanian history (Frashëri) because it will form the spine through which the entire process will be structured.

Archival research

There are many drawings from Tirana. In the development of the thesis, I will make use of them. They are the most reliable source to define the evolvement of the capital. Any other data provided by other sources will be confronted first with these plans. These drawings are often dated, and they show elements that are important for the perception of the city. They show streets' names, trees, bridges, houses, walls, religious objects, civic buildings, water mills, the river's meanders or the urban water channels. Those are drawings documenting the existing situations or projects, visions for the future of the capital, which remained on paper or partially implemented.

The first maps are from 1917, and they bear Germanic inscriptions. These topographic surveys of the city are leftovers from the Austro-Hungarian administration and an army that controlled the region of Tirana during the Great War. They represented the urban fabric shaped and leftover by the centuries of the ottoman rule, dominated by signs built by religious, mostly Islamic, authorities. I will make use of these plans for the observation of the first itinerary, which describes the very same period.

Other maps will be used for the first itinerary are from 1921 signed by Skender Frasheri a local engineer. They are probably a proof of the first attempts of the local Albanian authorities to inform themselves about their territory. Those maps are quite accurate representation of Tirana, only one year after its elevation to capital of Albanian. They document a situation quite similar to that of 1917. Obviously, in the countries instable decade since the proclamation of its independence in 1912, there was not much room for major public or private works.

The maps from 1923 are especially interesting because they have two juxtaposed layers. The first one is the existing situation, still similar to that of the previous drawings. The second layers instead are a novelty. They show, and design, the new networks of roads. For the first time the governing authorities, bring an enhanced thinking on the Capital. Larger and straighter axes appear overlapped over the organic fabric. In these years, Albania is a parliamentary republic, a democracy taking its first steps. These plans will be useful for the description of the second itinerary, which coincides with the rise and fall of Ahmet Zogu that in less than two decades vested the role of politician, minister, president and monarch of the Albanian state.

The drawings form 1929, are from the regulatory plan for the city. These plans represent a capital different form before. The former scattered neighborhoods of city are encircled by larger roads. A boulevard breaches through the existing fabric to the northern fabric and toward the empty meanders of the Lana to the south. A large and symmetric central square, surrounded by eclectic monumental buildings is given to the city. Signs of the civic authorities are becoming gradually stronger than the preceding religious signs. The square is one of the centers of the new capital, the other is the immense president palace at the end of the gardened southern boulevard. The Albania of this years is controlled by one man, Ahmet Zogu, that since 1925, after a series of endured and inflicted coup d'états took complete control over the state and its capital.

The maps from 1934 and especially those from 1937, clearly done by Italian instruments and military authorities, are among the most detailed plans ever produced for Tirana. The projects from the previous decade are being implemented and documented. The fabric of Tirana is altered, the boulevard to the south and the main axes have been implemented. Tirana has passed its major process of haussmannization (Frampton K. , 2007) the will influence its development for the decades to come. These plans are the last ones that will be utilized for understanding the signs of Zog I, which since 1935 until 1939 acted as King of Albania.

The last plans of the city that I will use for the third itinerary are from the 40s. They belong to the brief lapse of time that Albania was under the rule of the Italian kingdom and the fascist ideology. These are the years of the Second World War and during which the southern segment of the boulevard was implemented. In these plans the footprint of the boulevard, and that of the new added buildings envisioned by the fascist administration are represented.

Other drawings that will be useful for this itinerary are the projects for Tirana. First of all is the regulatory plan of 1939-40. This document and its series of drawings are relevant to understand the new direction of Tirana, after the local monarchy was overthrown.

Then it's the new project for the southern axis, The Boulevard of the Empire. This space has an entirely different character from the previous project made for Zog I. Its large gardens are substituted by a densely built promenade framed by compact volumes of institutional buildings. In this project the envisioned boulevard by fascism is clear, a project that at the end was only partially implemented.

The last relevant drawings are those for "Skanderbeg Square" and the Bazaar of Tirana. If the Italians had more time on their disposal, they would have reshaped "Skanderbeg Square". The square of Zog I, and the ottoman bazaar would have been demolished and substituted by new structures, buildings more similar to those already implemented in the boulevard.

I intend to utilize all this available data, and more of them, traced from the Albanian Central Construction Archives. I will redraw them, overlaying the path of my itineraries on these drawings.

Visual Representations

For Bruno Zevi, photography “*faithfully represents the great number of two and three dimension elements of architecture, everything, that is...*” (Zevi, 1974, p. 57). Through the text, I will utilize the old imageries representing genuine slices of life of the Capital. Indiscriminately ordinary or extraordinary events will be equally useful to understand and reproduce how the places of Tirana were.

There are many available images of Tirana in different times. The oldest imageries known are the aquarelles from Edward Lear; they give a vivid impression of the XIX century Tirana. The savage mountains, the picturesque valleys, the cypresses and the manufactured old mosque. Lear discloses for us a small town immersed in nature and that is not compact enough to obstruct the view of its periphery from the center. A city made of space rather than buildings.

Then there are other more recent images impressed on celluloid by foreign travelers or Albanian photographers. The black and white prints of the Austrian army portraying the mudded streets of the city, daily scenes in the bazaar, the graveyards, the first documentation of the public ceremonies, the military marches, and recurrences, the celebration of the Eid in the field of the weekly bazaar, or the first nocturnal images of Tirana’s sky illuminated by fireworks.

Lastly, I will base my observation on the precious archives from the Luce Institute. In their videos and photos, which documented almost daily the country after the Italian annexation, the Albania of Zog I is widely described. This collection is rich with imageries of Everyday routine, of special events, of rites happening along the streets of center, of people crowded around the speakers placed on the civic buildings of “Skanderbeg Square”, listening at the Duce. Moreover, a special place is given in this collection to the documentation of the large construction works carried out by Italians, images documenting thoroughly all the stages of the building process, and of the rapid integration of the new spaces of the boulevard to the new political and social life of Tirana.

Memoirs

While the imagery is, free for interpretations the many memories on Tirana offer a parallel personal description of the same scenes represented in the photos. Many visitors that have traveled to the city have left for us valuable first person accounts. Edward Lear himself, besides

its beautiful paintings, has dedicated an entire chapter of his book to his short visit, on September 1848 to the city. His impression of the buildings, the colorful mosques, of the people, the noisy bazaar and the beautiful landscape, the way he discloses the emotions caused to him by the phenomena of Tirana, are another precious information for truly understanding its places.

Besides those of Lear, there are the accounts from Johann Georg von Hahn, August Dozon or Alexandre Degrand, the French diplomat, which writes the first account of a traveler coming from the western regions to the city. The Albanian writer Vedat Kokona, moved from Turkey to Tirana after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. In his memoirs he describes his childhood impressions, of a city just awakened by the long dominion of the Sultan.

For the reconstruction of the second itinerary that describes the transformations of the city in between the proclamation of its independence until the dethronement of the Albanian King from Italy in 1939, the memories of Captain Duncan Heaton Armstrong or of the American writer Rose Wilder Lane, that in 1921, visited the just proclaimed capital, Tirana, were useful. While Satin Saraci, first best friend and then a foe of Ahmet Zogu gives a biased but valuable description of the political thoughts that Ahmet Zogu, staged in the capital. The many military personnel that have served in Albania as the British officials W.F. Stirling (1923-31) and Dayrell R. Oakley-Hill (1930), the British Scholar Stuart E. Mann (1929), have also written down their personal experiences in Tirana.

Finally, the other valuable source is the book from the Italian journalist, Indro Montanelli, entirely dedicated to Albania. He visited Tirana few months before the Italian Invasion. His vivid and thoughtful descriptions are useful for understanding the scale of the transformations that not only the capital but also the Albanian society as a whole was having.

The third itinerary, that describes the city left after the Italian invasion (1939), will be aided by the memories of the Italian Army doctor, Franco Benanti. He was very positive of what his compatriots were doing in the country, by then an Italian province. I will make use of the accounts left by the Nazi diplomat Hermann Neubacher, which sees Tirana in a more distant way. His impressions are probably more reliable. He describes a city still dominated by the ottoman past.

However, crucial for the documentation and understanding of the dynamic of this period are the memories of count Ciano the Italian Foreign Minister and Mussolini's son-in-law, particularly attached to Albania.

I will consider all these accounts and old photographs through a phenomenological interpretative approach. Having in mind that in *"phenomenology, reality is comprehended through embodied experience. Through close examination of individual experiences"*, I will seek to capture the meaning and common features, or essences, of an experience or event" (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

1.5. Chapter 1 Figures.



Figure 1. Untitled, Maurizio Cattelan, 2001, Photo Courtesy of mariangoodman.com



Figure 2. People celebrating in front of the burning headquarters of The Albanian labor Party of Shkoder, Shkoder. April 1991. Photo Credit: Angjelin Nenshati

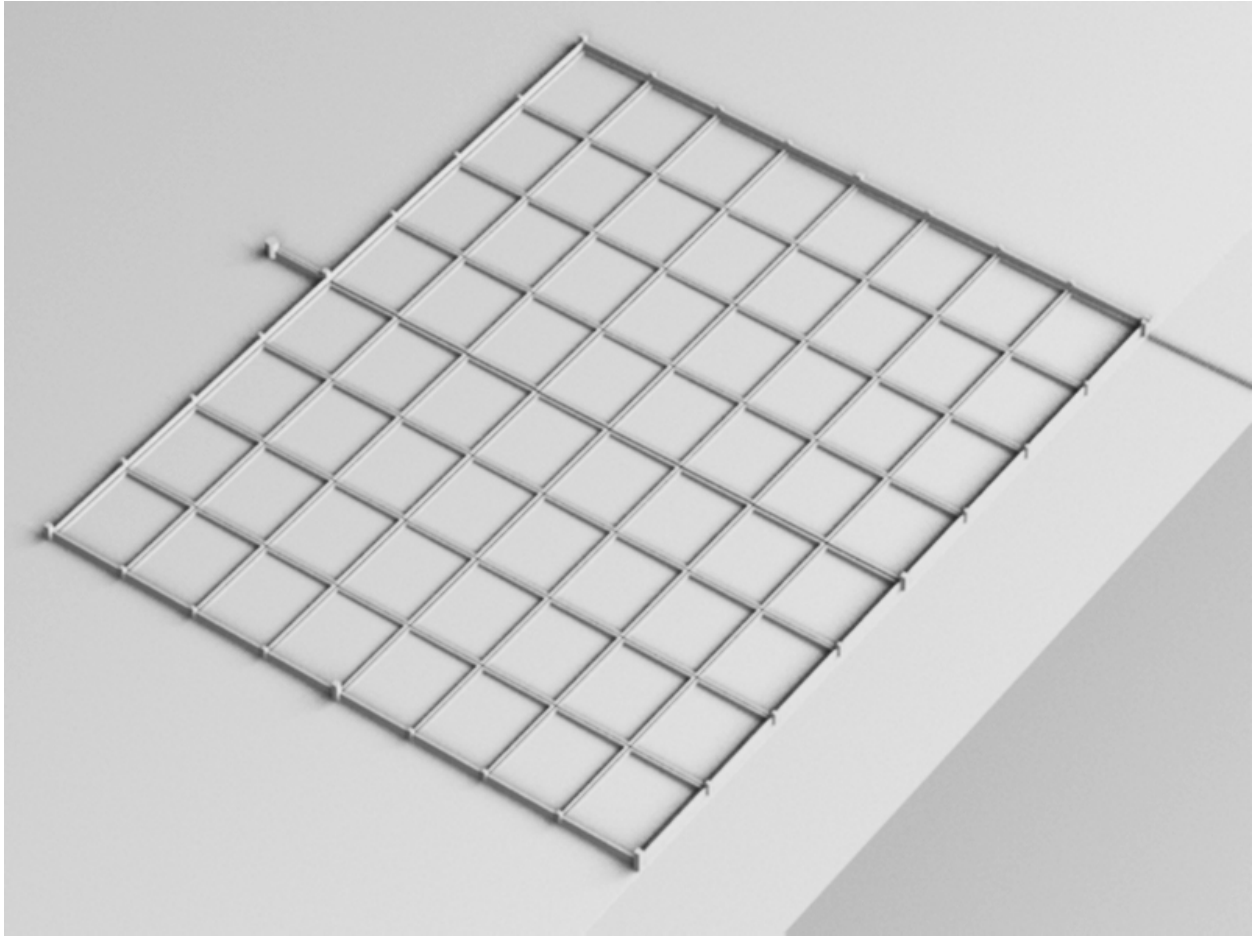


Figure 3. Amurot. A reconstruction of the structure of the Utopian Capital based on its description, in the Book Utopia, by Thomas Moore, Drawing: Endrit Marku

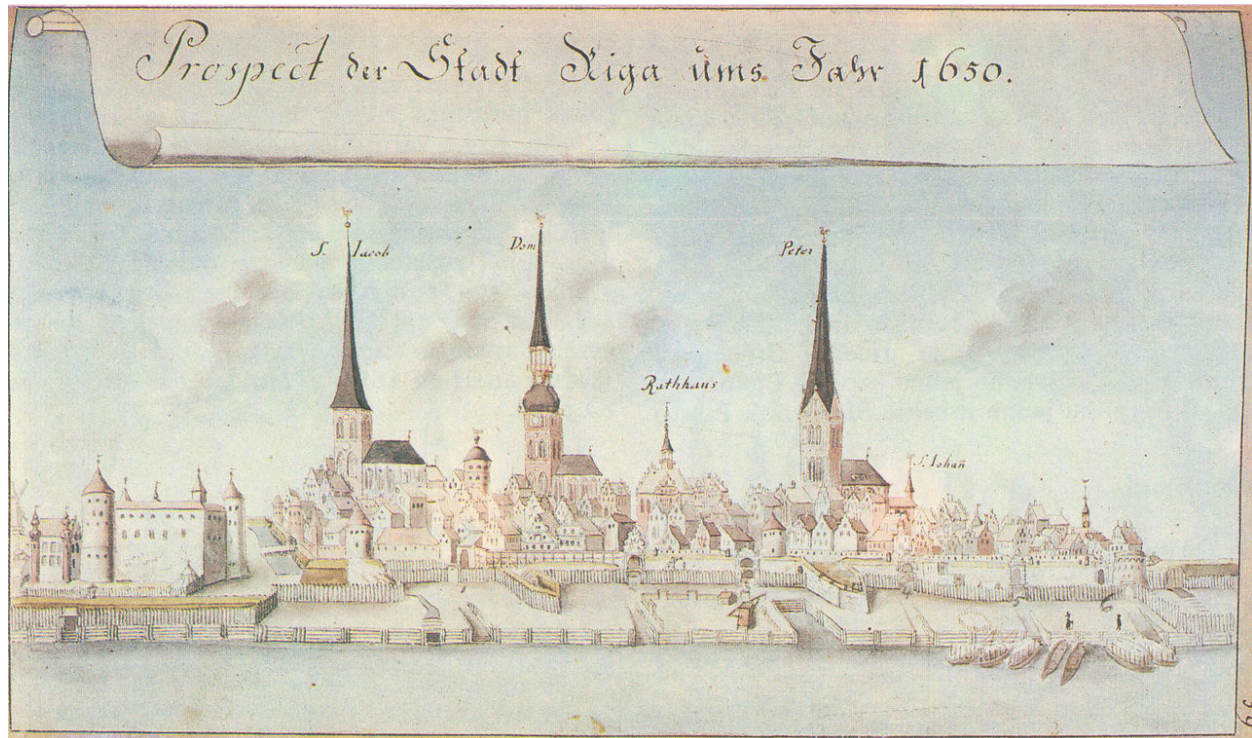


Figure 4. A View of Riga in XVII Century. The skyline is dominated by the bell towers of the three main Cathedrals and Churches. Drawing by Johann Christoph Brotze, 1650.



Figure 5. Two slices of the same skyline of Riga's center. (Above) In the first image appear the bell towers of the Christian churches at the core of the old town. (Below) In the second image is represented the Academy of Sciences. The photographs are from The Stone Bridge (formerly known as October Bridge). Riga. 2016. Photo Credit: Endrit Marku



Figure 7. An Image of the Freedom Monument. Riga. 1935. Photo by DAVID ILIFF. License: CC-BY-SA 3.0

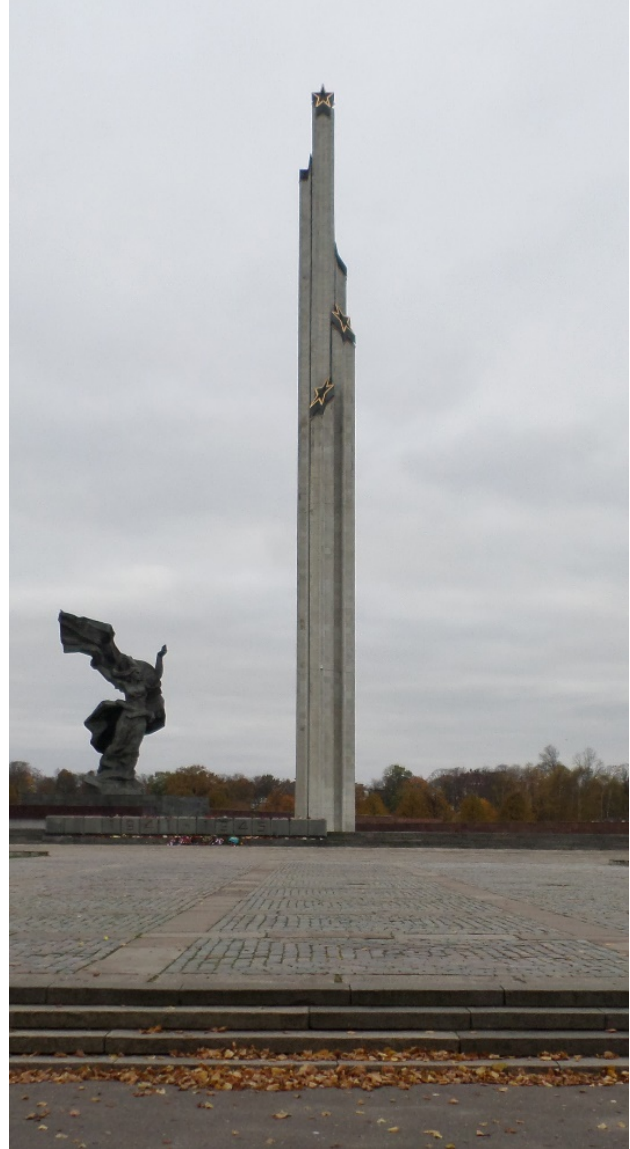


Figure 7. An Image of the Victory Monument. Riga. 1985. Photo Credit: laceduplutheran.com



Figure 8. The axis in between the two obelisks. On the eastern side is located the Freedom Monument (1). Moving to the right are the three Christian Cathedrals (2, 3, 4). Follows the former October Bridge (5). With the number Six (6) is signed the National Library, one of the new symbols of the city whose location seems intentional. Its presence obfuscates that of the Soviet monument next in the sequence. The Victory Monument (7) finalizes the path. This image is from the Academy of Sciences Rooftop. Riga. 2016. Photograph and Scheme Credits: Endrit Marku.

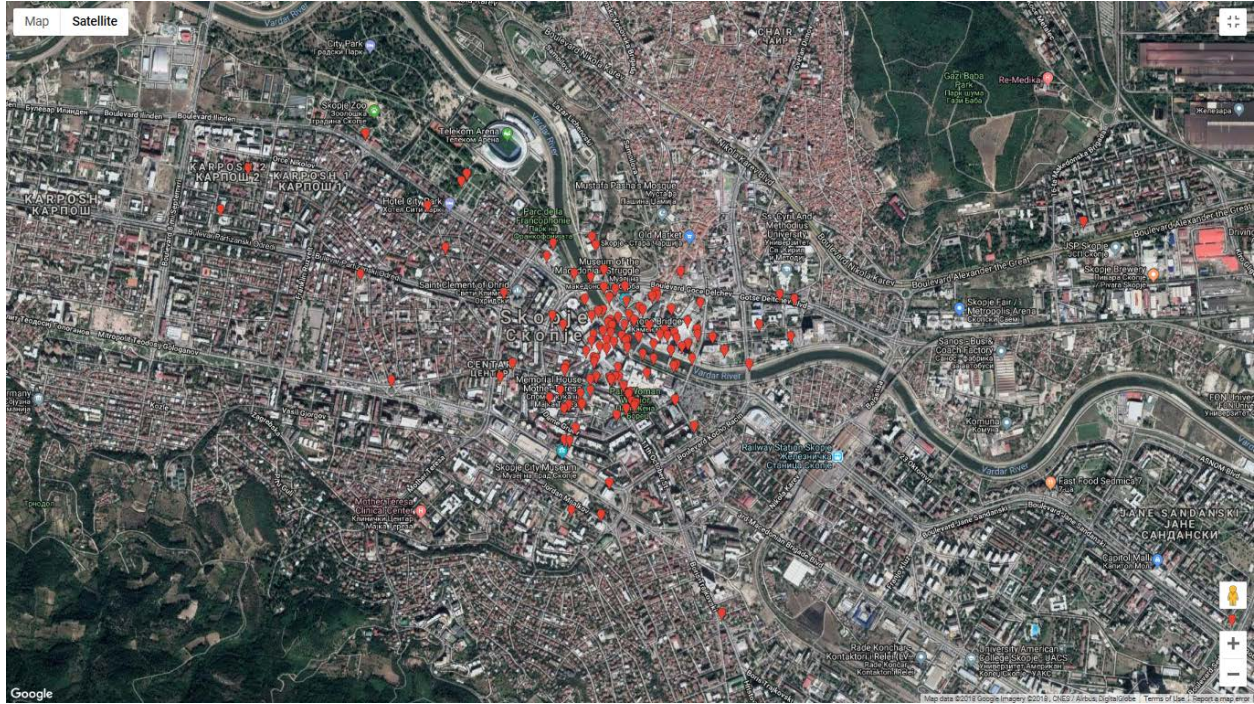


Figure 9. Location of the Skopje 2014 structures after an investigation held in the framework of the Project for Investigative Journalism and Cooperation Between Media and Civil Society - USAID Program for Strengthening Independent Media in Macedonia (BIRN, n.d.).



Figure 10. A Modernist Civic Building (The Administrative Court) during the process of refurbishment with a neoclassical facade. Skopje. 2017. Photo credit: The Bohemian Blog.

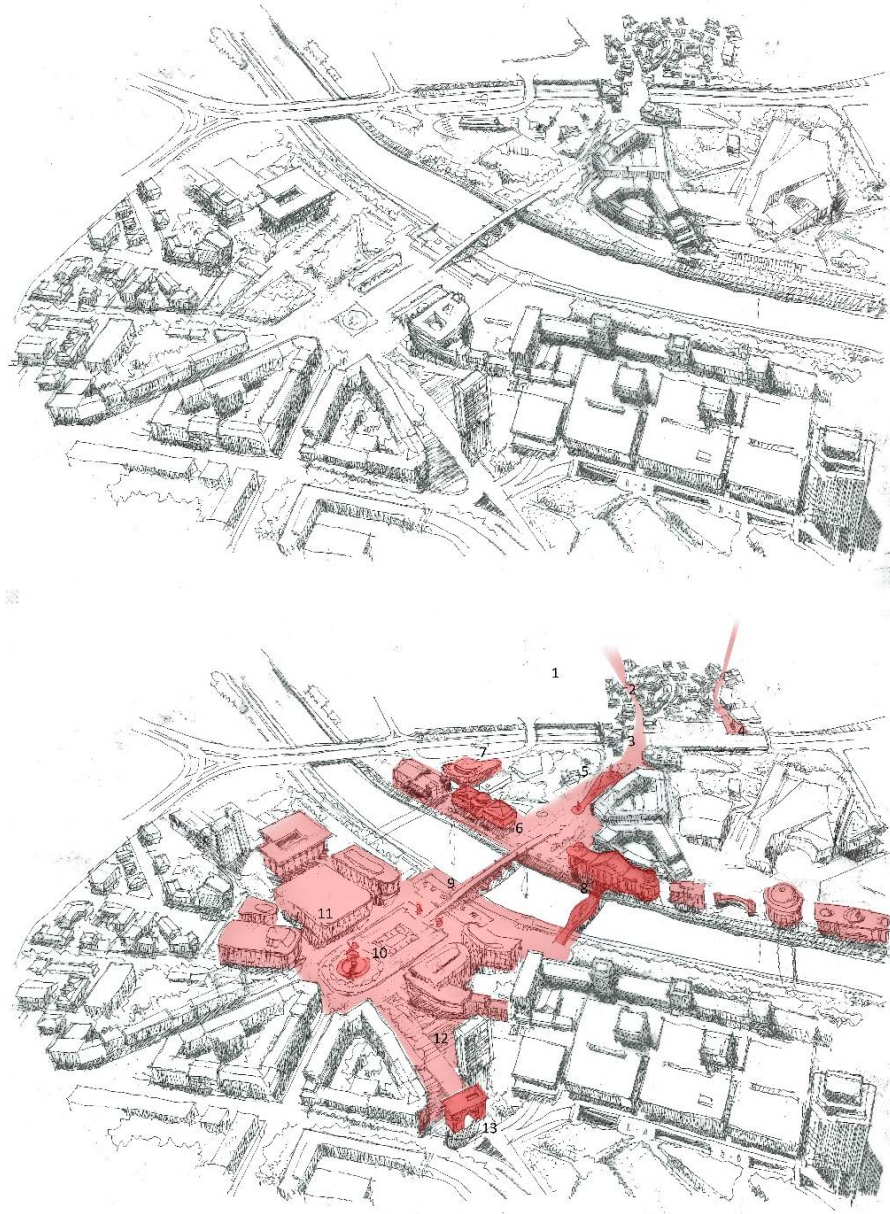


Figure 11. Skopje Itineraries. [Above] The original Rationalist center of Skopje, built after the massive 1963 earthquake. [Below] The juxtaposed neoclassical structure built in the last decade. The Castle [1]; the Ottoman Bazar [2], the secondary and disconnected Albanian itinerary immediately ending at the new Monument of Skanderbeg [4]; History and Manufactured history meet at the old Turkish Baths [3]. The First square of Alexander’s origins [5]. The “Near placed” Museums of Macedonian Struggle [6] and of the Holocaust [7]. The old Stone bridge [9]; The Museum of Archeology and its new bridge [8]; Square Macedonia, centered around the Giant statue of Alexander the Great [10] and the new neoclassical built front [11]. The included station of Mother Therese’s house [12]. The triumphal conclusion of Arch Macedonia [13]. Scheme Credits: Endrit Marku.



Figure 12. The Archeological Museum of Macedonia, during its construction. Photo Credit: Marcin Szala, August 2012.



Figure 13. The statue of Alexander the Great at Macedonia Square, the main center of the capital. Skopje, 2018. Photo credit: halo travel.



Figure 14. Porta Macedonia. The Conclusive (or the opening) monument of the itinerary. From the perspective framed by the arch is visible the statue of Alexander the great in the precedent square. The buildings on the flanks are before their baroque refurbishment. Skopje, 2012.



Figure 15. Reproduction of the Pantheon in Imperial Rome. The building was approached through a rectangular elongated plaza, surrounded by a regular peristyle.

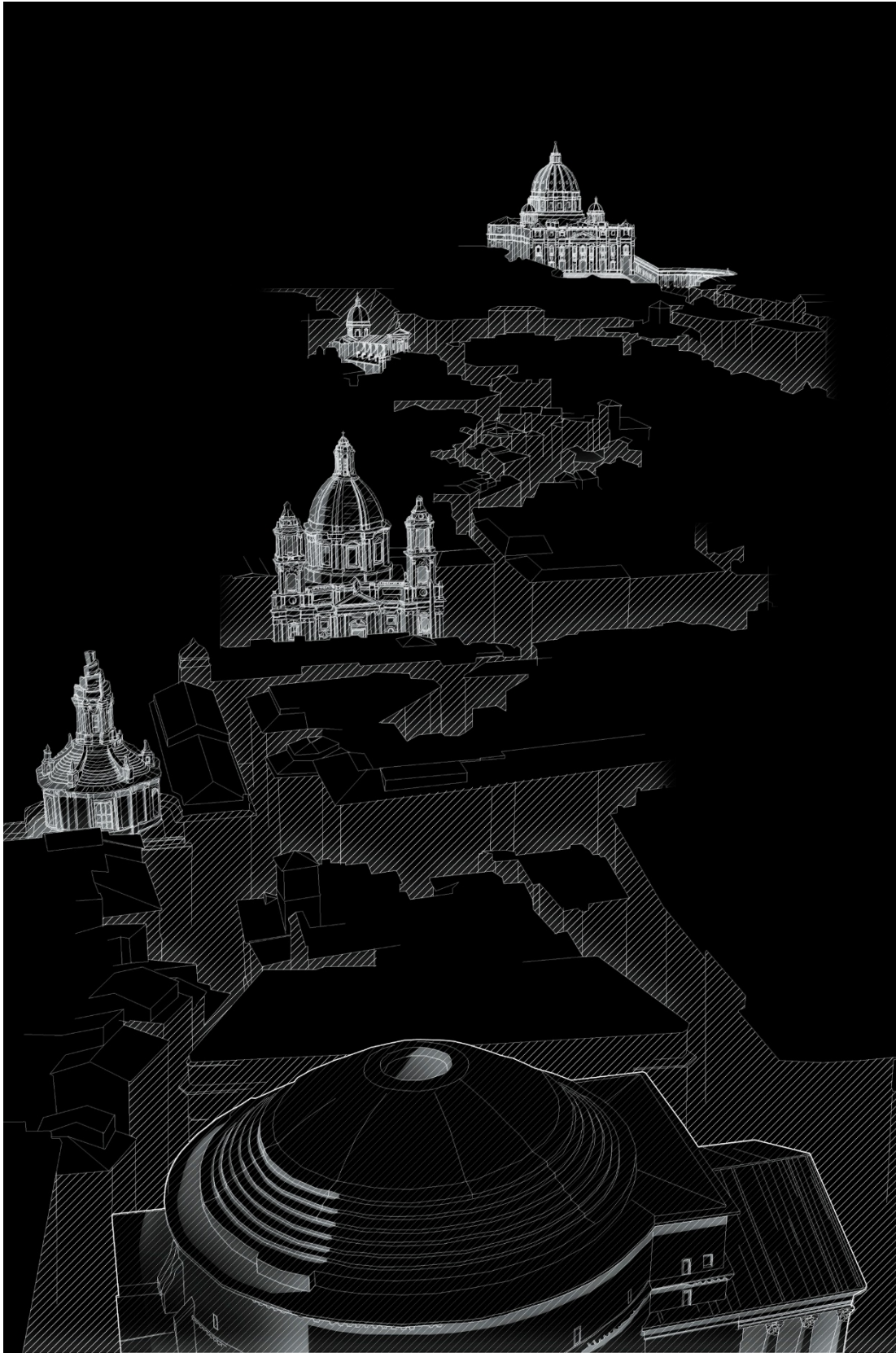


Figure 16. The Itinerary, from Pantheon to Saint Peter Basilica. Drawing: Endrit Marku

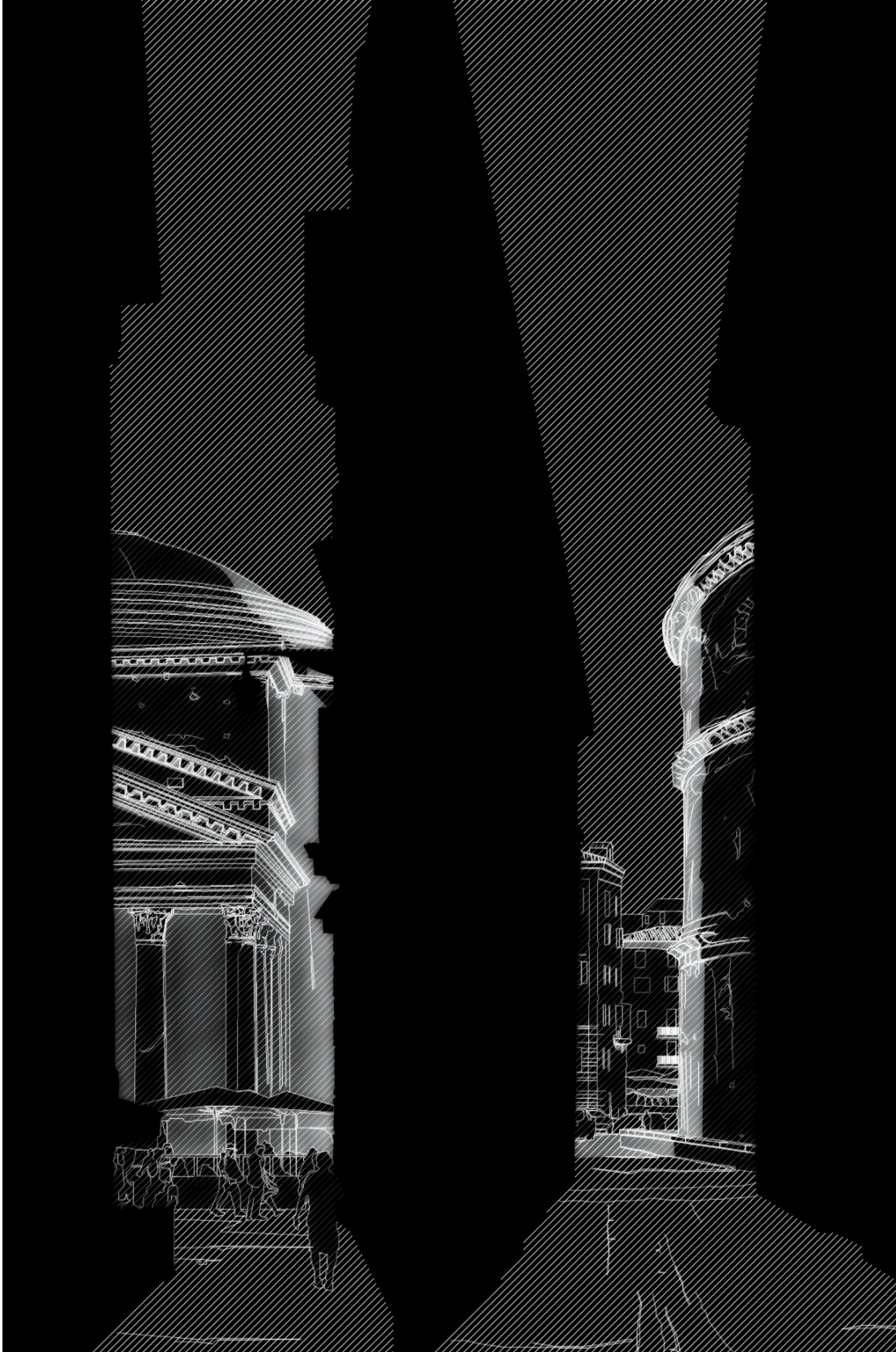


Figure 17. The pantheons present perception. Drawing: Endrit Marku



Figure 18. (Above) A drawing made by me in 1998, seven years after the fall of the socialist regime. (Below) The photo is from 2018, and shows the radical transformation of same street. Tirana. 2018. Credits: Endrit Marku

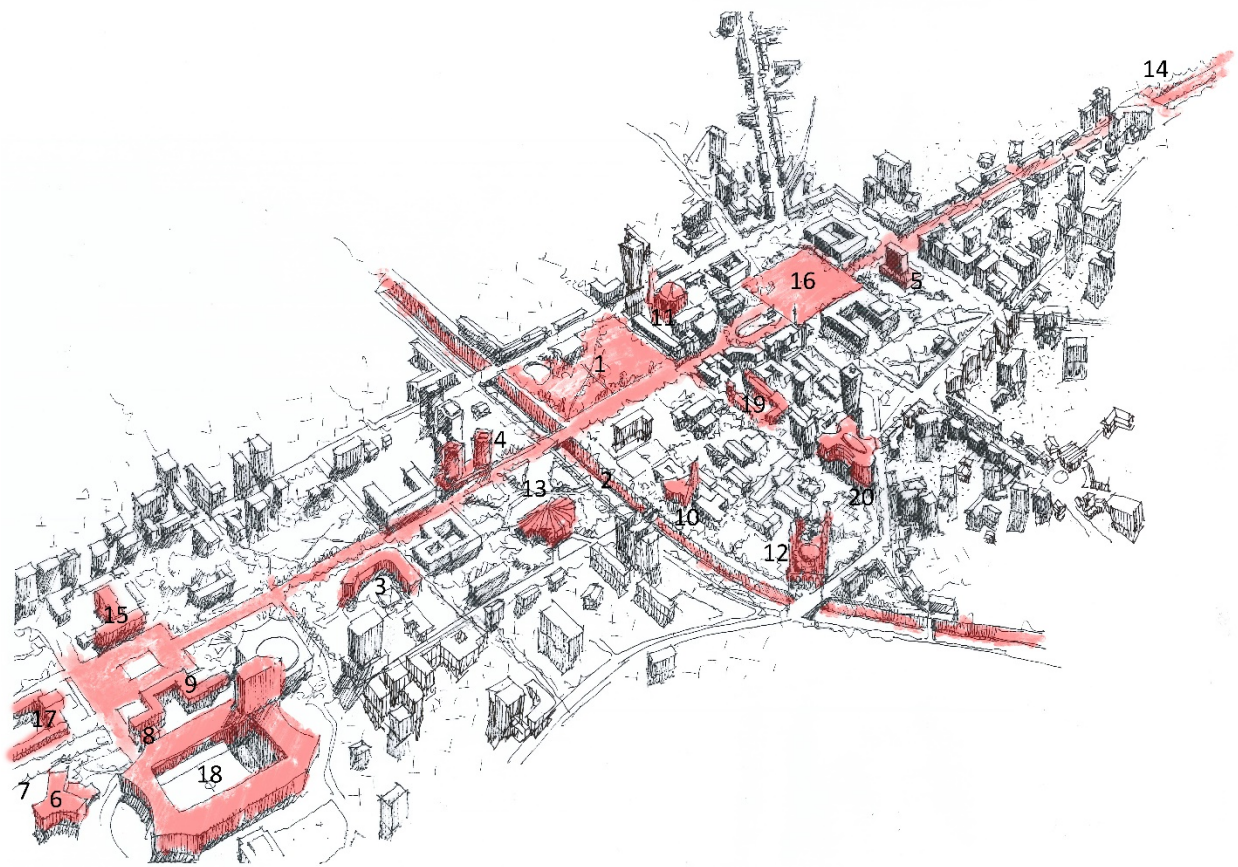


Figure 19. Tirana in 2018, after the transformations of the last decades. In the drawing are singled the buildings and spaces relevant to this section of the thesis. Drawing: Endrit Marku



Figure 20. Urban Design of Tirana City Centre, Architecture-Studio, 2003



Figure 21. (Above) The Pyramid, Build in 1988, as a museum for the deceased dictator Enver Hoxha. Photo Credit: Bohemian Blog; (Below) The New Parliament of Albania, The winning project in the competition organized in 2011. Credit: Coop-Himmelblau.



Figure 22. (Above) Photo of the gardens beyond Skanderbeg's statue. The photo is from the day of the local elections of 2011. The works stopped and restarted months later but to implement another project. Here represented in the lower part of the sequence. Tirana. 2011. Photo Credit Endrit Marku (Middle) The project from 51N4E that won the competition for Tirana's "Skanderbeg Square". The Project already in progress halted the day before the local elections of 2011 and re-implemented after the national elections of 2013. Credit: 51N4E (Below) This is the short-lived project implemented after the 2011 elections. The photo represents the celebrations held in "Skanderbeg Square" for the occasion of the centenary of Albania's independence. The center of the square is empty despite the large crowds. Photo Credit: Tirana Observer, 2012

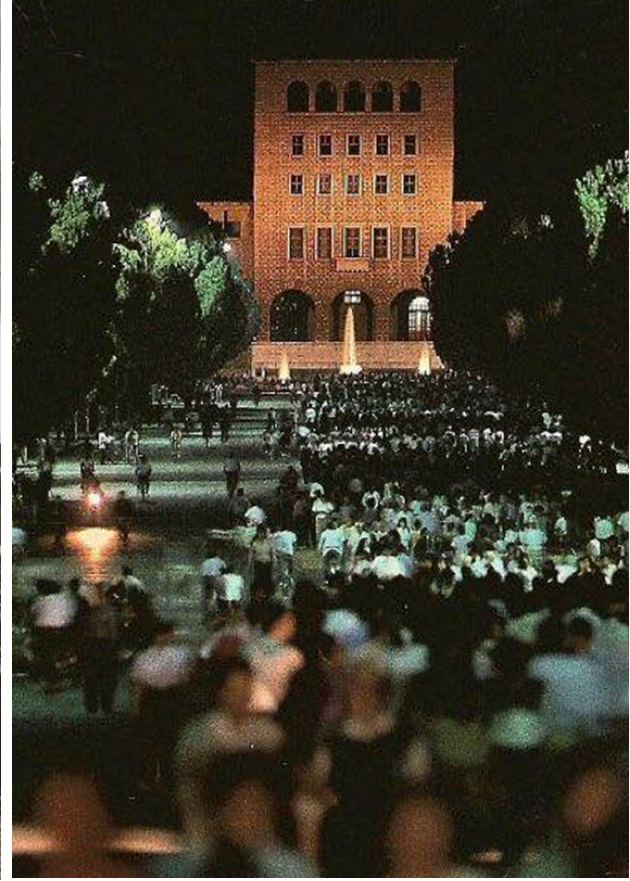


Figure 23. (Left) A scene from a military parade along the Boulevard of Tirana. On the background, there are the headquarters of Tirana's University, originally designed for hosting the Casa Dell'Fascio. The parade probably made for the 30th anniversary of the Liberation of country. Tirana. November 1974. (Right). The evening promenade. The National Geographic published this image in 1990. The scene is probably from one year before the fall of the regime in 1989. Tirana. 1989. Photo Credit: national Geographic.



Figure 24. The Boulevard the day before the visit of the Pope. Above the axis, where installed the images of religious martyrs executed during Communism. Photo Credit: missioneassisi.it. 2014.

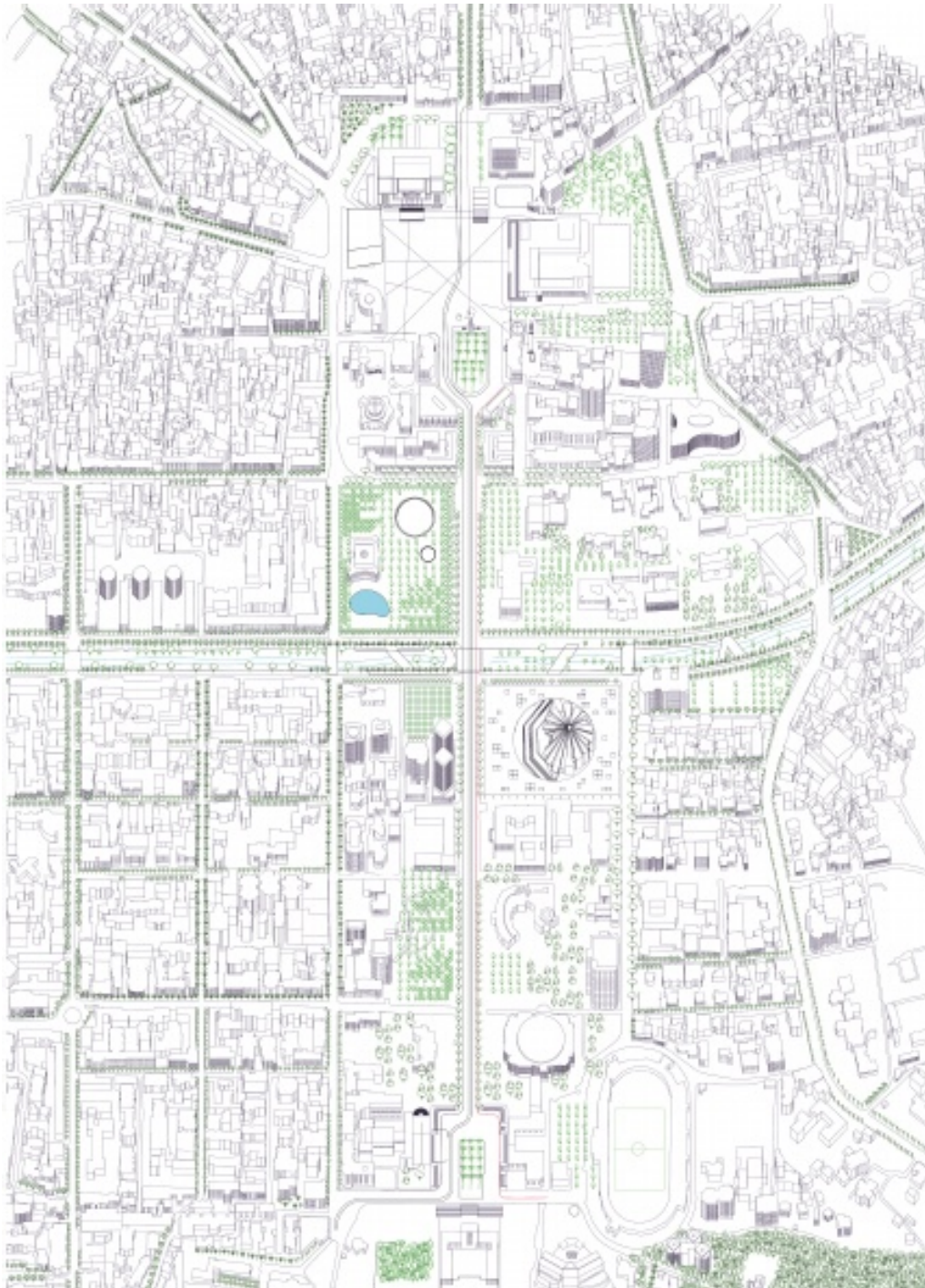


Figure 25. Park of Faith, Wining proposal, By USTUDIO + Jurtin Hajro, for the Park of Faith Competition. Tirana. 2015, Credit: USTUDIO + Jurtin Hajro,

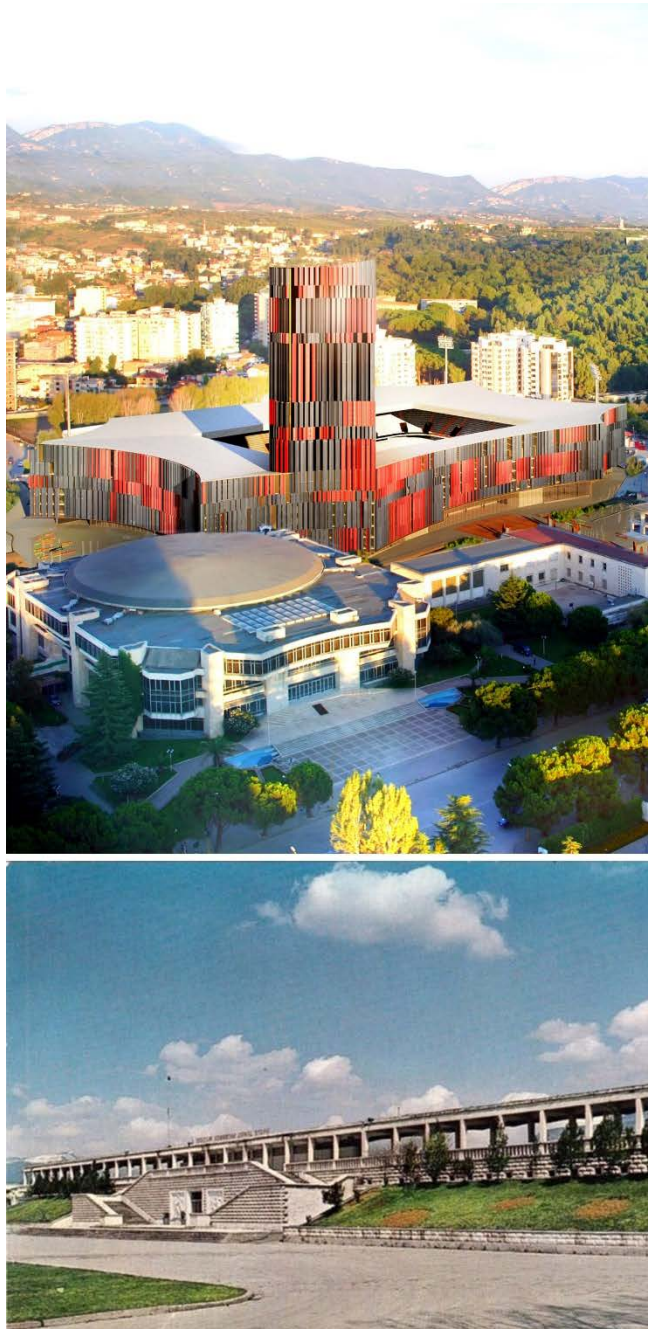


Figure 26. [Above] rendering of the National Arena. The project dominates from Mario Casamonti dominates the skyline of the final segment of Tirana’s boulevard. Tirana. 2016. Credit: Repubblica.it. [Below]. The former state of the national Stadium named after Qemal Stafa (a communist martyr of WWII), and built during the years of the Italian occupation. Credit: rtsh.al



Figure 27. [Above] the Ensemble of the National theater. Tirana. 2018. Photo credit Tsai Mali. [Below]The bow tie shaped project form Bjarke Ingels. Photo Credit: Bjarke Ingels group



Figure 28. The Fascist Befana. The photo shows an event organized in the space of the Theater. Albanian children's perform with European Renaissance costumes (never used in the Ottoman Albania). The inscription beyond writes: Duce, you liberated us! Tirana. 1940. Photo credit: Luce Institute

1. THE PLURALITY OF CENTERS OF THE OTTOMAN TOWN [1614-1912]

In this itinerary, I will walk through the streets of a Tirana that has just experienced the immense shift from being part of the Ottoman Empire to becoming an unintelligible entity drained by greater forces, sometimes toward dependence to other entities and sometimes toward autonomy.

The Tirana I will encounter is still rooted in its past. It is a time of uninterrupted traumatic events. The Albanians have proclaimed their independence in 1912, internationally acknowledged, in Berlin, only later, in 1913, in the aftermath of the Balkan war. To the new nation, a foreign king was imposed but its reign did not last long, brusquely interrupted one year later, in 1914, by the start of the First World War. The Balkans became one of the many theaters of the armed conflict. This Albania is crossed by one of the many front lines of the opposing coalitions. Tirana still unaware of the imminent events that would raise its status to capital of the country lays within the Austro-Hungarian controlled region.

Some of the most relevant data that will help me reconstruct this itinerary belong to the two years stretching from 1916 to 1918, a period during which the Austrian authorities took care of the local administration. In this short lapse of time some very important outputs take shape, providing vital clues on the state of art of Tirana in these years. The most important product left by the Austrian administration is one of the oldest known maps of the city. A quite accurate topographical survey that portrays a settlement made of small households, large courtyards, many mosques, cemeteries and scattered public buildings around an area central to the settlement. Another important output of this period are photos, from Austrian archives. They represent scenes of every day life, people walking in the streets, caravans entering and leaving the city, scenes from the bazar, ceremonies from the mosques and genuine slices of the city as it was, the streets of the bazar, its arcades, the covered wells, and the muddy and cobblestoned roads.

I will add to the previous other sources, memories and drawings left by foreign travelers that have visited Tirana. These testimonies although poorer are more genuine because they will help me reconstruct the ottoman spaces and society of Tirana from their direct experience.

Based on the above data I will rebuild an itinerary set in the second decade of the XX century through the signs left by the fallen regime of the ottomans. The places that I will explore although under the administration of a new regime are still those left by the four hundred years of the Sultan rule. I will wander along the streets of a quasi-independent state that did not have the time to intervene on the spatial and social structure left by the past.

1.1. Reclaiming nature [Prologue]

This story of the center of the present capital of Albania starts with a legend. A narrative of the power struggle among two men for the place that later would be called Tirana. The legend, the most detailed among other versions, has been written down for the first time by the French Consul of the northern city of Shkodra, A. Degrand (Frashëri, 2004, p. 55).

The story speaks of Suleiman Pasha, of the Bargjini family, an Albanian commander of the ottoman army returning back to his homeland from his military campaigns in Persia. In his path, not far from home, he was especially delighted by the encounter of a particular place that later he would call Tirana. A beautiful plain covered by a blooming forest and running streams. The pasha, a wise guy that got his tittle thanks to his talent in poetry especially in poems commending the virtues of the Sultan, decided to claim that land.

Nevertheless, in between him and that beautiful work of nature, there was another man. The other character of the legend is Selman Bey, ranked lower in the ottoman hierarchy, but the legitimate owner of that land. Suleiman pasha obsessed by the place, made continuous offers to the Bey, repeatedly, but they were always rejected.

Without any other peaceful alternative left, the Pasha changed his strategy. He ordered his man to reclaim the forest by force. They teared down a part of the forest and with the obtained timber started the construction of a mosque and a bakery. The angered Selman Bey decided to fight back. Determined to reclaim his individual propriety, he attacked the construction workers and demolished the mosque. This move signed his end.

With his actions, Selman Pasha destroyed the sign of the Sultan, of god, and for this he was accused of sacrilege, sentenced to death and executed. Suleiman Pashe Bargjini finally appropriated the beautiful forest, "The forces (of nature) were domesticated and the city became

a fact which helped to liberate man from the terror of the natural world with its dark power and limiting laws” (Schulz C. N., 1979).

From this mythic event, begins the story of the settlement. It’s the XVII century, that very same Grand Siècle that established the bases that would transform Europe radically. Another distant universe for this Albania that although geographically closer, had its fate intertwined with the Orient. This proximity is underlined also in the finale of the legend. Suleiman Pasha called the place Teheran, celebrating one of his former victories in Iran. He continued his campaigns along the eastern borders of the Ottoman Empire, serving the Sultan. After a battle deadly wounded he was transported in Baghdad, where he passed away. His embalmed body was brought back to Tirana, but his heart no, it was left behind in one of the mosques of Baghdad.

After the unclear beginnings of the settlement, Tirana initiated its growth. As its founder’s body, the settlement, very much alive, was about to become a European city with an immanent oriental spirit centered on its bazar and mosques.

2.2. Introduction to the first itinerary

Tirana’s history starts in 1614. The year of the construction of the Old Mosque, almost two centuries after the conquest of the byzantine capital, Constantinople’s, in 1453. In that period the authority of the Sultan was already well established. His power was delegated to an *Istanbul-trained class of military governors* (Hartmuth, The history of centre-periphery relations as a history of style in Ottoman provincial architecture, 2010). After this event the empire gravitated under a unique capital, an undisputed center of power.

The Crisis of the Center and Tirana (The Sultan)

Hierarchy within the ruling class was carefully preserved, to avoid noxious phenomena that could mine the overall established structure. For these reasons, from the XVI century every project in the empire had to be supervised by the institution of the Royal Architect, who took care that every construction of public relevance was proportional to the hierarchy of its patron (Hartmuth, The history of centre-periphery relations as a history of style in Ottoman provincial architecture, 2010). The local feudal would try to mark their domains through the founding of public works like mosques, bridges, fountains and by doing so they would mark their domains and try to obtain

the favors of the central power. Through their private investments, monitored by the royal institutions, they were spreading through the empire the signs of Sultan. The mosques of Tirana, spread all over the quarters of the city were emanations, often antagonizing each other, of the unifying center of the sovereign. The monuments of Tirana were built over three centuries. XVII, XVIII and XIX.

The XVIII century corresponded to the crisis of the main center of the Sovereign. It is the age of the large military conflicts involving the Ottoman Empire, against Russia and Austria. These wars signed the arrest of the territorial expansion of the domains of the Sultan. In this environment the *Spahi*, the ottoman feudalist, stopped basing their wealth on the spoils and rewards of the wars, and opted for a more introverted approach, based on the exploits of their domains, on the collection of the multitude of tax revenues and commerce. They would use all sort of excuses to avoid the military excursions ordered by Istanbul. Often, because of the further decline of the influence of the center, they would even openly refuse. The rage of Istanbul mitigated later through bribing. This crisis of the central authority resulted in the antagonism of the inner minor centers of the Empire, resolved in numerous conflicts in between the feudalists, in Albania as well. They could claim the domains of another ruler without the consent of the emperor. In case of success, they could always seek the approval from Istanbul in front of the *fait accompli*, again through bribing (Frashëri, 2004). In this situation the sultan, unable to control his enormous domains, could intervene only by manipulative “*Divide et Impera*” policies, “*Central rule continued in a new and more disguised fashion as negotiation more frequently than command*” (Quataert, 2005)

The Antagonizing centers of the periphery (The Local Feudalists)

“Overall, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, provincial political power seemed to operate more autonomously from the control of the capital. Nearly everywhere the central state became visibly less important and local notable families more so in the everyday lives of most persons” (Quataert, 2005) in this period in Tirana evolves the conflict between two families, the Bargjinolli, of the lineage that founded the city against the Toptani, rulers of the neighboring town of Kruja. The Bargjinolli did have the support of the city, of the inhabitants, of the main guilds, of the other large dynasties of Tirana and of the important center of the Ruler (Pasha) of

Shkoder to the north. Toptani instead did control the unconquerable (for any Albanian army) castle of Kruja, had a larger family, a more extended net of alliances throughout the southern region and better connection to the center of the empire.

Until 1768, mainly the Toptani ruled Tirana. On that year Ibrahim Bej Bargjinolly, the nephew of the founder, claimed back the city. From there on initiated a succession of events that saw the fates of the city, shifting from one family to another. The happenings were rich in conspiracies, murders and wars involving several thousand strong armies. The first and longest sequence of this story ends with the death of Ahmet Bej Bargjinolli, in 1809. He was the last male heir of the lineage of Tirana's founders.

The last vicissitudes of this chapter stretches to the XIX century in times of profound transformation for the Empire. Through the reforms of Tanzimat the center the Sultan regained its lost authority. At that time, in 1813, after the death of the last of the Bargjinollis, the city fell again under the control of the Toptani family, headed by Kaplan Pasha Toptani, and his son Abdurrahman.

In parallel, another figure entered the stage of Tirana, descendant of an important family of the city connected to the extinguished lineage of the founders through matrilineality. This character is Ethem Bey, known as the patron of "The Ethem Bey Mosque", the most important of the city, and of the Clock Tower. He becomes the ruler of the city from 1820 until he is removed from office by Imperial decree in 1931. He quietly accepted the decision of the sovereign, and continued his activity, distant from politics, in Tirana until death in 1848. The city was given to Abdurrahman Bej Toptani fervent supporter of the Sultan. From there on, his family controlled, the city unchallenged. The major monument of the period, "The Ethem Bey Mosque", the only domed, among the main mosques of the center of Tirana reflects an archetypical ottoman typology, with a portico, a domed chamber and a minaret. In the unity of its compact shape and the spherical dome can be seen the symbol of the reestablished central power. Of the Sultan's authority, quietly accepted by Ethem bey.

Other Centers (The Guilds)

Besides the political struggles in between the feudalists of Central Albania, there was another important competition going on, with an impact on the urban fabric. It is the competition

between the main corporate formations of the city, the Esnafs. The dynamics in between the Leather producers Corporation (Tabakë) and the Taylor's Corporation (Terzi), have been casted in the stones of the main bridges and mosques of the city.

The leather producers' (Tabak) interests were connected to the Army and to the central power, their products were mainly equipment as swords, arrows, spears, horseshoes, reins and other leather based products. For this reasons their influence was more related to the livestock of the hinterlands of Tirana and to the outward regional markets.

The Tailor's corporation was more city based. For example one of the guilds of this formation, was that of the Embroiders, called, *Kaza* and in the ottoman structure the *Kaza*, was a territorial subdivision corresponding approximately to a city. Their commerce based on goods mainly produced in the city, as were the silk clothing or the needlework of the women of Tirana. Their stage was the bazar.

This itinerary sets light on an undefined lapse of time, stretching from the foundation of Tirana to the fall of the Ottoman Empire. It progresses through a city surrounded by nature and already shaped by the inner struggles for authority over it. The characters named in the above power struggle, are not by chance. They will reappear while encountering the spatial and architectonic presences of this period.

2.3. Toward the city through the domain of nature

The journey to the ottoman town of Tirana starts from the city of Elbasan, located south-east **[Figure 29]**. It is a one day long walk on the hills separating the two cities. At this time, with the Ottoman Empire still alive, this would have been the privileged direction for approaching Tirana. The Albanian fragmented constellations, of mountains, scattered valleys, of a marshy seacoasts, of many minor centers, of a society divided in four religions, gravitates toward the faraway center of the Empire, thousands of kilometers South East. Elbasan makes the first pause in that direction along the paths of the former Via Ignacia. Probably, it would have been more common for an inhabitant of Tirana to go to Elbasan then the opposite. But I'm not following the paths of a local, I will proceed along the steps of distinguished visitors, as the painter Edward Lear or the French diplomat Auguste Dozon did. After reaching Elbasan they decided to extend their journey a little bit further, to the north, toward the minor center of Tirana.

Guided by the center of the Mountains

In this Albania, the man footprint on nature is still modest; especially in this periphery of the empire too far away, to absorb relevant funding for important works. Climbing the hills of Krraba, interposed in between Elbasan and Tirana, I am amazed by the simultaneous sensing of two magnificent natural features [Figure 30], two mountains the perceptible centers of the ample regions around them. On my back there is the Mount Tomorri, a solitary peak, the highest of south Albania, while in front of me it's the longest chain, of central Albania, later named after Skanderbeg, stretching as long as its northern regions. Embodied to this endless (to the view) succession of mountains stretching parallel to my path it's Mount Dajti, the master of Tirana's skyline. After looking at the mountains, "*center through which the axis mundi goes*" (Schulz C. N., 1979), together for the last time, I start the descending segment of my path, and with it the intensification of encounters with manmade signs.

Thanks to the elevated approach, descending from the altitudes of Tirana's southern hills I am able to perceive the signs of the city from a long distance, maybe from ten or even twenty kilometers away, on clear days. I can perceive the domesticated masses of orchards, of the olives, the pointy masses of cypress around the slim lines of minarets and in between, made of white and earth-like tonalities the marks of built settlement.

On a path underlined by the River

After a while the experience is enriched by the proximity of a river. The river is named Erzen. My path goes along its banks and valley: *the scenery along the banks of a river, a noble stream enclosed between fine rocks (the name of which I know not) was fine and varied... though, had time allowed, it would not have been easy to have selected only one from so many continually-changing pictures as the afternoon's ride afforded* (Lear, 1851). On my path along the valley underlined by the river (Schulz C. N., 1979), the first manmade signs appear in the form of enclosures, farmlands, herds, scattered households and the small villages. The town of Tirana is closer.

I am approaching the end of the valley with the signs of a city becoming increasingly apparent. The effect is eased by the lowering of the ridges on my left, while on my right the mount Dajti is

impressive as always. On my right, on the gentle hills surrounding the southern sides of Tirana is about to happen the next event of my path, the un-concealment of Tirana's plain.

2.4. Into the plain claimed by man

I am now in front of Tirana's beautiful plains that once amazed its founder. Until now I was in a domain of nature, along the path traced by long-lasting natural elements, mountains, ridges, water, valleys and plains. Here in Tirana's immediate neighborhood I decide to stop, in order to *"enjoy the most charming scenes of quiet, among splendid planes, and the clearest of streams"* (Lear, 1851), before entering another domain claimed by man long ago. The horizontal of Tirana's plains is the right setting for the development of human settlement, a proper place from man to draw his centralities and organize its paths, to imitate the order of the surrounding *classical landscape* and to structure the spaces of its everyday world (Schulz C. N., 1979).

The passage isn't of the easiest, but I proceed through *"the insecure wooden bridges over little streams"* (Lear, 1851). I follow the path paralleled by groups of local people loaded with goods, leaving or going to the bazar of Tirana. With the valley of Erzen left behind, I am now passing through one of the southern neighborhoods of Tirana, The neighborhood of Mujo, slightly elevated compared to the center of the town.

The friendly relationship of earth and dwellings

On my path I am flanked by the dwellings of Tirana, low, bricked, made of the very same mud of the surrounding earth. Their roofs follow a soft inclination, they have round corners as the handcrafted shingles on their top. The latter are made of the same material of the walls, of the very same malleable mud. Every component of those houses, bricks, roof tiles, the lime applied on walls, the wooden windows has been taken from the nearby, plain, valley and mountains. This man made spaces almost create a whole with the surroundings. The houses of Tirana lay distant from my path, surrounded by abundant spaces of the dwellers orchards and fields: *"bordered by verdant hedges (something quite rare in Turkey), as well as by trees that rather make it resemble a landscape in Normandy or Lombardy because the vines climb on huge pollards that are planted especially for them"* (Dozon, 1925). In the gardens of Tirana's dwellings, the main "stage" where the private life of the inhabitants take place, earth have been shaped and controlled resulting in

a friendly relationship (Schulz C. N., 1979). This relationship has its full manifestation in the well, another distinctive element of Tirana's dwelling. It lays there, visible, at the center of the private space outlined by a circular stoned wall. The Albanian writer Vedat Kokona recalls its central presence, when as a kid used to enter the large courtyards of the town houses: *the houses had a large courtyard, serving also as a vegetable garden, with a well in the middle and a bucket, pending on a wood, for the water,*" (Kokona, 2005). In the well the unity of man and earth has its higher expression. With earth the inhabitants of Tirana built their shelters. On earth happens their daily-life, their trees, vegetables and domestic animals are raised. From earth, through the center of the well, water is extracted. Without it, none of the above things, even the amalgam for their bricks, would exist or survive.

The Centers of the neighborhood

While passing through the peripheral neighborhood, my attention goes toward another type of building, the mosque. On my right in the direction of the mountains, distant and deep in the neighborhood, I can distinguish a minaret laying on a dark stretched roof. On the very same direction I can distinguish at least two other minarets and mosques. These are the center of the religious authority of the Sultan spread all over city. Each neighborhood has one of them.

The relations of the community to these centers is extensive. The muezzin notifies them from the heights of the minarets of the daily prayers five times per day. The religious festivities, the month of Ramadan are among the main events that bring the community together. Rites related to the birth, the rite of the circumcision, marriages and death are all mediated through the authority of the mosque. The relationship is extended to the afterlife, one day they will lay forever on the sacred lands of the graveyard in the immediate proximities of the Mosques.

In a sense the spatial conformation of the Tirana's neighborhoods (mehalla) are among the rare spaces that have the seed of determinism. In the succession from the outermost urban space of the dwellings, in the intermediate outdoor space of the graveyards and the interiority of the prayers room is embodied the destined procession of man from the everyday vicissitudes of its terrestrial life to the ascending of its spirit to a better existence in the heavens. The accession is embodied in the vertical of the minaret. The straight path to be followed while living their lives is indicated by the horizontal direction indicated by the Qibla wall. Its bare and fixed direction is

there to indicate the terrestrial center of Islamism, Mecca, from 1517 under the authority of the Ottoman Caliphate.

2.5. The eastern entrance [The Bridges of the Guilds]

Surrounded by scattered dwelling absorbed by blooming vegetation I proceed further, toward the proper center of the city. In front of me, I can already perceive one of the creeks of the city, the Lana. The water stream outlines the southern part of the Town. Its curvilinear pace is made of subsequent widenings and narrowing. The water flows along the plain, originating from the massive Mount Dajti on the east, and its destination is the Adriatic. In the ample meanders there are signs of human activity, a shepherd seated under an immense plane, grazing flock wandering around and woman doing their laundry. There is an impression that the southern edge of the city and its privileged entrance is still in nature's hands.

This impression changes immediately the moment the path toward the center of the city clears. *"The bridge swings over the stream with ease and power"* (Heidegger, *Building Dwelling Thinking*, 1971). I am in front of the *Bridge of Terzi*. It crosses through the domain of nature uninterrupted sustained by five remarkable arches. The short straight track is robust, carefully paved, and easily walkable despite the seasons, the opposite of the path traveled so far. The bridge has been erected by the Tailors' (Terzi) Corporation, the largest in the Town. It provides the community of the neighborhood of Mujo, just left behind, access to the center of Tirana, its mosques and bazar. The members of the corporation mainly reside there. This manmade structures turn this space along Lana in a place, it gives a meaning to this edge of the city. Where once there was whatever's segment of the river, now has been created a passage, a place of transition, connecting the banks of the river, the neighborhood to the center of town, the center of Tirana to that of the Empire. The bridge is more than a mere thing; it's a symbol (Heidegger, *Building Dwelling Thinking*, 1971). The bridge of the Terzi is more than just a bridge, it is a symbol beyond its utility. The unconcealment of its meaning will happen soon along the very next sequence of my itinerary.

I advance on my path through the hump of the bridge. There I stop **[Figure 31/Above]**. The widening of the river has opened the landscape around me. Through the dense vegetation, I can see the mountain one more time, the flowing water underneath, a small mill on the banks toward my direction and another thing, at the corner of my sight partially hidden by the curve of the

riverbed. It is another bridge. I am proceeding on the very same steps of Edward Lear. He stopped to paint this very same moment inspired by the beauty of the particularity of this place. In terms of Gestalt psychology, the reasons behind this inspiring particularity can be understood through this phrase from Rudolf Arnheim , “*The tension between the two antagonistic tendencies trying to achieve equilibrium is the very spice of human experience, and any artistic statement failing to meet the challenge will strike us as insufficient*” (Arnheim, *The Power of the Center, A study of Composition in the Visual Arts*, 1988). Lear previously stopped before the eccentric relationship in between the two opposed centers of the mountains of Tomorr and Dajti, behind and beyond his path. Some hours later, he decided to stop in front of the similar dynamics created by these two bridges. While passing the bridge of Terzi, **[Figure 31/Below]** he probably decided to stop and seat on the even surfaces of the squared stones of the place, took out is equipment and started drawing the scene in front of him, centered around the camber and the three arches of the bridge of Tabak.

In one of the peripheries of the empire, with severe deficiencies in proper road infrastructure, there are two fine stoned ottoman bridges erected only meters away, on the opposite corner of the same meander. The structure at the end of the perspective, a grey static man-made figure laying in front of a green background of moving planes. The work of the other Esnaf, the Corporation of the Leather Producers. Knowing its name is enough to disclose the symbolic beyond this, and the other bridge. At the southern gateway of Tirana is unconcealed the antagonism of two corporates, struggling for economic supremacy over the city’s market. The bridge of Tabak is up hill, east of my current position. It connects another neighborhood to Tirana, centered on the mosque of Tabak, and resided mainly by the members of the Leather Producers Corporation. The road goes further in the hilly hinterland toward the village of Shen Gjergj and other minor settlements that are the source of the Esnaf *Materia prima*.

Both Bridges are directed toward the center, the center of the city, of the bazar that is the stage contended daily by the corporations.

The Tailors seem to have the lead in the dispute. Numbers say it. They have eleven guilds while the Leather-Producers only seven (Frashëri, 2004). They reside on the older neighborhood of Mujo, along the privileged direction to Elbasan. Their Bridge has five arches; it is longer and more

impressive. Finally, their mosque, not encountered yet is way more centered than the Mosque of Tabak, central only to its neighborhood. The bridges I just experienced revealed me that the Etnaf of Terzi, the “Tailors”, have mastered the economy of Tirana. The Guild of the Leather Producers probably suffered the consequences of their more direct dependence on the vacillating needs of the Empire. When the center was in need *“of goods for the palace, other state elites, the military, and the inhabitants of the capital city ... often paid below-market prices for the goods and, often drained away all or most of a commodity, thus creating scarcities”* (QUATAERT, 2000)

2.6. The Encircled Field (Namazgja) of the Toptani

I just crossed the Lana creek the southern boundary of Tirana, as Heidegger writes, in its *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, “A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presenting”. From now on, after leaving behind the edges rendered permeable by the bridges, Tirana begins its urban presenting.

I am inside; I am now on a road paved with large cobblestones. It is uneven, badly maintained but clearly a sign of an operating civic authority. My attention is again attracted by a particular space on my left. It is wide open, very large and almost square [Figure 31/Below]. Along the road the field is encircled by a wall, but it is permeable, nothing seems forbidding me to enter inside. Along the road there’s a continuous line of tall sequoias. Then the line bends and encircles entirely the space of the field. Obviously, these trees are not here to outline the main road but to mark their territory of this open place. This fence is obviously thought to be visible from great distance. A stoned wall outlines its other three sides opposite and orthogonal to the road from Elbasan. The tree-lined perimeter is included in the walled fence. The wall, probably the most massive fence in Tirana at that time, encloses the side, making its presence evident even from up close. At the center of the field there’s a pile of stones, clearly given a center and direction to this space. At the opposite side of where I am laying, there’s a portal, a large door pronounced by the deep shadow casted by its stoned frame. The elongated wall outlining the field has a double role of separating it from large private mansions. The mass of the wall reveals the importance of the built ensemble behind it. The only way to approach it is through the long trajectory leading

through the field to the portal. I just entered the city, and I am in front of a squared space outlined by vertical sequoias and an horizontal massive wall, and on the diagonal opposite of my location there is a large portal, and it's time to understand better this relationship, if it's by chance or an expression of authority over space.

The Sign of the Present Rulers

The space along my path, known as the *Namazgjah* [Figure 32], is a place for the community to conduct their cyclical prayer. Especially on important events as the conclusion of the month of Ramadan, all the inhabitants of the Tirana would be praying here pointed toward east. This space is perfect for large gatherings and assembles, events where important issues are discussed and decisions made. It is clearly a space of political relevance for the town. This field was an Idea of the Toptani family, and conceived by the head of their household, a ruler of the city from 1831, Abdurrahman Bey Toptani. The Toptani that after an almost half a century of struggle for dominance, were finally expressing their regained authority, by marking the gateway to Tirana with their sign. The space with a double, civic and religious, valence is their gift to the city. The gateway at the opposite side of the *Namazgjah* was one of the entrances to their extended residence, defined by the stoned wall. By doing so the well-known rulers of Tirana were interposing a sacred space in between their private space and the rest of the settlement.

The historian Kristo Frashëri adds also another reason for this location that is the proximity with another field, smaller and less ordered. The area known as the Planes of Tabak, close to the Omniiums Bridge was the traditional gathering place for the men of Tirana. With this operation Abdurrahman juxtaposed to one of the previous centralities of the city, his own. His space was also a locus for the prayer, practically the largest praying place of the city. The basic requirement of a mosque is to potentially hold together the entire male community in one space, *"the only initial requirement for a mosque was a space large enough to contain the whole population of a given settlement"* (Grabar, 2000), and this could be fulfilled only by the *namzagjah* of the Toptani. They envisioned an enormous primordial mosque, an uncovered space with just a simple wall separating it from the rest of the city, exactly as it was done in the very first mosques (Grabar, 2000). They have marked the fabric of Tirana with an urban sign, simpler but effective compared to the architectonic signs of Suleiman pashas Old Mosque or the domed Ethem Bey Mosque.

I proceed forward on my path toward the next important pause, The Old Mosque, the oldest in Tirana, erected by the founder Suleiman Pasha Bargjini.

At the center of an Ottoman Town.

I advance uphill flanked by the namazgjah on my left and a tiny water stream on my right. The stream curbs further right and disappears in-between the houses. Its course is deviated by man, used to water the local orchards, and before meeting the Lana, it winds up a small watermill at the foot of the Bridge of the Terzi. Once the field projected by the Toptani is passed I start sensing more intensively the presence of the fabric of Tirana **[Figure 33]**. The more I proceed the more the dwellings flanking my path densify. The Houses are surrounded by high walls, and the large space of their courtyards isn't perceived. This Tirana from its plan might appear as a large garden, or orchard, with scattered buildings but from the eye level its way more intense. The path goes slightly up hill, and because of this what awaits me is still concealed from the view.

2.7. The Sign of The City's Founder [The Old Mosque]

Finally, I see two large sequoias *of the dead* (Lane, 1922), and a white minaret, signs of the Old Mosque vicinity. I keep walking alert to catch every detail that is added step after step. The twin cypresses are special landmarks, a distinctive feature that belongs only to this place. They are tall, large and old, they look as a couple of timeless guardians protecting the town **[Figure 33]**. They are *alive* symbols of the intersection of man and nature. The wilderness of the original forest of Tirana cleared by the Old Mosque, has been replaced by this couple, a manifestation of the living reality of man. (Schulz C. N., 1979)

I start catching details of the space around the mosque. It is uneven, made of protruding headstones spread disorderly. It is a graveyard but despite its utility it gives importance to the mosque, it works as a square, making the totality of its volume visible from all around. This space, although legally belonging to the Sultan, is given to the community.

I am not at the presence of the mosque yet, and I realize that in between there is another volume, proportionally smaller than the mosque but quite similar **[Figure 34/Above]**, *"The founder's tyrbe, or mausoleum, is invariably in a garden behind the mosque. These are simple in their plan, square or polygonal, covered by a dome and with a small entrance porch"* (Freely, 2011), the

other building is definitively a *tyrbe*, the sepulchral place of the founder of Tirana, Suleiman Pasha. There's also a small kiosk, at the north western corner of the ensemble, probably close to the still invisible entrance of the mosque. The structure covers a well, the water source as vital for the needs of this place, as it is for the dwellings of Tirana. *Perhaps the mosque is a dwelling too in its own way.*

From this perspective the mosque and the *tyrbe* seem opaque; they are rectangular with the longest side parallel to the direction of my path **[Figure 34/Below]**. I am walking along the direction of Elbasan that is almost parallel to the direction of the Mecca. So instead of the old mosque aligned to them, most likely it's the last segment of my path, and probably the entire adjacent neighborhood that are aligned to the old mosque. The mosque and the city are for the living, while the *tyrbe* and the space of the surrounding graveyard is for the deceased. Although all of these things seem conformed to the same messianic time. The mosque is opaque and elongated, shaped by the *qibla* and the direction of the prayer, while the *tyrbe* is similarly shaped by the direction of the grave in its interior, aligned just the same. Thus the role of the mosque is disclosed, it is there as a center, another sign, that indicates to the dwellers of the city the right path. This is reconfirmed also by the way it relates to the immediate surroundings. On its western side, on the direction it faces the bazaar, it has no continuum. Along the main street I am traveling, the space of the mosque is clearly delimited, from the street itself. While on the other side the surrounding space of the mosque stretches toward the neighborhoods uninterrupted by trails for the passers-by **[Figure 39/1]**. The mosque is clearly detached from the bazaar and is a whole with the dwellings.

Transiting on the side of the ensemble, I cross the *tyrbe* of Suleiman Pasha, the two sequoias and the western wall of the mosque with the attached minaret until I finally see the main front. It is porous countered with porticoes on two levels **[Figure 34/Below]**. The openness of this front gives another impression of the building compared to its closed back front. The slender columns are counterpoised by the imposing horizontal of the protruding roof. The old mosque as it appears belongs to the earth but it's free from it. (Schulz C. N., 1979).

The mosque is a simple mesjite type, having the shape of one chamber oratory, for the prayer. If it wasn't for the minaret it would appear as the house of one of the dignitaries of this city,

probably of the most important. The passage from the windowed back front [Fig. 35/Ab.] to the porticoes²⁴ forefront [Fig. 35/Mid.] resembles the structure of ottoman residences as the Muradiye Konak (Freely, 2011), in Istanbul. The old mosque doesn't have a dome but it has a remarkable roof, remarkable as the *Arz Odasi*, the Sultans Throne Room [Fig. 35/Bel.] . The last chamber of the sultan was also the innermost space of its court, used for meeting and receiving higher local and foreign dignitaries (Freely, 2011). The porches of this space lift up an excellent wooden roof, highly protruded around the perimeter of the building. The room of the Old Mosque of Tirana is deeply rooted on the ground and open to surroundings as well. The large, almost horizontal, roof of the Old mosque roof similarly protrudes toward the town of Tirana [Fig. 35/Ab.], its neighborhoods, bazar and streets offering a shelter, indiscriminately, for the all its earthily dwellers. While the minaret again mediates the heavenly matters.

The latest element in sequence, notable only from up close is the rich ornaments of the mosques façade [Fig. 35/Mid.]. The former visitors have noticed their character, Edward Lear writes *"I observed two or three mosques most highly ornamented, and from a brilliancy of color and elegance of form, by far the most attractive of any public building I had yet beheld in these wild places"* (Lear, 1851); Hahn from his direct experience calls them *"the colorfully painted mosques"* (Hahn, 2015). Michiel Kiel a renowned scholar of ottoman (especially Balkan ottoman) architecture writes that *"In the field of decoration, however, the Albanian mosque shows great originality as here it links up with the Post-Byzantine art"* (Kiel, 1990). The rich ornaments, are there to elevate the image of the mosque. As elsewhere in the peripheral Balkans they are a relatively inexpensive replacement to the complexity of the domed structures (Hartmuth, The history of centre-periphery relations, 2010) found closer to the center of the empire. Despite this reasoning they might represent more than just superficial splendor.

Man has the tendency to vest evil, or the unknown, with a physical presence (Schulz C. N., 1979). By giving a location to something that is normally elusive he can control it. The colorful frescoes illustrate plants, floral motives, imageries of natural elements gathered on the plastered walls, outside the inner shell of the praying chamber. In it I see the domesticated nature, its unknown

²⁴ The round arches of the porticoes may suggest that the Old Mosque known to us, first by the drawings of Edward Lear in 1850, is a later restoration of the original. The round arches are a relatively new addition to the Ottoman architecture. They started being used during the Turkish Baroque (Freely, 2011), after 1730.

former forces tamed by Suleiman Pasha himself. This mosque seems as the home for the community, a reassuring center at the heart of the settlement.

The Old Mosque of Tirana, embodies in it numerous faceting. The ornaments are reminders of the initial seizing of this place, of how Suleiman Pasha subjugated the beautiful nature of the plain to the needs of man. He opens the space of his mosques to the community through the porch. He encourages them to make themselves at home under the larger shelter of the plane and protruded roof. His aspiration to be the guide of the community, beside the authority of the Sultan, is here. Before moving further but already aware of the surroundings I understand that I am in front of the original center of the city, still important but no more unmatched.

Altering the Signs of Past Authorities

I am in front of the mosque. This building in front of me is the former center of the city. Probably, at least symbolically, it is still the most important center because the spirit of this place, this town, still lays here. Although while standing in this place, looking around in the other directions I understand that this is changing.

The clues on this changing process were already given by the space of the namazgja encountered just a few minutes before. In the contrast in between the former center of the Old Mosque and the newly established center of the Namzagja, the long process of vicissitudes that saw the dynasties of the Suleiman Pasha successors counterpoised to the Toptani family can be traced. The namazgja signs the end of this confrontation. But there's an oddity in this final expression of authority.

The new authority places his mark counterpoised but not juxtaposed to that of the former. The first reason for this can be traced in the original story of Tirana's foundations. Harming the mosque would mean to contend, first of all, the authority of the Sultan. Another reason for this detachment from a direct confrontation, was probably the fondness of the people of Tirana toward their former ruler. These reasons were probably quite enough for the Toptani family, to keep distance, and try to build new centralities rather than altering the existent ones.

While looking at the Old mosque of Tirana, for the last time from up close, its volume and the volume of Suleiman Pasha Tyrbe, there's another particular structure that attracts my attention. An elegant, white, self-contained porch having a round plan and encircling a large grave. It is at

the perimeter of a gated graveyard, a little bit further than the two large cypresses and close to the main street [Figure 36]. The structure outstands in the space around the mosques. Its skeletal structure gives to the object a sense of lightness and transparency. This structure doesn't obstruct the views from and toward the old mosque but it rather frames them. Because of all these uncommon characteristics the structure is vested with an importance comparable to that of Tyrbe of the founder. The structure I am looking at is also a Tyrbe, a relatively new addition to the space of the graveyard.

It is the Tyrbe of Kaplan Pasha Toptani, the man who prepared the ground for his son Abdurrahman's (the creator of the namzagjah) final seize of Tirana. The last of the Toptani that spent his life for the conquest of this town lays here. He lays side by side with the ancestor of his foes, the Bargjini. The half century long blood feud in between these families, ends here in these two minor centers gravitating along the major center of the city. The tyrbe of Kaplan Pasha, stands out but it doesn't excel that of the founder. The former and future authorities are here in proximity of each other with the former rather than rivaling, seeking the legitimation of the later. I can conclude that the Toptani didn't just try to place new signs elsewhere in the town but they have tried to alter, although gently, the leftover sings of former rivaling authorities.

At the Heart of This Tirana

I'm now on the verge of traveling the last part of my itinerary. From where I stand, in front of the old Mosque, I can see the path traveled so far, and other paths, corridors that vanish in front of me in all directions. This space in my immediate vicinages appears as a square, but it isn't the typical plaza of the contemporary European town. Its openness is more of an accident, a consequence of the intersection formed around the space of the old mosque[Figure 37/Above]. The closest resemblance of a monument, probably not by chance, is the tyrbe of Kaplan pasha. "Religion forbids the representation of the human figure, hence it blocks the development of figurative arts- sculpture and painting" (Benevolo, 1993) this simple fact has been visible along all my path and it is especially here at its peak. I am in a city of empty clearings, filled with utilitarian structures at most. A tree or a well are rather usual while, there are no equestrian statues of kings or important figures, no fountains adorned by virile and sensual human figures.

The city so far has a transient character, and the resting spaces are somehow detached, beyond the walls of the dwellings, the Namazgjah or the porches of the mosques.

From this place while turning my back on the old mosque there are two urban spaces that immediately attract my attentions: a street larger than the others, flanked by the largest buildings in the city and two other mosques; and another space, made of many smaller streets that all together form a unique place, the vibrant space of the bazar.

After the relative calmness of my itinerary so far, in front of me is disclosed the destination and beginning of the path of the many people encountered since kilometers away. Starting from the actual transitioning square, small groups almost become crowds and chatter turns into a lively racket. I decide to take a provisory detour from the main street, and its other mosques and follow the wave into the “labyrinth of contorted passages” (Benevolo, 1993), of the bazar of Tirana **[Figure 37/Below]**.

2.8. The [Old] Bazar

It was so beautiful when I went to the old bazar, in front of the large clock tower, watching the craftsman working, the kettle makers making kettles, hat makers making their hats, the shoemakers sewing pairs of shoes, the saddlers making saddles and I especially enjoyed the making of the Kadaif” (Kokona, 2005).

I start slowly progressing inside the space of the bazar **[Figure 38/Above]**. On my way here I passed through the neighborhoods of Tirana. They were relatively inactive, as other typical ottoman “neighborhoods leaned more toward segregation, clustering around churches, mosques, or synagogues” (Goffman, 2004), while the bazar is another thing. The atmosphere is filled with life, movement and interaction, it is “a *mélange of people*” (Goffman, 2004), of different religions as well **[Figure 38/Middle]**.

It’s hard to define its extension as there are no deep perspectives indicating the other side. The space is filled with people while the parietal building are filled with goods carefully watched by the responsible salesmen. Customers, mainly men but also women, stop continuously from shop to shop, bargaining and trying to find the best possible deal. The buildings have often a protruded porch, or improvised fabric tents. These structures, quite narrow, are more suitable for preserving the goods, especially on sunny days, rather than for sheltering passersby and potential

clients. Underneath them sidewalks appear, made of small cobblestone, probably extracted by the nearby riverbeds. They outline the pavement around the buildings, separating the proper commercial space from the street, suggesting that carts, wagons or animals usually enter to the core of the bazar, to furnish the shops or to collect the purchases. The descending surface of the sidewalks and the narrow step provide an appropriate expedient for washing out the dirt from the shops and for preventing it from entering their space. The soil of the bazar is overly paved, oddly hydrophobic compared to the streets traveled so far. Maybe because it is more intensively used, active 6 days every week, penetrated continually by outlanders coming through the mudded paths of Tirana's most rural regions and for this in need of a more efficient maintenance than the other streets.

The richer net of fluxes crosscutting the bazar is also indicated by the wells **[Figure 38/Below]** posed in all its main intersections. They aren't simple, they are embraced by important structures, held by colonnades that in turn are crowned by capitals. The columns sustain tiled coverings framed by different ribbons of plastered moldings. The wells are the only modest centralities, recognizable, in this continuum of streets and shops. They are necessary, they are there for satisfying the thirst of the essential pack animals, for cleaning the dirt from the front of the shops after rainy days, or just for wetting the cobblestones on hot and dusty summer sunny days.

The air is filled by chatters, smells and fragrances. There's also noise, produced by the wheels of the carts and the beats of horseshoes on stone. But noise comes also from elsewhere from the inner space of the bazar buildings. The structures around me aren't just shops, they are workshops where goods are produced. The local hats, utensils, shoes and many other goods exposed on the buildings' outer walls are produced only meters away. While the owner is busy winking to the potential clients, inside there are small armies of artisans, experienced men and apprentices working long hours, on day and probably night.

The bazar of Tirana appears as another city within the city. Walking here for a moment I lost the perception of Tirana's neighborhood, of spaces and rhythms organized around the volumes of the mosques, and the calls of the muezzins. I got lost on the apparently chaotic rhythms of the everyday, of the shops' and workshops' working hours, of the multitude of individual rhythmic

cadences, of the clients, of the beggars, of the caravans. I got lost in a place dominated by horizontality, by lower buildings and similar continuous porticoes, in a space lacking the verticality of the minarets. I feel here, for the first time since I entered the man made environment, detached from the center of the Sultan or his local vices, in a space apparently pervaded by a sense of freedom.

The space ordered by the guilds

The bazaar is indeed different from the rest of Tirana, it is less segregated than the residential parts of the city, here Muslims and Christians are together integrated into the economic life of the community (Goffman, 2004), but it can't be free of the control of imposed authorities.

The streets so far, were orally named after their destinations. Until reaching the bazar I was traversing the street to Elbasan, and from all around the space of the bazar are extended subsequent itineraries named after the cities of Shkoder, Dibra, Durrës or Kavaja. The neighborhoods are named after the mosques or the names of the families that have originated them. But here within the bazar this changes.

The streets are named after the subgroups of guilds occupying the flanking shops. This is a well-known phenomenon observable in many ottoman towns, also in the very center of the empire, in Istanbul and elsewhere *"street names are derived from trade names, and this would seem to be an indication of the historical concentration of trades in their respective centers"* (Yi, 2004). So I find myself passing over the streets of the Blacksmiths, of the Taylors, of the Shoemakers, of the Silver, of the Salt and of the Flour. They held the names of the guilds, corporations, whose signs I encountered while entering the town, embodied in the arched bridges of the Terzi and of the Tabak.

I understand that there is more to the bazar than meets the eye, what is suggested by the names of the streets is disclosed by the products on sale. The rows of shops aligned on the same alley are monothematic, they expose similar goods and have some resemblances with the contemporary supermarkets subdivided in departments. Beyond the lively atmosphere of the bazar, its apparent freedom, lays the dense structure of the guilds' control, which *"were able to elect their own headmen and restrict the number of shops in each trade"* (Yi, 2004). The two bridges easing my access to Tirana, were also orienting me to the center of their patrons, which

is the center of Tirana's everydayness, toward the horizontal and labyrinth-like space of the bazar.

So far, in the Namzagja, the old mosque or the other mosques of Tirana I understood the will of the local rulers to make their authority present, which after all, it was always transcended by the main authority of the Sultan. Their centralities served as a nucleus around which the different quarters of Tirana developed. The bazar doesn't have such nucleus, it is free; in its heart there are only its streets, wells, shops and caravansaries (Hahn, 2015). There is definitively a spatial contrast in between the bazar and the mosques that deserves attentions. Benevolo, although based on the slightly different structure of Arab Islamic cities, notices it, *"The workshops of the merchants aren't grouped around a square, but aligned along one or more streets, covered or exposed, forming the bazar. In this irregular fabric are opened – and acquire full value - the large regular courtyards of the mosques"* (Benevolo, 1993, p. 111). The mosques of Tirana do not have large regular courtyards but they have abundant space in between them and the fabric of the city, including the bazar.

Here a doubt arises. This contrast suggests that maybe the space of the bazar, and its authorities are somehow autonomous and disconnected to the sequence of authorities emanated by the mosques.

A reminder of the main Authority

The answer to this question comes quite swiftly. It is just past midday and the Arabic chant of a muezzin, breaks through the atmosphere of the bazar. Each one of the dense plot of rhythms that have rendered my experience of this place so intense are suddenly interrupted. Every man and woman is reminded of the prayer and they obey. Their midday prayer reminds the faithful of other rhythms, laying above the frivolous rhythms of the everydayness, it *"resembles and points to midsummer, and the prime of youth, and the period of man's creation in the lifetime of the world, and calls to mind the manifestations of mercy and the abundant bounties they contain"* (Leaman, 2006). After this, other calls for prayer will follow, each one outlining its own symbolic meaning, distributed evenly in the 24 hours, and setting the patterns of time for the inhabitants of Tirana. The rhythms of the bazar are, after all, subordinate to the rhythms of the prayer emanated by the mosques. This is true also for the authority of the guilds, despite their control

over the matters of the bazar, they are directly subordinated to the Sultan. *“As a matter of routine the local Kadi—a central figure of the Ottoman administration—kept written lists of guild members as well as copies of documents attesting to the various guild heads appointed by the court.”* (Cohen, 2001), the Kadi is the head of the Council of the Sharia (Islamic Law), an important figure distinct from local authorities, and directly nominated by the sultan.

Messianic signs around the everydayness of the Bazaar

The muezzin ends his prayer and I start seeing the space around with new eyes. I am not lost anymore, and I realize that the bazar of Tirana is not so large. Its space although free from signs of central authorities, is indeed an island surrounded by many of these signs. A moment before, not one, but different muezzins started their chants from all directions and sporadically even the bells of Christian churches are heard, *“another element that made guilds obedient to government authorities was the religious control of society...religious belief or divisions facilitated government control”*. (Yi, 2004)

I am at the core of the bazar, pervaded once more by its relighted atmosphere not lost any more. At the eastern perimeter of the bazar is the *Old Mosque*. Moving toward south, clockwise, there is the *Mosque of Ethem Bey* with its elegant minaret. Then comes the *Mosque of Terzi* laying west of my position. On the north, there is the campanile of the Orthodox Church. The Bektashi Teke of the Bazar closes the cycle. In any of the points of the bazar, from inside it would be impossible to not hear or sense at least a section of one of these signs. The user, inside the bazar is repeatedly reminded of the outside. In the contrast in between its interior, I see a conflict in between two domains, that of the everydayness suggested by the bazar, lectured by the allegedly imperishable domain of the authority. Apparently, the former needs but also fears the latter.

2.9. An Early-Modern Site of Public Display [Returning to the Main Street]

My wandering along the bazar has brought me back to my previous path. A diagonal deformation of the fronts of the bazaar detoured my path on the left, coming across the Main Road of the city, in front the Mosque of Ethem Bey [Figure 40]. On my left at distance, I can again distinguish the old Mosque and the twin cypresses while on my left, on the same main street at the western

access to the bazar, it's visible for the first time the Mosque of the Terzi, named after the dominant guild of the city [Figure 40/6].

The main street delimits the bazar southern front; it is contiguous to it but different in character. It is larger and has a well-defined perspectives; its vector is clearly traced by the three centralities of the mosques laying at its extremities and the center. Besides the shops especially on the bazar's side, I see cafes and signs of civic activities. This larger street, especially the segment in between the Old and Ethem Bey Mosques, has the character of an elementary promenade [Figure 41]. Its space although not entirely free of the influence of the overflowing bazar activity preserves some gravitas. In it I see the progeny of a place thought for the institutional representation of the civic authority and mundanity.

The period this space has taken its shape corresponds to XIX century. To the very same years that saw the edification of "The Ethem Bey Mosque" and the clock tower. A period during which the Ottoman Empire struggled to keep up the stride of the outer world, of Europe, of the Russian Empire. The quite unsuccessful challenges on the foreign front brought nonetheless an era of modernization in the country and its society. The lost influence of the empire externally was accompanied by a raised influence of the authority of the sultan, of the authority of his state on his subjects internally, *"Domestically, the central state became more powerful and influential in everyday lives than ever before in Ottoman history, extending its control ever more deeply into society."* (Quataert, 2005).

I see along this street, here more than anywhere else in the town, people dressed in a conformed manner. There are many of them, not a majority but for sure a remarkable minority. Especially in the XIX century *"the state continued its evolution from a pre-modern to a modern form and the numbers of state employees vastly increased."* (Quataert, 2005), and the result of this process is visible in Tirana as well. These people are bearing the red fez, and dressing alike. In 1829, the sultan Mahmut II has passed the law for the conformation of the dressing code for the state bureaucrats, *"In wearing the fez, government officials and the rest of male society (outside of the religious classes) thereafter were to look the same before the monarch and to one another"* (Quataert, 2005). *This is a sign that past differences, the disharmonies of an extreme hierarchy of the society isn't wanted anymore, "in 1829 Long-standing rules that had sought to distinguish*

cobblers from silversmiths and merchants from artisans and Muslims from non-Muslims disappeared overnight." (Quataert, 2005). In the main street of Tirana there's only the state and his subjects while the deflecting mediation of quasi-independent feudalists is no more.

This street is a symptom of a changing society; it's different from the spaces of the mosques or the bazaar and represents a model that has already been shaped in the towns of the empire. Streets, bussied by well dressed people going in and out form (the still rare) caffes or administrative offices. The building they dwell for good part of the day, placed along this street, are different from the ones seen before. Their character goes beyond the utilitarian and vernacular character of the workshops and dwellings. Their colonades are often squared and deeper permitting the passage of people, the windows are larger, they often have more than one floor, their roofs have sharper foldings, signs of more profesional manpower while on their front appear the signs of western decorations, of neoclassic pediments and ediculated openings.

This short segment, is obviously the main site of *public display* of the town, "*where persons came out to promenade and show their finery*" (Quataert, 2005), it likely is the perfect place for official ceremonials, or just to parade the individual wealth, a fashionable dress, a fine horse or the first automobile traversing the streets of Tirana. Its importance to the public life of the city will remain and expand in the years to come, until and beyond the second world war.

Here after overlooking at its elongated space, my attention is reclaimed by the imposing structures in front of me, the mosque of Ethem Bey and the adjacent clock tower, built during the same historical interval and enviroment mentioned in the paragraphs above.

2.10. The Heterotopia of the Cemetery

I stop in front of the mosque. I see that here, the contrast in between the bazar and the spaces of the central authorites is manifested once more. The dynamics of the bazar extend to the perimeter of the mosque [Figure 42]. As a tide, especially on Thursdays, the days of the weekly open market, villagers, merchants with any sort of goods clump along the low stoned enclosure of the mosque. On these days for most of the time the market and the mosque almost become part of the sameness, separated only by the narrow space of the cemetery.

I have seen before the sequence of spaces around the mosques, initiated by the outer intermediary space of the graveyard. It is an experience repeated any time I encounter a mosque. But here it deserves a last reflection, at this crowded juncton of the city.

I see, an energetic peasant, trying to sell a cow to the best offerer. He probably shouts, he calls the passersby and he continually cries out the qualities of the animal, its age, weight or quality of its milk. Time by time he pauses and he jokes with another seller on his side, who is selling the very same product. They are cheerful but focused on their mission. Any time a potential client comes close, they immediately dress their merchant attitude and begin again praising their respective animal. All this happens close by to the place where the dead are buried.

A few meters away there are the remains of people that they may have known in life, of people they probably have meet, surely of people that they have at least seen, and apparently they don't care, maybe because *"in a time of real belief in the resurrection of bodies and the immortality of the soul, overriding importance was not accorded to the body's remains."* (FOUCAULT, 1967). For those two merchants, and for almost the entire dwellers of Tirana, what lays beyond those low walls it's natural, there, lay the physical rest of their relatives, while their souls, what really counts is elsewhere, beyond the porchs of the mosque, above the roundness of the dome, in the heavens pointed by the minaret, as Foucault writes.

The cemetary is an important place, all the inhabitants are somehow related to it. In the Europe of the XVIII and XIX century, according to Foucault, the cemetery still is *"the sacred and immortal heart of the city"*. In this Tirana it surely is. What happens here discloses one more time the way the distant centre of the Sultan controls his subject.

The Sultan doesn't need to be here, present and visible to his subject. It's not really important for him to participate through investments in ammenities for the city and its citizens. Bridges are built by guilds, Hammams and Mosques by the healthy, food for the poor is provided by a system of charity organised by religious orders. As long as his subjects are reminded continuously of the next life, as long as they are educated accordingly and provided with proper space to venerate God, he will continue to be the main authority, the center of this regime. After all, he is a Caliph, a sucesor of the Prophet and that's enough for now.

Beyond the crowded wall, and the empty graveyard lays the object and space where the power of the Sultan is definitively manifested and contained even more than elsewhere. The next subject that will receive my attention is the building of “The Ethem Bey Mosque”

2.11. “The Ethem Bey Mosque” (The Sign of the revised center)

I approached the mosque from north, coming from the allies of the bazar facing its principal façade. The building in front of me belongs to the so called Turkish Baroque (Freely, 2011), an architectonic style that flourished from 1730 (The Reign of Ahmet III) onwards. This belonging, apart from the age of its construction, is emphasized by the round arches of the porches that in previous ages were pointed (Freely, 2011). In front of me is a small provincial mosque, with a solitary minaret on its right. It has a porch of five successive arches. The entry arch is not in the middle of the five subdivisions but it is the second from the right, it is closed and has a squared doorway. On both sides of the gate are placed the Graves of Ethem Bey (on the viewers left), the founder of the Mosque and his wife (on the right). Few meters ahead of the Tombstone of Ethem Bey is placed the well. Before entering the mosque the devoted would stop there to conduct the purification rite (the abdest), mandatory for conducting the prayer.

“The Ethem Bey Mosque” is the only domed mosque of Tirana. Indeed it is probably the finest building in the city located along the busiest node although at the edge of the settlement. The city doesn’t continue behind it, around there is the graveyard, while behind there is a background of trees and a descending field that continue along the largest meanders of Lana until it meets the flowing water. On the left side of the mosque, its view is wide open. The porch on this front fully encloses the inner volume of the oratory and closes the perspective of the main street **[Figure 43]**. Apparently for the first time, in Tirana, a building has been positioned with an awareness of the urban setting.

Conscious use of Perspective

The Tirana encountered so far was made of many separated centralities. It wasn’t crucial for them to be visible, on the human eye level, from great distance. This wasn’t a necessity because these centralities, local mosques, were made for the immediate community and known to them

since childhood. For the wanderers seeking for them, there was the minaret that would orient their path and help find the exact location through the disordered urban fabric. As discussed, the presence of the mosques scattered all over the town was enough sign for the sultan's authority. For the first time in Tirana with "The Ethem Bey Mosque" this changes, an active element, the conscious use of perspective is introduced, "Volumes impress us primarily by their being, vectors by their acting." (Arnheim, 1988). "The Ethem Bey Mosque" closes the main street, and is connected, through the space of the street, to the original center of the old mosque on the opposite side at the beginning of the path. "The Ethem Bey Mosque" Volumetry excels and as consequence it becomes the center that emanates the dominating vectors (Arnheim, 1988), toward the Old Mosque and the rest of the city. Ethem bey, a cultured man that traveled all around the empire, to Istanbul, but also in the western world, as in Venice (Frashëri, 2004), has juxtaposed to Tirana the seeds of a new structure. A very weak breeze of renaissance is sensed for the first time in the city.

Then I lay my sight on the right of the mosque, the front where the minaret is placed **[Figure 44/Above]**. On this side the porch doesn't enclose the core of the mosque. By doing this the author of the building has missed the opportunity to design a symmetrical space, of imitating the grand symmetric mosques of Istanbul. After all an inscription commemorating the finalization of the mosque is written. "Having another Aya Sofya, made this city beautiful." (Frashëri, 2004).

A Contextual Building

The Hagia Sophia of Tirana is not symmetrical **[Figure 44/Below]**, perhaps because of pragmatic reasons related to the specificities of the context. The porch of the mosque has been erected on the eastern and northern facades of the mosque, but its presence is not fully extended to the western facade. The portico creates an intermediate, "L" shaped, space in between the exterior and the prayer room that could be used in special occasions when the mosque was overfull. It surrounds "The Ethem Bey Mosque" on two directions, toward the main street (pointing to the Old Mosque) and along the marketplace. The other direction is left uncovered by a portico, probably because on this side its view is blocked by neighboring lateral façade of other commercial buildings. Here on, the main street is narrowed, "The Ethem Bey Mosque" is at the

exact spot where this happens, and becomes another of the streets of the bazar leading to the Mosque of the Terzi. As consequence the Mosque of Ethem Bey is not symmetric, it speaks to the spaces of the city that are opened to it. This building is deeply contextual, it alters the balance of Tirana's center, by adapting itself and not by altering the urban space to its need. After all Ethem Bey was a reputable leader but he didn't have an absolutist authority over his city.

The Openness of the Base

The portico encloses the mosque's inner volume on its visible sides. Its presence discloses one of the intentions of the building. It was thought to be opened or closed for the city? "A compact building devoid of openings will look much more forbidding when it stands amidst contrastingly open space" (Arnhem, 1977), that is not the case of this mosque. The arched porticos of the bazar, and the square of the main street bend and merge along the base of this construction. The only difference is that here, along the porticoes of the mosque, the arched void is expanded and framed by richly ornamented, columns. The depth of the space beyond the columned surface, much larger than that of the adjacent portico buildings, casts a dark shadow toward the interior. The base of this building is basically negative space (Arnhem, 1977), opened to the views and paths of the public. The Mosque as it is placed mediates with other fluxes of the city, of the bazar and the main street, it attracts them toward its body, through the negative space of its base toward the positive shapes (Arnhem, 1977) of the inner prayer room, and the rising dome. This building is certainly both a landmark (dome and minaret) and a contiguous and open chamber (the porch space) for the inhabitants of Tirana.

Before moving my attention to the upper part of the building I stop one more time at the circular arches of the portico. The vertical movement imitated by the columns is dispersed on all elevated directions by the half circles. The lack of difference in between them and the continuous sequence of five shapes puts an emphasis on horizontality. The base is calm and even, its constancy seems a proper foundation for the following gentle crescendo of the roof and dome.

Expansion from the Base

On top of the portico arches lays the protruding roof covering its space. At the old mosque the roof was the final element enclosing everything, while here it has mediatory role to the further vertical expansion. Above the strong vertical, underlined by the shadowed protruded line of the fascia starts the gently inclined hip of the roof. Here its line encounters another horizontal, the white squared tholobate supporting the dome. Then the descending is again activate through the curves of the dome. The dome is made of two continuous curves, one smaller at the base and a larger one enclosing the dome. Both curves cover a span of less than 180 degrees with the larger curve covering an ampler angle than the smaller. Both expedients combined vest the volume with a sense of unitary flow (Arnehim, 1977). “When the segment of a circular arch covers less than 180 degrees it increasingly loses circularity and approaches straight lines” (Arnehim, 1977), and this what is perceived by looking at curve of mosque; it looks quite horizontal. The introduction of the smaller curve at its base, and of a narrow filament at its top, aren’t enough to trigger the verticality of the structure. Summarizing, at the base of the roof fascia a pyramid like shape is elevated. The slow inclination of this system is helped partially by the introduction of the horizontal ribbons, the fascia and the tholobate, than step by step, the first phase of the elevation is ended by the dome. “The broader a member’s base the more sluggish its power to rise” writes Arneheim, and seems that his phrase fits perfectly this case. Then he adds: “the slimmer the base, the more energetic its upward push” and as it seems, here at the mosque of Ethem Bey this role is granted to the minaret.

Before moving further to the wholeness of the mosque for the last time. Its diagonal eccentricity in the plan has created a dynamic perception of its overall appearance. The ascending movement toward the minaret, step by step, isn’t static, its barycenter moves with the view in a proactive equilibrium.

In conclusion, I see, in the dynamic positioning of “The Ethem Bey Mosque” its strong connection to the place, in the fragmented porches, round and squared of the adjacent buildings, the ottoman society of Tirana, in the large and deep porticoes the newly renewed structure of the

state apparatus. Finally, everything is gathered under the dome of the father- figure of the Sultan and topped by the minaret transcending upward to the divine.

Next to the mosques, there is a tower. It is square and solid, without the elegance of the mosques minaret. It is crowned with two subsequent rows of arches. This structure one day will hold a clock on his body. It is the future clock tower of the city. Its actual state seems more as an attempt to counteract the effect of the Bell Tower of the Orthodox Church on the opposite side of the bazar. It is not for measuring time. Elsewhere in the empire, clock towers, and railways are becoming the norm, indicator of the growing awareness of the central state on the economic value of time. The Ottoman Empire unified around the renewed authority of the Sultan is trying to catch up with the western world conscious that its inherited backwardness might (will) be the cause for its dissolution. This motion is still tangential to Tirana, for its dwellers, the articulation of time made by the calls of the muezzin is still the norm.

I leave “The Ethem Bey Mosque” and the adjacent tower and I proceed west toward the last segment of this itinerary.

2.12. The last segment of the bazar

My path toward west is somehow decided. I make a right turn from the Ethem bey’s mosque main façade and keep walking. Now behind me is the Old Mosque, on the right the previously traveled alleys of the bazar and on my right an unpaved street that goes toward the Lana creek **[Fig 45/Above]**. I progress on the same path of the main street that **[Fig 45/Below]**, from here on, mutates its character. From the main mosque its space is narrowed and becomes more unified. On both sides the street is enclosed by continuous porched buildings.

The mains street, of which this segment is part, is a relatively new addition to the space of Tirana (Frashëri, 2004). Probably its original blueprint is older than the city itself, most likely it was the original pathway connection, Shkoder, Durrës or Kruja to the North-West to Elbasan and other south-eastern regions. Its urban layout instead appears shaped later on, along the perimeter of the bazar. For this its section is larger and the building flanking it more carefully designed.

The porticoes along the street are the longest in the city, and are quite large if compared to the tight structure added to the shops of the old bazar. It probably belongs to period of economic expansion of Tirana, and hence of the space of its bazar. The commercial front parallel to my path are a coordinated seems as a coordinated effort to give to the city a respectable commercial street. The following segments is the other space of Tirana that has been developed with an urban awareness. The continuous arches of the porticos are an ordered new structure juxtaposed to the informal space of the bazaar. This is also the effect of the efforts and campaigns of Sultan Mahnut II, during which, in between 1820-30, "the Janissaries were destroyed and the guilds badly weakened" (Quataert, 2005).

This path's perspective leads in the void of a field, but stay on the left following the ordinary curve of the street until I encounter the last architectural space of my itinerary. At the end of the commercial street, slightly decentered on the right is the mosque of the Terzi [Figure 46].

The former Mosque of the Guilds

The mosque of the Terzi is approached from behind, following a similar disclosure with that of the old mosque. Its portico has proportion similar to those of those of The Ethem Bey Mosque but it does not have a dome. These buildings probably the first important sign that welcomes the visitors of Tirana coming from the north-western regions. Its presence together with the ordered front of the bazar are maybe a signal of the changing tendencies. The attention of Tirana, of the society is slowly shifting toward west, toward the Adriatic's bridging Albania to Europe instead of the originally eastern, mountainous, Istanbul direction.

This mosque is placed on another edge of Tirana. East of it are the densely built spaces of the bazar, while on its west there's the empty field seen only few moments before. The field is empty but not functionless. On the bazar days its open space becomes one with the compressed space of the bazar. This is the field of the weekly bazar that once every week and on special occasions becomes the main stage of Tirana's everydayness.

The Mosque founded by the guild of the Terzi is at the center of its domain surrounded on all sides by places of economic activity. The Mosque of The Tabak was far away from the center, on the other side of Lana, while this mosque, or their opponent is at the very core of Tirana economic

heart. This definitively clarifies who dominated the rivalry manifested from the moment I approached the town, at the sight of the two bridges.

From the half of the XIX century (Frashëri, 2004) this mosque changes its name and patronage. Its latest restoration was done by the Karapici family, revealing the relentless loss of the authority of the guilds. At some point in time they ceased being relevant. “The Ethem Bey Mosque” (The Sign of the revised center)

Other Places of the everyday

“One wild scene of confusion, in which oxen, buffaloes, sheep, goats, geese, asses, dogs, and children, were all running about in disorder” (Lear, 1851). This passage of Edward Lear explains the changing atmosphere of the empty void in proximity of Tirana’s center. Calm and empty on normal days, it changes completely on special occasions. On these lapses of time the place is consigned to the inhabitants without many constraints. Especially on the bazar days, and on some special occasion. Every Wednesday, on the days of the Saint Alexander’s fair²⁵ (Frashëri, 2004), or in month of the Ramadan, the space is filled in with crowds of people scattered all around selling all sort of products, trying to get a good buy, attending to particular ceremonies, festive events and festivals [Figure 47]. This space does not have the religious and political burden of the encircled Namzagjah, it is wide open, expansive and adapt also for more frivolous activities. *“During Ramadan, a time of intense socializing, the rhythm of daily life profoundly changed”* (Quataert, 2005), people would fast during the day but after sunset, a long festive night would start. Every meal, the *iftar*, was practically an abundant feast; people would exchange visits, and share their nourishment with their relatives and friends. Dignitaries and officials would be visiting each other homes, or organize big dinners for the poor. From the XIX century these attitudes started to partially change. The celebrations are extended beyond the domains of the dwellings and to the outdoor space of the city. From the XIX century the outdoor spaces of Tirana will start acquiring more relevance. During the Ramadan, the field weekly becomes one of the special places of Tirana. Its unconstrained space is the perfect locus for exceptional events, *“in the*

²⁵ The fair of Saint Alexander was held every year around the end of May in the field at proximity of Tirana’s bazar. The fair is supposed to have a remote origin as its Christian name (prior to the islamization of the Albanians) indicates. It had mostly an agricultural and pastoral character (Frashëri, 2004).

eighteenth century, social events had turned on the iftar and included promenades, karagoz²⁶, and coffee houses while, in the nineteenth century, these had expanded to include new entertainment forms...Ramadan, in a certain sense, was a month of carnival when social barriers fell”

My itinerary in this Tirana shaped by the fallen Ottoman Empire comes to its end. Behind me it's a town made of many signs, of smaller undetermined centers that despite their autonomy and differences can be attributed to the main authority of this land, the dynasty of the Sultan. In front of me it's another space, opened, with fewer constraints that on some occasion becomes a place of distraction from the customary presence of the authority.

Exactly on this void, soon a process of space formalization will be triggered that will mark the space of Tirana for the entire next century. It will become the locus for Skanderbeg square and the starting point toward important itineraries regulated by future authorities. From here the main boulevard of Tirana will start. This unrestricted space adaptable to the everydayness of the people, will become, probably because of the absence of constraints, the privileged space for the authority to put its restriction. Here the Totalitarian authorities that will seize the space of Tirana will have the perfect chance to kill two birds with one stone: they have an empty void where to put an immediate seal; and they will purify a problematic site of Tirana's everydayness.

I am at the center of the field of the bazar. Toward south unobstructed by any man made structure I see the Lana sinuous riverbed of the Lana, behind a picturesque landscape of lower hills. On the opposite side the Path from Dibra, coming from behind “The Karapici Mosque”, meets the other path coming from Shkodra and Durrës. Their unity is underlined by the artificial stream flowing at the road side. It descends the plain of Tirana after having nourished its gardened dwellings. This engineering work, is contemporary to the completion of “The Ethem Bey Mosque”, and was an idea of Ethem Bey (Frashëri, 2004), conceived for his fellow countryman. In this flowing water, the same that seduced the founder of this city, I see a place where there is still a friendly relationship in between man and nature.

²⁶ An improvised form of theater, very popular in XIX century Ottoman empire, played through casted shadows

2.12. Chapter 2 Figures



Figure 29. Regional scheme showing the first itinerary. The path starts from east, in the city of Elbasan [1] and proceeds along the road of Elbasan [10]. The pass of Tirana [2] is the point where two territorial centers are both visible, Mount Dajti [4] dominating Tirana's skyline and the Peaks of mount Tomorri [3] the highest mountain in southern Albania. The itinerary proceeds along the Erzen River [5] valley in between high chains on the west and the lower hills of Krraba [9] toward west. The path descends to the Plain of Tirana [6] and slowly approaches the center of the town [7]. Other streets connecting Tirana to other important centralities are the street of Kavaja [11]. The street of Durrës [13] connecting Tirana to the harbor city of Durrës [12] on the Adriatic sea. The road of Shkodra and Kruja [14] to the north and the road of Dibra toward east [15]. Scheme credits: Endrit Marku



Figure 30. The Pass of Tirana, Edward Lear. 1848



Figure 31. (Above) The painting from Lear was done from the Terzi bridge. In the background is the other smaller bridge of Tabak. The bridge of Terzi was the largest and the road to Elbasan passed through it. Tirana. 1848. Painting: Edward Lear. (Below) The photo shows the side of Terzi Bridge. The river bank in front is on the western side, the side of the town. The wall is the perimeter of the namazgjah, the first major instalment within the town. Tirana. 1917. Photo Credit: Austrian Archives

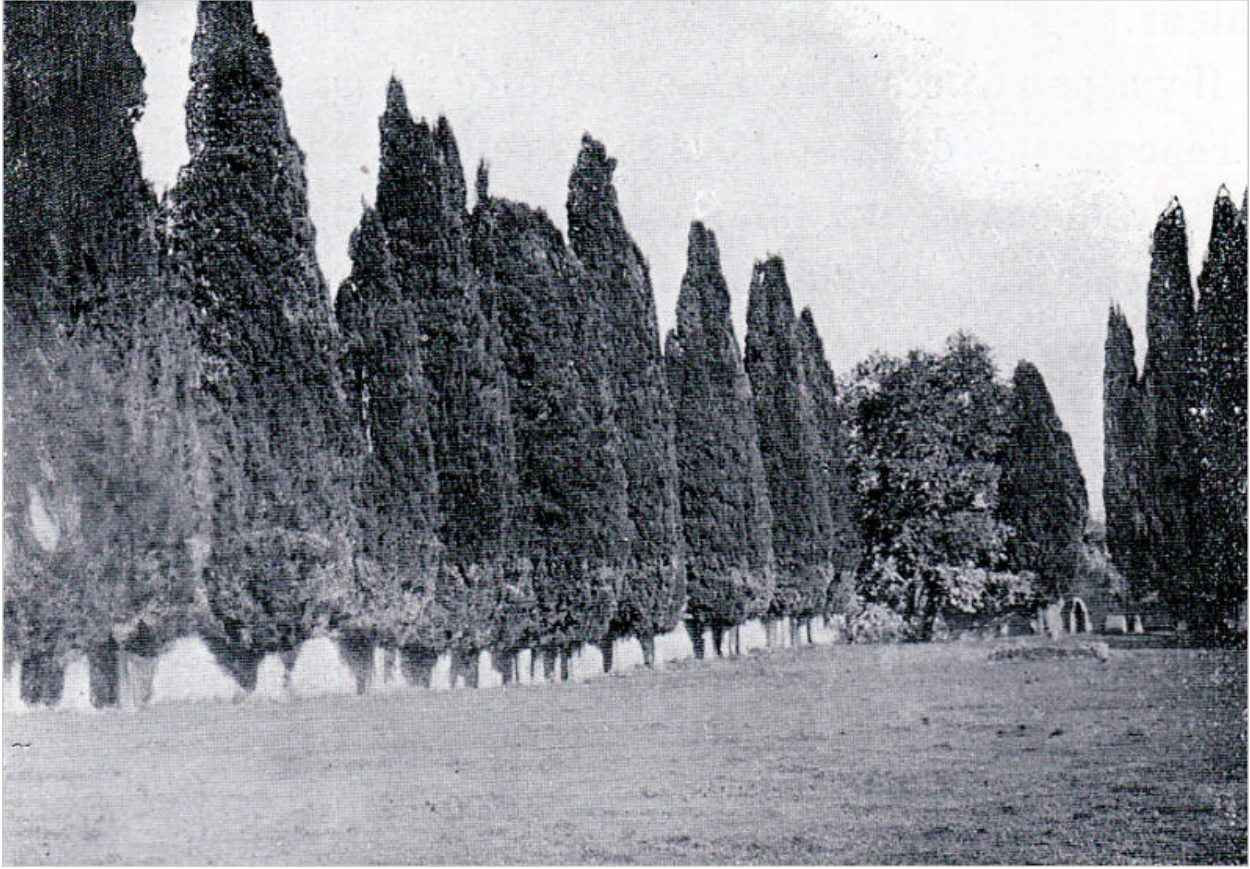


Figure 32. The Namazjah field. The larger space for the prayer in the town. Tirana. 1901. Photo: Alexander Degrand



Figure 33. From The Namazgja to the Old Mosque. The field to the left in older maps is named as Sheshi i Sundimtareve [The Square of the Rulers], probable because of its proximity to the Residence of the Toptani. Tirana. 1917. Austrian Archives.



Figure 34. (Above) The old mosque of Tirana. The Photo was made from the perspective of the path from Elbasan. The smaller volume is the Tyrbe (sepulchral chamber) of Tirana's founder. Album: Tirana in Colors. Tirana. 1913. Photo Credit: August Leon, Albert Kahn Collection (Below). The image shows the lateral façade of the mosque. Here the Mosque has still it's the surrounding graveyard and the lower stoned wall separating it from the main street. Album: Tirana in Colors. Tirana. 1913. Photo Credit: August Leon, Albert Kahn Collection

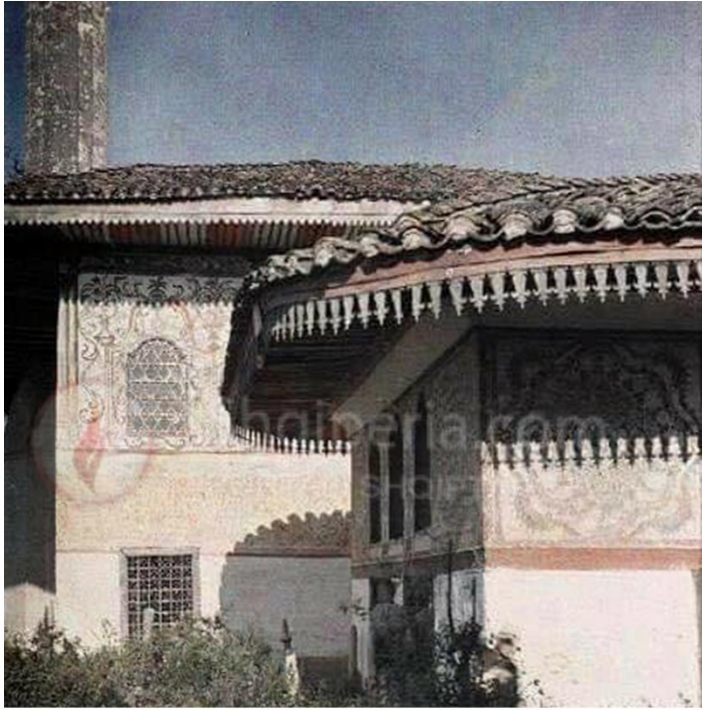


Figure 35. [Above] The protruding roof of the Old Mosque. Album: Tirana in Colors. Tirana. 1913. Photo Credit: August Leon, Albert Kahn Collection (Middle) the Main facade with its porch and the walls painted with floral motives. Album: Tirana in Colors. Tirana. 1913. Photo Credit: August Leon, Albert Kahn Collection (Below). The sultan's chamber room (Arz Odası) built in the XV century. Istanbul. Photo credit: Panoramio.



Figure 36. The two monuments opposed. The old mosque build by the Founder of Tirana, the Bargjinolli, where the Sulejman Pasha was also buried, and the Tyrbe of Kaplan Pasha, the sepulchral place the head of the antagonist Totptani family. Photo Credit: Austrian Archives



Figure 37. (Above) The Square in front of the old mosque. The large Sequoias and Cypresses, the covered well, and the graveyard are the main elements of Tirana's main square. (Below) The Street that from the mosques proceeds toward the core of the bazar. Tirana. Approx. 20s. Old Postcards



Figure 38. (Above)The path proceeds deeper in the bazar. (Middle) the photo was taken at the same place with the precedent. But it shows the space filled with merchants and buyers on the market day. (Below) The photo was done further within the bazars space. At its core where a covered well was located. Tirana. 1917. Photos: Austrian Archives.

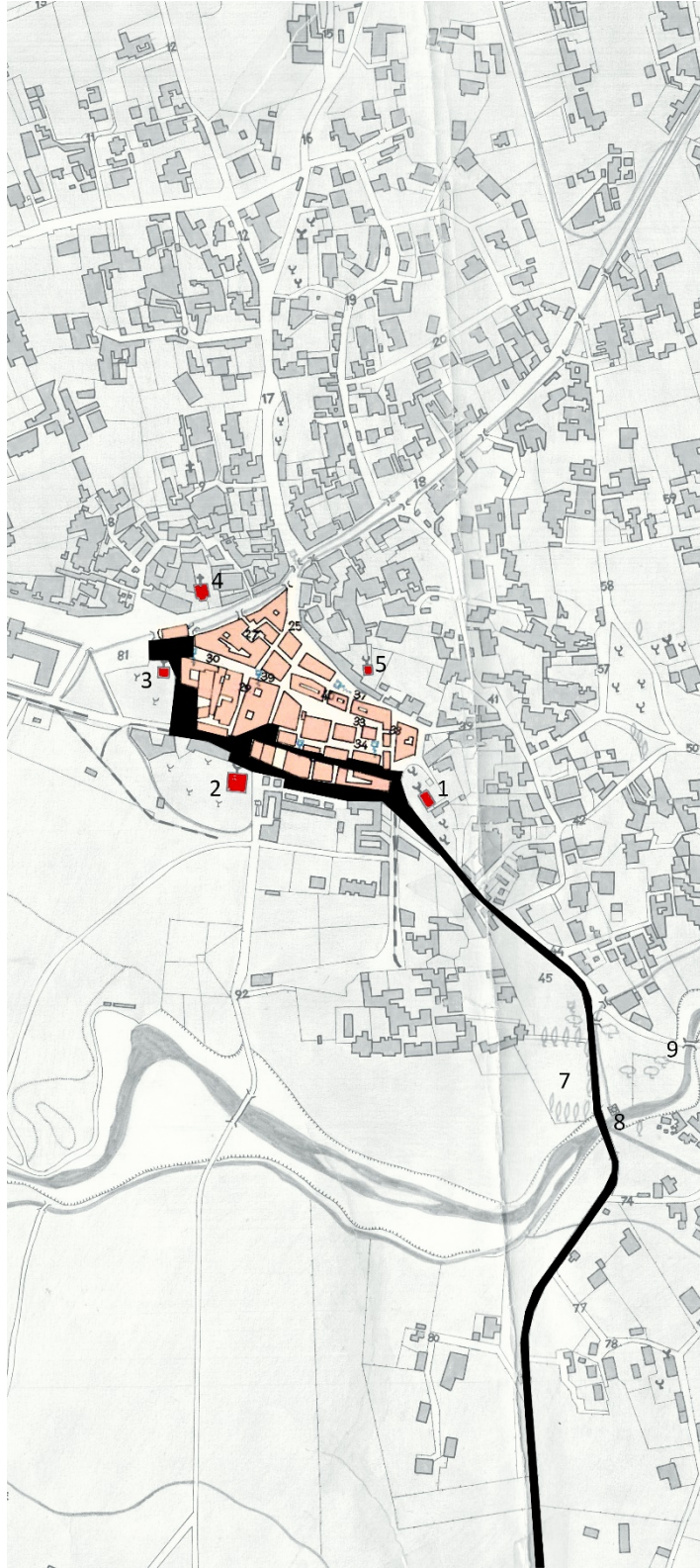


Figure 39. Messianic signs around the bazar. The scheme was based on the 1921 map of Tirana, by the engineer Skender Frasheri. In black is shown the itinerary so far. In Rose is the bazar, still fully preserved in 1921. In red are the religious objects: 1. the old Mosque; 2: “The Ethem Bey Mosque”; 3. The Terzi (Carapici) Mosque; 4: The Orthodox Church; 5: The Bektashi Teke of the Bazaar. Other numbered places are: 7: The namazgjah; 8: The Terzi bridge; 9: The Tabak Bridge. Tirana: 2018. Plan of Tirana. Skender Frasheri. Scheme credits; Endrit Marku



Figure 40. Leaving the Bazar. The photo was taken from Tirana's bell-tower, attached to the Ethem Bey Mosque [1]. The clearing in the bottom of the photo [2] is the space in front of the Ethem Bey Mosque. To the right is the entrance [exit] to the bazar [3]. After existing the bazar, I will describe: the large clearing beneath [28 Nentori street][2] that connects the Ethem Bey Mosque with the Old Mosque [not visible because already left behind][4]; The Ethem Bey Mosque itself [not visible because behind the observer]; and the last segment that leads, along the arcaded facades [5] to the Karapici Mosque[6]. Source: Old Postcard.



Figure 41. An Early-Modern site of Public Display, 28 Nentori Street. The photo was taken from the very same position of the previous one. From the base of the Clock tower, the perspective looks back toward the Old Mosque. Austrian Archives. Tirana. 1917.



Figure 42. Bazar day, along the Ethem beys Mosques perimeter and Graveyard. The location of the viewer is very same of the two previous photos. The Ethem Beys porch is at the left of the photo. While in the right side is the road intersection where I left the interior of the bazar. The arcaded linear buildings show the further continuation of the itinerary. The minaret in the background belongs to the Terzi (Karapici) mosque, which is also the final sign of the itinerary. Tirana. 1917. Austrian Archives.



Figure 43. “The Ethem Bey Mosque” closing the perspective of the main street [28 nentori]. Its porch and the minaret are at the center of the vector that goes toward the viewer (in the photo) in the direction of the other (minor) center of the old mosque. Tirana. 1917. Austrian Archives.



Figure 44. “The Ethem Bey Mosque”. (Above) The Building is shown with its surrounding context; the hills in the background are toward the road to Elbasan, traveled in the first part of the itinerary. The photo was probably done from the minaret of the Terzi (karapici) mosque. (Below) The Front of “The Ethem Bey Mosque” with all its elements visible. Tirana: Aprox. 20s. Old postcards.



Figure 45. (Above) Ethem Beys Mosque back-front. This images is actually a 90 degree deviation to the foreseen itinerary. It is relevant because it shows that the center of the town made of the Mosques of Etehm Bey and the bell-tower (That one day will become Clock tower) is at edge of Tirana. Toward this direction the capital will find the grounds for the future expansions of the boulevard. Tirana. 1917. Austrian Archives. (Below) The last segment of the itinerary. The path proceeds along the arched shops west of the Ethem Bey Mosue. Tirana. Approx. 20s. Old Postcards.



Figure 46. The Karapici Mosque. The last Sign of the itinerary Tirana. 1901. Photo: Alexander Degrand



Figure 47. The Field of the bazar. A space for different usages, for the weekly bazar, fairs, festivals and celebrations. A place of the everyday later claimed by the Kings "Skanderbeg Square". Source unknown.

3. EMERGING SIGNS OF THE CIVIC AUTHORITIES [1912-1925]

The path toward the independence of the Albanian nation started in the XIX century, pushed by different political and cultural movements that aimed to the awaking (or the construction) of national sentiments. The first Albanian cultural current, known as *Albanian renaissance*²⁷ belongs to this period, when the Albanian language was for the first time extensively written in works of literature with a thematic often related to the Albanian national sentiments. In these decades the figure of Skanderbeg was reintroduced, the Albanian noble that in the XV century, for a quarter of the century, was the only Balkan stronghold opposed to the Turkish expansion. The vestige of his dynasty, was used for the Albanian flag, and his name and deeds often vested with a mythical character where gradually included to the local culture.

Albania entered the international stage as an independent country only in the second decade of the XX century. It was among the last Balkan nations that separated from the Ottoman Empire. Independence was declared in the Assembly of Vlore, on 28 November 1912. On those days, only the southern town could host the event because all the other Albanian cities were either controlled by the last bastions of the Ottoman Empire or the opposing front of the allied, Montenegrin, Serbian and Greek armies. However, the last decision that gave international recognition to Albanians was signed on July 29, 1913, in the *Conference of London*. The international meeting of the representatives of the Worlds Powers, organized to distribute the ottoman spoils, decided that Albania was going to be an Autonomous principality, ruled by a foreign *Prince* (Shqipërisë, 2007, pp. 27-28).

The first international commissions responsible for tracing the Albanian borders came on October 13. On 21 February 1914, an Albanian delegation officially delivered the Albanian crown to Wilhelm von Wied, a German noble. The delegation was headed by Esat Pashë Toptani (Shqipërisë, 2007, p. 58), hereditary of the well-known family that ruled Tirana for most of its ottoman history. Wied arrived in the coastal city of Durres, his projected capital, on the seventh of mars 1914. During his short rule, he made a visit to Tirana accounted in the memories of his Secretary. His regime ended in the first beginnings of WWI, reframing again the Albanian political

²⁷ The contemporary political program, already quoted in the first chapter, Urban Renaissance, has obviously borrowed its terminology form it.

scheme. Wied abandoned Durres on 3 September 1914, only one month after the beginning of WWI. He made the decision pressured by a local rebellion and the lack of funding, because of the war, from his main sponsor Austro Hungary.

The conclusion of the Great War coincided with the entrance of Tirana as a protagonist in the Albanian scene. The process started on January 1920, in the Congress of Lushnja held in the city of the same name. The event was held in parallel with the *Paris Peace Conference* and had the task to organize a coordinated Albanian response to the decisions made in Paris. In the last days of January in Lushnja where decided the new Albanian Government, The National Council²⁸, and the High Council²⁹. At the end of January, the delegation appointed for the constitution of the civic institutions of the new state was prevented from entering the city of Durrës, former capital of Wied and controlled by the Italian armies. On February 11, the convoy derailed toward Tirana (Shqipërisë, 2007, p. 144). On the very same day, they entered in the town, appraised by cheering crowds. This event signed the future of the city that became the Capital of Albania.

On December 17, 1920, Albania was officially admitted in the League of Nations. From that moment, its nationhood was never questioned.

The following years were characterized by the antagonism of two political parties, The Progressive party and the popular party (Fischer, 2012, p. 27). In this period two men emerged. The first was Fan Noli, an orthodox bishop, Harvard graduate, intellectual, writer, the man that first translated the works of Shakespeare, and a leftist with progressive ideas. The other was Ahmet Zogolli, already appointed Minister of Interior by the Congress of Lushnja, an ambitious and dynamic chief-town belonging to an important dynasty of the northern Albanian regions. This period was dominated by politic instability caused by continuous interior power struggle.

On December 11, a group of armed man was sent to the room of hotel International of Tirana. A modest building located in the Skanderbeg's Square. The room was hosting the Prime minister of Albania Pandeli Evangjeli. They were sent from his antagonist political figure Aqif Pasha, as the last resource for removing the Prime Minister. His rather *"unfortunate move led to an entire*

²⁸ In this Congress was established for the first time the institution of the parliament. In this early stages named Senate.

²⁹ The councils was composed of four representatives and had the authority of the Head of the State. It was supposed to be provisional until the approval of the constitution that would deliberate on the form of the regime.

series of coups” (Fischer, 2012, p. 31), that were proven disastrous for the fragile Albanian democracy. One day later December 12, 1921, an army led by Ahmet Zogolli entered Tirana. Zogolli already a prominent political figure and the *Minister of War* of Evangjeli’s government seized the opportunity to become the leading politician of Albania. His staged entry in the capital through its main roads must have had an extraordinary impact on the traditional Albanian society. 1921, ended with the institution of a new government, formed on 25 December and headed by Xhafer Bey Ypi, a figurehead (Fischer, 2012, p. 35) of Ahmet Zogu.

On February 1922, another internal rebellion against the Albanian government, started. The prime minister and most of the ministers fled to the neighboring city of Elbasan. The Minister of Interior, Ahmet Zogolli remained alone to defend the capital. Through tough resistance and negotiations, he disrupted the other front and miraculously succeeded. This event further reinforced his image, *“since heroics in the face of overwhelming odds were much valued by Albanian chieftains”* (Fischer, 2012, p. 37). The following months the rule of law and with it the increasing authoritarianism of Zogolli was spread to the entire Albanian territory. However, he still avoided a visible leading position, and re-constituted the previous government.

Following the continuously shown incapacity of the government of Tirana, at the age of 27, on December 16, 1922, Ahmet Zogolli finally decided to step in and became the prime minister of Albania. From 1920 to 1922, Albania changed seven prime ministers, and Zogolli was the first to resist for over a year. However, chaos reemerged and he soon he had to compromise with the representatives of the *“clique”*³⁰ about to start another rebellion against him. The compromise formed another government, still headed by Zogolli, but not controlled by him. The newly appointed administration organized the agitated national election of 1923.

Ahmet Zogu³¹ gathered around him the conservative Albanian beys, landowners and was able to win the elections although unable to form the government alone. On 24 February 1923 In the midst of the created instability, he suffered an assassination attempt while walking on the stairs of the parliament headquarters. After the gunfire, wounded in his hand, he calmly proceeded toward his parliamentary bench. The event again helped his image of invincibility. The day after

³⁰ An semi-official organization supporting a reactionary and pro-Islamic regime.

³¹ In 1922, Zogolli changed his surname to Zogu. He probably removed the suffix *“olli”*, a Turkish form reminder of the former ottoman links of his family.

he resigned from his Prime Minister Office, retained from the previous legislature. Soon was formed a new government led by his projected father-in-law Shefqet Bey Verlaci, again controlled by Zogu from behind the scenes.

On 6 April 1923, two American tourists were ambushed and killed (Fischer, 2012, p. 60). The unusual event transformed soon into a political confrontation. Both fronts accused the other for staging it. The government accused the opposition. The opposition accused Zogu. In their opinion, he was trying to demonstrate that he was the only man capable of establishing stability. In the aftermath, a state of emergency was installed all over Albania.

On April 20 1924 the last fracture between the two main political fronts took place, the government party controlled by Ahmet Zogu and the opposition led by the Bishop Noli. The reason was the assassination of Avni Rustemi, a politician exponent loved and respected by the people. He became famous in 1916 when he executed Esat Pashë Toptani in the streets of Paris. The latter, was in league with Serbia for the division of the Albanian lands. Rustemi's action stopped him. Esat Pasha was the head of the dynasty of the former rulers of Tirana and the uncle of Ahmet Zogu. Besides this, Avni Rustemi was suspected as the mind behind the attempt on Zogu's life. Consequently, there was more than one reason for the opposition to blame the latter for his assassination. Rustemi was buried in Vlore, not in Tirana, giving a strong message of dissociation from the center.

In the aftermath of the funeral, many deputies of the national assembly (The parliament), joined the opposition in Vlora and they explicitly requested for the entire assembly to be removed from the capital and continue the normal activities in the southern city where the independence was first proclaimed in 1912. However, the government refused. The escalation pushed many ministers to abandon their seats. In May the entire cabinet headed by Shefqet Bej Verlaci, finally resigned, immediately replaced by another again controlled by Zogolli. A few days later the last conflict started, which was going to put an end to the Albanian democracy.

The event known in the books as "*The Democratic Revolution*" started from the northern city of Shkodra. On May 16 the army garrison of the city raised against the government. This was followed by a series of other insurgencies all over the country. Ahmet Zogu failed to defend his

authority, this time. On June 10 the Rebel Forces, entered in Tirana (Shqipërisë, 2007, p. 226). Zogu and his man flew first to the mountains of Tirana and then to Yugoslavia.

Noli's Government had a very ambitious program that would have *"made any Western Democrat proud... but he lacked financial backing and domestic support"* (Fischer, 2012, p. 66). He soon failed to procure a foreign loan for Albania, indispensable to put the Albanian economy into motion. His progressive ideas were too difficult to digest for the Albanian society, even for some of his closest supporters. On the other side Ahmet Zogu, was very active in the organization of his return, from his residence in Belgrade he gained military and monetary sponsorships from private businessmen and the Yugoslav state, in exchange of future concessions. On December 1924, he started his comeback action.

Ahmet's Zogu's troops entered in an empty capital on 24 December 1924. Noli, his ministers and supporters withdrew to the coastal cities and soon sailed to Italy. The date of Zogu's return was officially declared as the *"the legality day"*. This event was the last of the Albanian troubled first decade as an independent country. Wars, economical problems and political instability did not permit larger changes to occur. The Tirana entered by Zogu's armed man in the last days of 1924 was not that different from the city left from the Ottomans. Nevertheless the first signs of a civic authority appeared.

3.1. The Western Entrance

This time I will approach Tirana from west. In the historical accounts of these years, as the visit of the French Diplomat, Degrand, in 1901, or the one-day long visit of Prince Wied, the western direction from Durrës or Shkodër seems the new favorite compared to the eastern direction of Elbasan. Obviously, the Albanian western alignment was not only social or political but expressed through space as well.

Reaching Tirana from its western periphery is another experience from the one described in the previous Ottoman path. The former approach from Elbasan, from east, was outlined by the center of the great mountains and the precipitous Valley of Erzen River, the city was first discovered from an elevated point, and then approached.

Coming from west, I am not able to distinguish the settlement from very far. Tirana is at the end of Tirana's River valley, a large plain created by three parallel and distant creeks [Figure 48].

Immediate tree lines and distant uninterrupted silhouettes of mild hills and mountains flank the route along the plain. Toward east, the ridges of Mountain chains of almost 2000 meters peaks enclose it. Toward west, are the lower coastal hills. Mount *Dajti*, incorporated in the mountain chain, closes the perspective. Until few kilometers from the town, the path advances parallel to the mountains, upstream the creeks descending the valley end. However, the city will not appear until the very last kilometers of the journey when the first man shaped silhouettes become visible.

“At least, at about 10 o’clock, we saw the minarets of Tirana,” (Heaton-Armstrong, 2005) writes, the Captain Duncan Heaton Armstrong, the private secretary of Wied. While approaching the city, I first distinguish the *active* (Schulz C. N., 1979, p. 51) elements, the verticals of the minarets. They are the first visual object that strike out, white, tall and slim they are easily distinguishable helped by the darker tones of the mountains and the irregular and blurry profiles of the trees. A little more and the *passive* (Schulz C. N., 1979, p. 51) elements appear, the horizontals of the houses and their walls. They are mostly low of one floor and rarely of two floors. The later make an impression on the American writer Rose Wilder Lane *during her short stay in the capital, “Tirana, the white, low town, drowsed in the sun; water rippled in the gutters of the winding, walled streets”* (Lane, 1922).

The minarets are quite a landmark, and Tirana has many of them. They are the only element that can help me find my way toward the center. The streets bend immediately after breaching the edge of the city’s fabric, making the orientation on ground level difficult. The city in front of me is horizontal and it has a fragmented organic fabric [Figure 46]. The concepts of radial, grid and axis do not belong here yet. The minarets are scattered evenly along and above the skyline of the horizontal households. However and attentive look reveals that there are more of them at a certain area. Tirana has also a bell tower; it is shorter but larger than the adjacent minarets. It further helps in pronouncing even more the possession of the sky by the manufactured verticals in that same direction. The path of the unpaved street I am stepping will probably bring me there. This Tirana is dominated by space, even after entering it. Although I can sense that I am in an entropic landscape, the presence of nature is everywhere, it is present in the tall and ever-present background of mount Dajti, it is in the centenary plane trees, giants [Figure 48/above]

when confronted with anything man-made in the city, or in the large cultivated courtyards attached to the households. Nature accompanies this itinerary to the very core of the town, as it did in the previous.

3.2. The undefined western edge of the city

Defensive walls do not encircle the city **[Figure 49]**, apparently they never did. Visitors can walk uninterrupted inside it, following the mainstream along the largest and crowded road. The transition from countryside to a more built landscape starts after crossing a massive orchard. Moving forward, or turning right? I proceed forward; even though I am not confident enough because there are no road signs indicating directions. I came from Durres and the street I am walking was naturally introduced to my path.

However, the city is not completely unintelligible; there are other clues for the visitor to understand. They can be found by observing the people. An overloaded horse dragged by its owner and young son, is coming toward me, supposedly from the right direction. Probably they just left behind the bazar and they are now headed home, to share with the waiting family the earnings of that day, purchases and the latest gossips from the large town and the agitated world. A group of fast walking armed man passes sideways. They probably went toward the direction I am headed, to the very heart of this Tirana. Clues of the direction can be found elsewhere as well, in temporary signs all around. On wet autumn days, the mudded street is carved by deep guiding lines, traced by the oxcarts wheels, horse-cars or from the army vehicles, habitual in these days. In dry summer days, the mud becomes earth and dust, raised up by the very same vehicles heading to the local market or the centrally located army barracks. I have only to go after the busiest, the most engraved or the dustier street. I choose to go forward.

I just crossed the edge of Tirana, voids in the manmade mass are now distinguishable, and among them a larger and deeper one, toward which the direction of the flow of my path goes. The settlement on all directions does not present itself as a blurry uniform mass anymore, now I can sense the openings, the concavities disappearing deep in the labyrinths of the houses **[Figure 50]**. The path gradually becomes more defined, a lower wooden fence on the side, masses of more dense planted trees **[Figure 51]** and at some point the solid of the walled houses enclosing the view. They are now at touching distance and their imperfections disclosed. In their rough

surfaces, the uneven joints in between the bricks can be seen. Their presence is perceived also beyond the thin layer of white mortar. Parts of these walls are lower, fallen, and bended; making me aware of the resilience of the material, they were made of. Often these bricks are smoothed, there have malted slowly under the rain and sun and are now regaining their original quality as a mud **[Figure 52]**.

The path becomes narrower as I enter deeper in what is considered a city, the largest in the region. There is flowing water on the left³², it can be heard and seen washing out the dirt of the town. Improvised little bridges made of wooden planks, connect the houses and orchards on the right side of the street. The unpaved has finally a defined perimeter, although space still prevails on the built form. I can still see scattered houses at distance, because on both sides of the itinerary, the lateral fronts often become permeable.

There is one direction that although fragmented is made of only opaque and artificial presences. That's the direction to follow, forward along Durres Street named after the short lived capital of Albania that ceded its role to Tirana. The direction I am following hasn't any new signs so far, and its sequences aren't orchestrated with the attention of the first itinerary. The stoned bridges, the namazgja and the important mosques do not belong to this direction. I am on a path that suddenly becomes important. Following the water stream and large turn of the street, I encounter a large cemetery **[Figure 53/2]**. Its lower wooden fence allows a deeper visual toward the rest of the Town. On the other side of the cemetery, there is another street³³. After few meters, both streets join **[Figure 53/3]**. In the created relationship, the street that I just encountered seems more important than the direction I walked through. My itinerary coming from Durres pours into the space of Kavaja Street, confirming once more its inherited inferiority.

3.4. First Sign of a civic authority [The First "Skanderbeg Square"]

In front of me, a building looks different from the rest. I have only a glimpse of its lateral façade but I can sense that its volume is larger and longer than any other building I encountered so far **[Figure 53/4]**. I move toward it to discover that the building's façade is symmetrical. The instant I reach its western extremity is also the moment I discover the first square of Tirana **[Figure 53/5]**.

³² It is the same water channel encountered in the previous itinerary, after leaving the Terzi (Karapici) Mosque

³³ The street of Kavaja, that in the future will be named Mussolini Boulevard.

The structure that derailed my path toward the square appears in all plans of Tirana, until way beyond WWII. In the Plan of the city, prepared by the Austro-Hungarian authorities ³⁴in 1917, and apparently focused in the elements of the city that could prove useful to the needs of their army, it appears as a Hospital. In latter plans of the city, it is signed as Military Barracks and more specifically as *The Skanderbeg Barracks* [Figure 53/4]. The utilitarian use of the building is evident also in its rather plain appearance. Nevertheless, its main front, the longest façade of Tirana, faces the city's first and so far only piazza. This place shares its name with the barracks. I just entered the original "Skanderbeg Square" [Figure 54].

The significance of the modest widening just before reaching the bazar of Tirana is much more important than its appearance. Its location is rather strategic [Figure 55], at the junction of two important streets of Tirana, the street of Shkodra and the street of Diber. Seeing the corridors that from the space of the square disappear toward the periphery of the town, I am again reminded of the still low relevance of Durres Street. I found "Skanderbeg Square" only thanks to the imposing center of the army barracks. Without their accidental guidance, I would have entirely omitted the city plaza from my path. Along the perimeter of "Skanderbeg Square", there is a series of parked cars, probably taxis belonging to the wealthy man and politicians. Their presence discloses the importance of the place that has become a departing, meeting and destination point of the city. A large water channel interrupts the space. Despite the fragmentation, it creates a separated area for the use of the pedestrians. The line separates the spaces in two halves; on my right it's the long front of the Barracks while on my left there are the facades of fragmented buildings. This front of the square has also a lot to say.

The only unitary element of the fragmented facades are their arches, smaller, larger or narrower, they are rather archaic elements used to give to these buildings an apparently desired quality. This quality is transparency. Beyond the arcaded facades, there are bars and restaurants, and through them, the inner space extends toward the outdoor sidewalk filled with dozens of chairs and coffee tables. The fates of Albania were probably decided in those tables. Members of the parliament, ministers, and bitter foes were probably sitting in adjacent tables, in the openness of the square protected by the lack of intimacy. Here the minister of Bishop Noli were calmly

³⁴ For two years during WWI Tirana was controlled by the Austro-Hungarian Authorities.

chatting disturbed by the distant firing of the Zogu's armies approaching from the mountains of the city (Stirling, 1953). In few hours the defenses of the capital were breached and Zogu entered triumphant the city through the northeastern direction of Diber Street.

In the middle of the fragmented front, there is a larger façade. On the ground floor, large arches sustain it, while on the upper part there is an opaque wall perforated by large windows. The building has a balcony, framed by an iron parapet. This element alone is enough to understand that the hotel is more than what its function announces. The small balcony is a podium for conveying public messages rather than a place for personal relaxation. The building bears the written signature, *International*. It is the main hotel of the city, formerly named Istanbul (Bakiu, 2013). Many things have changed in Tirana in the last decades since its ottoman years. Edward Lear, among the sources of the first itinerary, wrote a short essay specifically dedicated to the inn where he sojourned during his one night stay in Tirana. His colorful description writes: "*O khan³⁵ of Tyrana! Rats, mice, cockroaches, and all lesser vermin were there*" (Lear, 1851). Now Tirana has different hotels, following western models, indispensable for an open city trying to adapt itself to growing numbers of visitors. Its former name *Istanbul* says that this process started earlier in the ottoman days, in parallel to the modernizations efforts of the empire. Its present name, *International*, reveals the new reality of Albania, striving for international acknowledgment.

Its rooms partially hosted the hundred, thousands, of people that reversed the new capital Tirana in the aftermath of the Great War. They found a city that was inadequate to their accommodation needs and probably the hotels that emerged were the best response to the immediacy of the problem. The many politicians from the other regions of the country sojourned here, prime Ministers as well. The last act of the first coup d'état staged in Tirana was played here. In the winter of 1921, the then prime Minister Pandeli Evangjeli, was in his hotel room at the *International*, when assaulted by armed men asking his resignation. This event staged at this place was the first coup in the new capital. After the event, the same night, Evangjeli left for his native city of Vlore.

³⁵ *Khan* is the deformation of the Albanian form *Han*, which can be translated Inn or Caravanserai.

“Skanderbeg Square” and its mundane cafes and hotels where the first signs of a new aspect of Tirana that was developing separated from the past Ottoman traces. The way its space was used was more conform to the western models. This spirit was embodied in many of its aspects. For example in another building enclosing one of the shorter sides of the plaza, the attached advertising signage read: “*Hotel Continental; European Restaurant*”. However, this square was also a place of political public display almost an extension of the adjacent parliament chambers. The first “Skanderbeg Square” is devoid of political signs, despite being itself a sign of a state *struggling for stability* (Fischer, 2012).

3.5. A first Fracture

I proceed further with my itinerary. In front of me, on the left I see the well-defined trace of Diber Street, while on the right the space is widened. On one side, there is a layered front of houses and shops in continuation with the facades of “Skanderbeg Square”. In the other, there is another graveyard, and a large mosque [Figure 53/6]. I decide to rely again on the vertical signs rather than the horizontal paths, worried of getting lost through the labyrinths of the small city. I turn left flanked by the cemetery of the Mosque of Karapici, oriented toward the silhouettes of other minarets and of the tower of Tirana [Figure 53/7].

In a couple of minutes, from the mild vacuum of the cemetery, I find myself in the middle of an almost empty field, suddenly thrown outside the urban area. Instants ago I was within narrow streets and neighborhoods trying to find the right path. I am seeing at the world *sideways* (Arnheim, 1988, p. 42), in front of me there is an almost isometric overview of Tirana’s center. I will try to exploit the created dynamic, in order to see the scene in front of me with *noninvolvement*, and without *actively participating* (Arnheim, 1988, p. 43)

I can see the path traveled, the previous cemetery at the junction of Kavaja and Durrës street, the back front of the Skanderbeg barracks and in the background the roofs of hotel International. Then there is an interruption. It is the pause of the other cemetery and the Mosque of Karapici just passed. Then I see the old part of Tirana, the porches of the bazars, the mosque of Ethem Bey and the tower without a clock yet. Further away, I can also see the minaret of the Old mosque flanked by the unique twin cypress.

The center of Tirana has two sides now. One of them is still ambiguous but already a reality. Located in the western side it is evolving around the public space of “Skanderbeg Square”. Toward east the other character is located, that of the old ottoman core centered on the bazar. I am looking at the created situation from the empty field of the weekly bazar. The space where I am standing soon will become the ground where the competition in between these two sides of Tirana will take place. For the moment, both spaces are divided by the virtual axis passing in front of the mosque of Karapici and in the middle of the field **[Figure 56]**.

Nevertheless, the wide field of the weekly bazar it is not neutral anymore. A new building just completed on its domains, now stands solitary in the empty plain **[Figure 53/7]**.

3.6. The First Sign of the Capital [The parliament]

I am in front of the Albanian parliament headquarters **[Figure 57]**. The building is rather simple and has a moderate scale, certainly proportionated to the state it was designed to represent. However, within its simplicity, elements trying to vest the building with some importance can be found.

The Albanian parliament is lightly elevated from the surroundings. The entrance is approached through four steps, which curve outwards following the plan of the buildings entrance. The protrusion of the central part is stretched in order to create a small elevated widening before passing through the entrance. This space was perfect for group photos, for immediate announcements or for welcoming larger delegations. The gesture of the convex steps is counterpoised by the shadowed verticals of the entrance. Lotz describes a similar dynamic in Michelangelo’s vestibule of the Laurentian Library: *“The vertical of the walls contrast the horizontal layers...In front of the steps the viewer has the sensation of being before superhuman forces”* (Lotz, 2012). The men ascending those steps were remembered on the responsibility of their role, on the importance of the function hosted by that building.

The protrusion of the steps is followed by the protrusion of the entrance of the parliament, creating a quasi-narthex. The front of the portico is connected to the inner vestibule through and arched doorway. The portal lays in between two-binary pillars, which are fourthly framed by the parietal pillars of the portico. The entire ensemble has the structure of a triumphal arch. The building, completed only in 1925 when Zogu installed its authoritarian regime, never became a

symbol of the Albanian triumph of democracy but rather the symbol of the Zogu's "triumph of legality"³⁶.

Above the protruded porch, there is a balcony. Its parapet is articulated by the four extensions of the supporting pillars. The four massive pinnacles are connected by a balustrade. Perhaps they are there to symbolize the *High Council* of the state, jokingly called by the locals the *Quarter-Kings* (Lane, 1922). The balcony itself is not secondary as it is the largest stand of the capital, capable of holding many representatives of the parliament and perhaps the entire members of the government.

The Parliament of Albania is symmetrical. It has only one unique axis, disclosing for the viewer a static building, *fully committed to centrality* (Arnheim, 1988, p. 94). The central volume hosts the main chamber, where the final cause of the building is actualized, while the lateral bodies host attached loggias, for the use of the visitors. Its facades are surrounded by large windows, placed in between the bearing pilasters. The building's transparency and construction technology are certainly a novelty for this Albania.

The roof of the parliament is different. It is covered by asphalt tiles. A technology imported from overseas, from the distant America. Its pitches are smoother with a rhomboidal texture and perfectly polished corners. Its appearance is something else compared to the typical Mediterranean roughness of the Tirana's roofs. Even its inclination is exaggerated, more congruous to northern archetypes. Maybe because it has Austrian roots (Bakiu, 2013). Works on the building were initiated by the Austrian-Hungarian administration that controlled Tirana during WWI. Besides, the pronounced inclination seems more than an imported inertia. The emphasis on the vertical direction of the building looks intentional.

Other elements attracting my attention are a series of vertical elements placed on the perimeter and at the center of the roof. The pilasters of the building parietal facades are extent above the roof plan, forming a series of lateral pinnacles. They are shaped as smaller chimneys and maybe this is also their function, probably the pipes³⁷ responsible for ventilating the loggias pass through

³⁶ This is the name Ahmet Zogu gave to its counter-coup that definitively installed his regime.

³⁷ The chimneys maybe are simply ornamental. They are an extension of the lateral pilasters, making difficult a possible connection with potential ventilation tubes.

them. Their position, number and elaborated shape contribute to the further elevation of the roof, the building's crowing piece.

Finally, there is a small cupola. It has a series of lateral grills. I can imagine why they are there. More than one hundred men discussing and arguing for hours and hours, all of them ardent smokers, often crowded the small chamber of the parliaments. Those grills at the top of the roof were probably the only way for the foggy and polluted air of the interior to escape. Nevertheless, there is something that adds importance to the element. The small cupola on top of it. Apparently, it connects *"to the source of the universal idea manifested in the state"*, to god. The building in front of me is clearly a statement. In its unity is embodied the will of the Albanian nation whose state has become a *"definite object of world history proper"* (Hegel G. W., 1953).

My second itinerary ends here, in front of the building of the parliament laying alone in the middle of the empty field of the bazar. The house of the parliament is the first visible sign of the Albanian State in the Albanian capital. The building is the first implementation of a series of projects that will be built around it and that in the following decades will reverse the equilibriums of the capital's signs. The first victim of the confrontation, not by chance, will be the preexistent mosque of Karapici, overlooking the Parliament. The process of the *substitution of centers* described by Derrida has just started.

3.7. Chapter 3 Figures



Figure 48. The Western Entrance. After the Albanian independence and the increasing dependence on Europe, the western paths of the city became increasingly important. The plain valley of Tirana [3] shaped by different rivers is surrounded by elevated edges on both sides. The Plain valley has a typical horseshoe shape. Toward east are the higher mountain chains [5] that include also Tirana’s Mount Dajti. Toward west there are lower hills [4], separating the valley from the coastal plains. The path of Durres [2] passes between these edges until it reaches the Tirana [6]. [Other Directions are the road of Elbasan [9], already mentioned earlier as the former privileged path; the street of Kavaja, that in the late 20s will be named Boulevard Mussolini. The street of Durres, coming from Durres [1], on the Adriatic [10] the privileged entrance of Tirana after the independence. Soon it will be named by the kin Zog I, Mother *Queen Boulevard*, and later after Vittorio Emanuele’s son, Prince Umberto I. The other path comes from Shkodra, slowly losing its importance in Tirana because of its proximity with the road of Durres. Lastly is the path of Dibra [6], through which Ahmet Zogu army entered Tirana, forcing the so called “Legality” that started his long-lasting unquestioned rule. The street was later named by Zog I after his father, and then (by the Italians), after Bajram Curri, one of Zogu’s antagonists.



Figure 49. Tirana from a western perspective. The image is from the riverbed of Lana, on the future location of the Southern Boulevard. Nevertheless, this view of the city was quite similar with the other view from the Street of Durres. A very different perception compared to the elevated entrance from Elbasan.



Figure 50. The Streets of Tirana, before the Large Operation led during the monarchy. Durrës Street Probably had a similar appearance during the 20s. Tirana. 1939. Photo Credit: Richard Busch-Zatner.



Figure 51. Centenary Trees in Tirana's outskirts. This image was taken close to the Tabak Mosque, belonging to the Guild of the leather producers, close to the bridge with the same name. The chosen image wants to indicate the character of the town, where natural landmarks are still present despite the increasing man-made signs. Photo Credit: M.Bali



Figure 52. An Old Wall in Tirana. Photo Credit: Endrit Marku

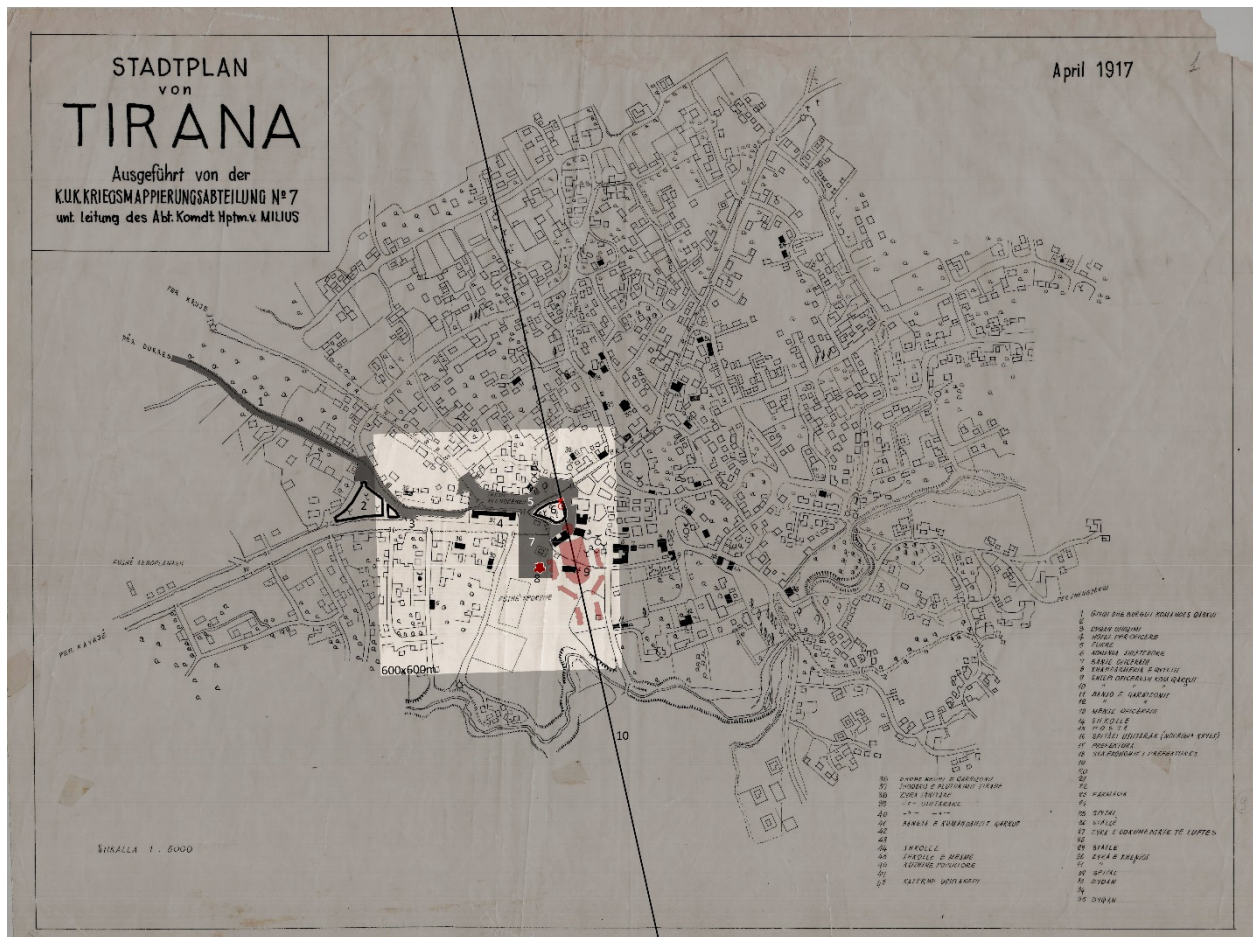


Figure 53. Through the Emerging Civic Signs. The base for this scheme is the 1917, Plan, prepared by the Austrian authorities controlling Tirana during WWI. The scheme indicates the entrance through the Street of Durres. The city is entered through an undefined edge made of orchards [1] and scattered constructions. After a large curve the path approaches the first large cemetery [2] than joins “Kavaja Street” [3]. Here is evident that the Kavaja corridor is better defined. The path follows the lateral front of the Skanderbeg barracks [4] and through a narrowing enters “Skanderbeg Square” [5]. The Path proceeds toward south, on the side of “The Karapici Mosque” and Graveyard [6] and further in the middle of the field of the Weekly bazar [7]. The itinerary ends in front of the new parliament completed in 1925 [8]. In the scheme is added the location of the later “Skanderbeg Square” [9], and direction of the boulevards [10]. Scheme Credits: Endrit Marku; Original Plan: Albanian National Construction Archives.



Figure 54. The Original “Skanderbeg Square”. This place coincides with the point where the first Itinerary was concluded. The square is divided by the characteristic channels of Tirana, enhanced during the short rule of “Ethem Bey”. On the left is the proper plaza where the first western restaurants and bars of Tirana were located. The larger balconied building is “Hotel International”, the largest in the Town. At the center of the image corresponding to the central pole is the direction of “Dibra Street” going toward the Dajti Mountain in the background. Behind the red car is located the other hotel named “Continental” with the accompanying sign writing; European Restaurant. Behind the trees on the right edge of the photo, is noticeable one of the arcades of the “Karapici Mosque”. The Skanderbeg Barracks, where positioned further on the right by they don’t appear in the photo.

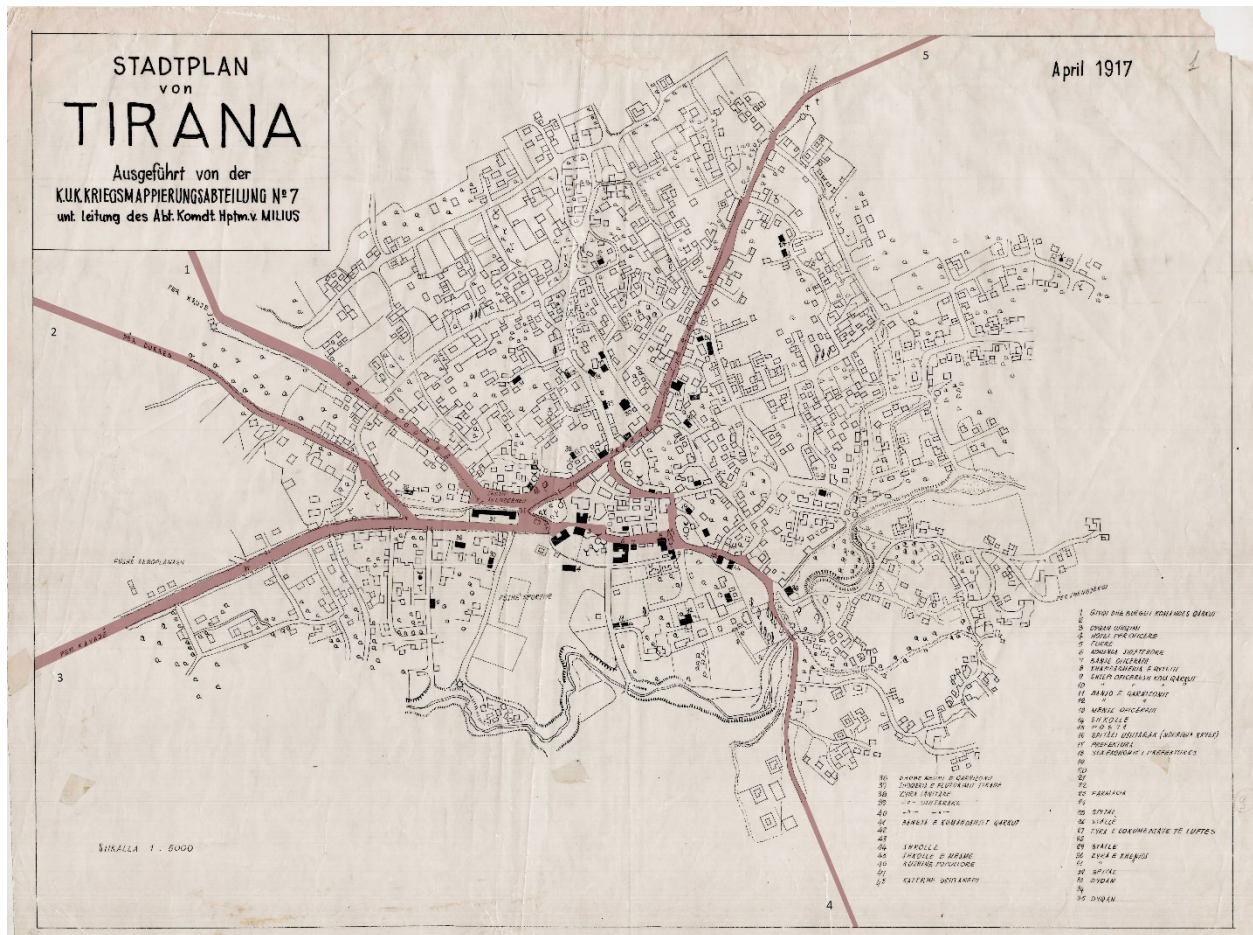


Figure 55. Main Connectives of Tirana. The base for this scheme is again the 1917, Plan, prepared by the Austrian authorities controlling Tirana during WWI. Shkodra and Kruja Street [1]; Durres Street [2]; Kavaja Street [3]; Elbasan Street [4]; Dibra Street. Scheme Credits: Endrit Marku; Original Plan: Albanian National Construction Archives.

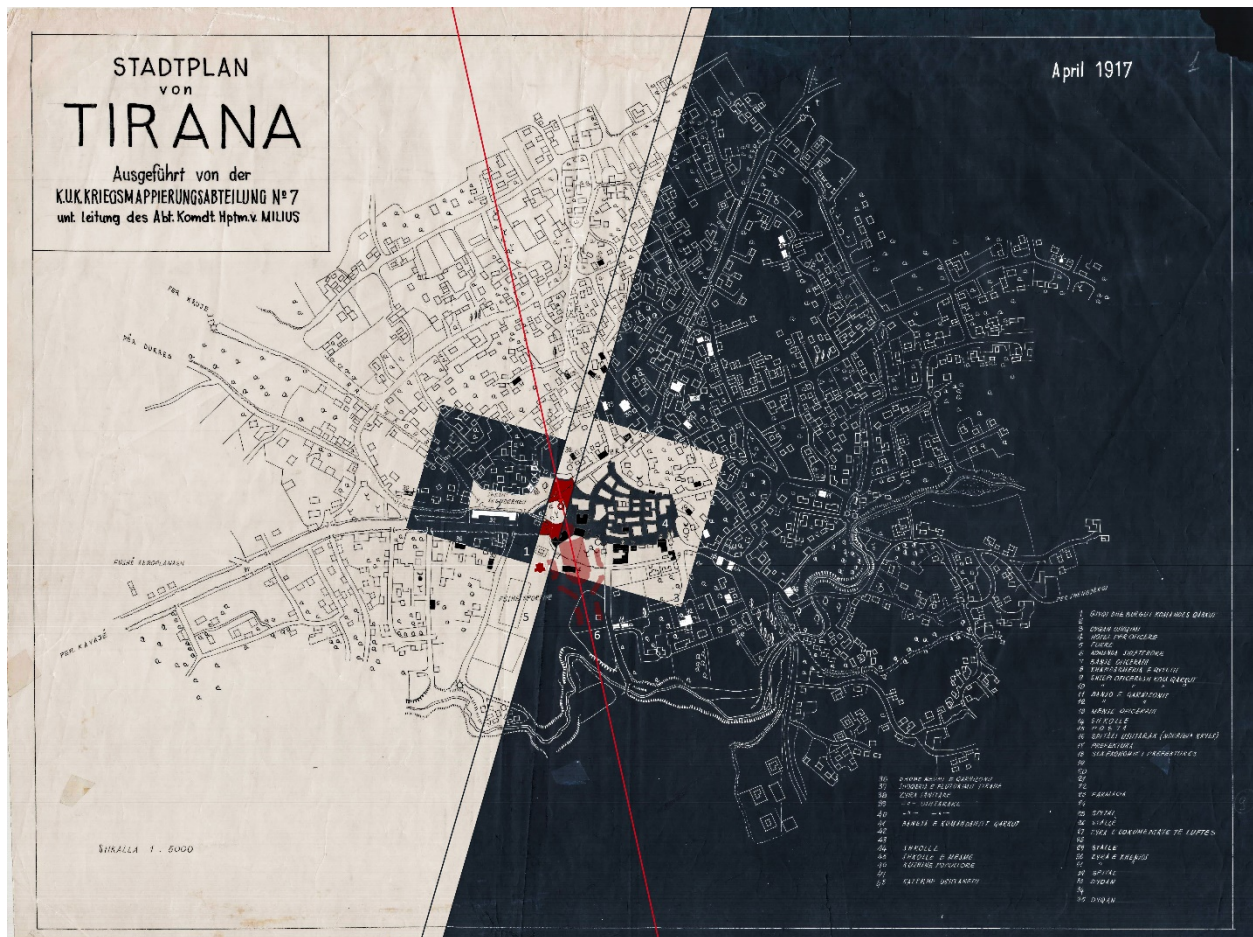


Figure 56. The Fracture. The Fascia separating the plan [5] passes along the field of the weekly bazar, the parliament and the central graveyard of “The Karapici Mosque” and the Mosque itself. Two poles were being developed on both sides of the Fascia. On the left the new civic pole centered on the original “Skanderbeg Square” [2] and the Parliament. The other pole, on the right is centered on the bazar [4]. The red axis [6] indicates the direction of the later “Skanderbeg Square” and boulevards. The layout and position of the New “Skanderbeg Square” is indicated with a transparent red.

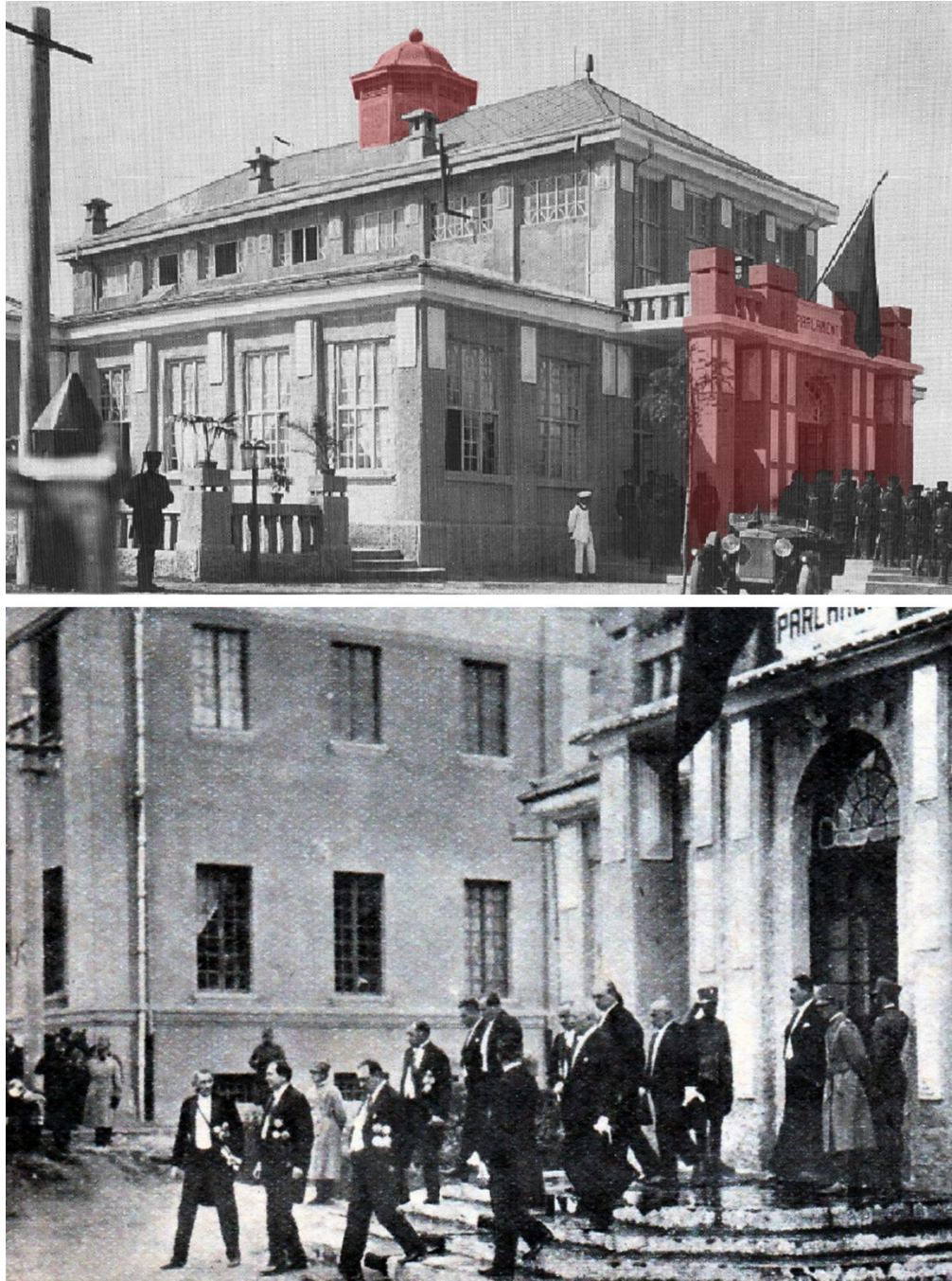


Figure 57. The Albanian Parliament. [Above] Photo Taken on the day of the proclamation of the monarchy. In the photo are underlined the Entrance Porch, and the small Cupola later removed. Tirana: 1929. Scheme Credits; Endrit Marku. Photo Credit: Unknown. [Below] The protruded steps of the Parliament. The Photo was taken on the day of the Albanian Crown was offered to Vittorio Emanuele III. Tirana. 1939. Photo Credit: Match Magazine

4. THROUGH THE VICISSITUDES OF THE KING'S CENTER [1925-1939]³⁸

At the end of 1925 Zogu called the parliament again. Out of 103 deputies only 64, showed. On that day with only two contrary votes, the republic with Ahmet Zogu President was proclaimed. He was granted a seven years long mandate, and extensive authority over all the components of the state, the parliament included (Fischer, 2012).

Meanwhile during the entire transitional year he tried to install new relations with Mussolini's Italy, seeing in it the only salvation for the Albanian vital need for international funds. In January 20, through a bilateral pact, signed in secrecy, Italy was given the status of the favored nation in Albania on matters of trading. Immediately all the concession of the Albanian resources, its oil and railways were given to Italian companies. Even the Central Bank of Albania was created with Italian loans. In the statute of the bank, it was stated that the Albanian capital couldn't be above 49%, disclosing the *"unusual and onerous ties which were being formed with Italy"* (Roselli, 2006, p. 33). Shortly, the finalization process of the National Bank, was concluded with the institution of SVEA, the company for economic development of Albania³⁹. The funding for the SVEA, officially portrayed as private company, was indeed Italian public money (Roselli, 2006, p. 41), making the bond in between the two countries difficult to dismantle in the future. On 27 November 1926 and 22 November 1927 the bond of Albania and Italy became even stronger and extended on other matters, through a mutual *"friendship and security pact"* and the *"Treaty of Tirana"* where Italy was given substantial rights on the Albanian army.

On August 25th, the Constituent Assembly met in the building of the parliament, starting a process aimed to the amending of the constitutional law. On September 1st, 1928 the assembly deliberated its unanimous decision. On that day Albania became a monarchy. The crown was given to Ahmet Zogu, from that day hereditary ruler and King of Albanians under the denomination Zog I. He swore on both the bible and the Quran, and declared: *"Gentleman may we come forth with honor in the eyes of history"* (Fischer, 2012, p. 142). Everyone was compelled to participate to the celebrations as the authorities required that *"No Albanian man or woman*

³⁸ This itinerary takes place in 1939, after the fall of King Zog I.

³⁹ *Società per lo Sviluppo Economico dell'Albania*

shall sit during the demonstrations in a coffeehouse, restaurant or street” (Fischer, 2012, p. 143). By the end of 1928, Zogu’s dictatorship became a reality.

In the 30s, the relations with Italy entered into a phase of deterioration. Zog I was by then aware that he had allowed Italy to enter too deep into the Albanian affairs, and that their helm was not disinterested. What Mussolini was seeking wasn’t an alliance, but the dissolution of the Albanian state. In 1931, Zogu in a first attempt to dissociate refused to renovate the “Treaty of Tirana”. Meanwhile the fundings of the SVEA had their effect on the country. For the first time in the Albanian history, large investments in infrastructure and public works were initiated and often completed. On the other side they created a millionaire bill for the poor Albanian state. The creditor was Italy.

In the following years Italy repeatedly tried to force Albania into a union and the enormous debt was a major card in the political game. On June 1934 a large military convoy of the Italian navy, sailed to Albania. They entered the port of Durres without the consent of the Albanian authorities, and anchored. The significance of the gesture was strong despite their withdrawal a few days later (Fischer, 2012). This was a strong shock for the King. Immediate, but rather ineffective, actions followed. He tried to cut the expenses of its administration and increase the tax revenues. While on the political and cultural front, he tried to decrease the foreign influences. Meanwhile Albania was passing through increasingly “Tragic Economic difficulties” (Fischer, 2012), and its dependency on Italy relentlessly expanded.

By 1936 the Italians were randomly referring to their neighbor as the “Albanian problem”. On 1937 during his frequent visit to Albania, Count Ciano, initiated his plan for the invasion of Albania, through instructions that were given to the Italian representatives in the country. Driven also by the German union with Austria, the *Anschluss*, Ciano’s plan was finally approved by the fascist government, on 8 January 1939 (Shqipërisë, 2007, p. 356). On April 7, the Italian armies disembarked on the Albanian harbor cities. They encountered ephemeral resistance by the weak and uniformed Albanian army. By that day Zog I, together with his wife and the two day old son, was already on his way to the Albanian southern border. That was his last march on Albanian soil. In the following itinerary I will describe the capital left by Zogu that he was able of transforming through the Italian funding of the SVEA. The Italian influence was manifested also through the

architects that conceived the transformation, however following the idea of the King of the Albanians. Tirana was re-designed with its first linear boulevards and monumental plazas. This itinerary through the vicissitudes of the King's center, follows a path that is almost identical to the previous but with transformed character. In this part of the thesis I will go also through rejected and interrupted projects for the center of Tirana.

4.1. The Reversed Ottoman Itinerary [1928]

On the morning of September 1, 1928, Ahmet Zogu started the preparations for the most important day of his life. The Luce Institute has documented the events of the day, in a video chronicle entitled, Tirana the Capital of the new Kingdom⁴⁰ (Luce, 1928). Through this black and white, mute material, I will try to build a narrative of that day [Figure 58/59], in a moment of an important political transition staged along the spaces of the capital.

The video starts with an aerial footage of the city. The airplane flies above the old city, along tiled roofs, the orchards of Tirana and its minarets. It also goes above the bazar. On the side of the compact organism, one building stands alone, surrounded by high walls and ordered gardens. It is the presidential residence about to become the Royal Palace. From the aerial footage transpires the truth of this city, still linked to its ottoman pasts. The director of the reportage, decided to fly over the namazgja, the old mosque, the bazar, and the palace of the king. The latter was located within the territory of the large ensemble belonging to the Toptani family⁴¹, close to the namazgja and to the eastern entrance of the city.

There is only one novelty in this built landscape, showed also in the video, the Italian embassy, built parallel to the namazgja in between the two bridges still named after the former ottoman guilds. The first day of the monarchy starts among the signs of the past and the still ephemeral signs of a present friendship with Italy.

The second sequence of the video shows Zogu entering the parliament. In the back seat of its modern automobile, he travels through a corridor of ceremonial guards. This passage occurs in the otherwise empty field of the weekly bazar. In the background the mosque of Karapici is seen. The mosque appears as a simple spectator among the other buildings of the bazar. It is attending

⁴⁰ Tirana La Capitale Del Nuovo Regno

⁴¹ Zog I paid a rent to the heirs of the Toptani. Furthermore he was parented to them through his mother's lineage.

at the ritual that will activate the processes of change in the capital's center, and that will end its existence as well.

In the small space of the parliament chamber, Ahmet Zogu is proclaimed king. The parliament of Albania, already irrelevant in the decision-making of the state still has a symbolic significance. After the proclamation, Zogu leaves the small parliament and returns to his palace, the real center of Tirana. On the way back, he passes along the space of the weekly bazar, "The Ethem Bey Mosque" and parallel to the bazar. He proceeds straightforward until he reaches the old mosques and the two sequoias. He turns left, and proceeds in between the tyrbe of Tirana's founder, Sulejman Pash Bargjinolli and the tyrbe of its conqueror, Kaplan Pasha. From here, he proceeds toward his residence, once the house, and still property, of the Toptani. In the final walk along the private road of the residence, beyond the gardens of his improvised Palace, was clearly visible the silhouette of the Italian embassy.

The final part of the video portrays the subjects of Zog I, paying tribute to him in organized forms. Peasants, people from different regions, army men, renowned personalities and foreign diplomats, after passing through the traces of Tirana's ottoman past, finally reach the regal place. On his coronation day, despite its absolute power, Zog went through the signs of the past authorities, which have preceded him. He travels along the very same itinerary described in the previous chapter of this thesis. He goes through its reversed path, as a king. From the symbol of the Albanian statehood, toward the different traces of the Sultans to its own center, he seeks the final legitimation of his authority.

4.2. Through the Rectilinear Mother Queen Boulevard [1939]

I return to Tirana eleven years after the proclamation of the Kingdom [Figure 60]. Something has changed, and it is evident from long distance, kilometers before reaching the center of the city. The relation to the west of the world is not an abstract aspiration anymore, an itinerary experienced by very few Albanians, or a sporadic event as the visits of the European travelers of the past. Now, especially because of the close relations to Italy, the Adriatic is just another day of travel rather than the insurmountable bulwark between the orient and the occident. The western itinerary has definitively become the privileged entrance of the capital.

The city is approached through an unfinished road passing along the base of the coastal hills flanking the valley of Tirana. They are the very same hills⁴², laying left of my path in the previous itinerary toward the just proclaimed capital. The blue print of the road is not perfect but is essentially better than the “dusty road...of several very dilapidated wooden bridges” traveled by Prince Wied’s automobile in 1914. The very same journey traveled by the Albanian-German Prince in about seven hours, a quarter of century later is shortened to less than three, thanks to the road build by the Albanian King.

I understand that Tirana is close, again, thanks to the increasing proximity of the center of Mount Dajti, on which feet Tirana lays. After a while the road takes a wide turn and *voila*, Tirana is there. Not simply the periphery but I can see its center. Proceeding forward I distinguish more and more details and especially the unique landmark of Tirana’s Clock Tower⁴³ and the minaret of “The Ethem Bey Mosque”. I’m at least five kilometers away from them.

Without the uncertainties sensed in the previous itinerary, I pass the boundary in between the agricultural fields of Tirana’s periphery and the urban area. Surely the edge is still undefined, but is more consolidated now. I’m walking on a boulevard, named Queen Mother [**Figure 61/Above/Middle**], after the spouse of Zog I, on paved sidewalks as the former water channels are no more. There are still some remnants of the former lower houses, hidden after mudded walls and covered local terracotta tiles. However, there are other typologies that are expanding. The opaque walls have been sometimes replaced by transparent iron enclosures, often with decorative details. The former houses have become villas of two floors, with large balconies and with roofs covered by imported materials. Before I walked under the heat of the sun or the wet of the rain, covered only sporadically by gigantic trees protruding from the lateral orchards or by the large shelters of the secular portals placed on the parietal walls of Tiranes houses. My present walk is partially shadowed by aligned rows of trees.

Tirana has passed through a process of Haussmanization (Frampton K. , 2007). The term encountered in the writings of Kenneth Frampton describes an operation that is more complex than cutting a street on a consolidated urban fabric [**Figure 61/Below**]. Similar intervention on

⁴² The hills of Ndroq

⁴³ Previously I have called it the Tower or the Bell tower of Tirana. No it’s the clock Tower because by 1939, the summit of the structure was reshaped and refurbished with a modern Clock.

the existing urban fabrics are actually earlier than the plan of Haussmann and Napoleon III for Paris. A well-known example is the axial interventions on Rome's medieval fabric envisioned by the different Popes of the XVI century. They surely were impressive for the peregrines going to the Urbe. Domenico Fontana, an architect of the time describes the experience of traveling through the new monumental axes of Rome implemented after the will of Sisto V: "... With incredible expenses, compliant to the heart of a Prince, he has stretched these streets from one end to another of the city, unconcerned of the mountains, or the valleys, traversed" (Benevolo, 2002, p. 523). However, despite their grandeur, their innervation were *partial and discontinuous* (Benevolo, 2002, p. 518).

Haussmann's vision was broader **[Figure 62/Above]**. His aim was to "to give unity and transform into an operative whole" the city of Paris. His interventions transformed the French Capital entirely, from "a city organized around traditional quarters to a metropolis united by "Fever of Capitalism" (Frampton K. , 2007). Tirana process is quite similar and its impact was even more radical proportionated to the scale of Paris. However, the difference in between the two projects is at the same time slim and substantial. While the interventions on Paris improved the access to its economic heart of the "huge consumer markets", the percement of Tirana's ottoman neighborhoods connected them to the center of the political power. The first urban plans for Tirana belong to the period of Zogu's rule. First through fragmented studies and then in 1929, through a proper regulatory plan the capital was designed with a radial structure around a new central square **[Figure 62/Below]**. The Queen Mother Boulevard, a series of other rectilinear axis and a peripheral ring where traced as emanations, and gravitating around the dominant center of the square, where the headquarters comprising the administrative apparatus of the state where located.

Another perspective on the boulevards of Paris, is brought by Giulio Carlo Argan. He writes that: "*The poor kept living packed in the old neighborhoods, isolated but not requalified by the new boulevards: in compensation was eased the repression of the popular rebellions to the troupes, and land speculation to the propriety owners, land speculation*" (Argan, 2004, p. 98). With the last reflection, my walk along Queen Mother Boulevard gradually comes to a conclusion **[Figure 63/Left]**. The former sensation of surprise refreshed after every junction of this street is no more.

On this path everything is revealed in advance, as it was already predetermined. Obviously, Zog I was quite successful in reshaping its capital. He marked it with his historicist vestige from its suburban edge.

4.2. Discrepancies of “Skanderbeg Square” [1939]

I am now in the larger space of “Skanderbeg Square”, guided by the imposing lateral front of the Municipality headquarters, I distinguish the large northern axis of Boulevard Zog I [Figure 63/Right]. I see “The Ethem Bey Mosque” and the clock tower and then in succession, the recently built ministries, the Parliament, Bank of Albania and Café Cursal.

However, there is also another city evident made of the bazaar, the old houses from ottoman times and spaces flowing from the alleys of the ottoman fabric going deep into the neighborhoods. Apparently these places where the everyday activities of the inhabitants take place, still participate in the space of this Square.

Furthermore, I see the circular fountain in the center of the space, the lowered elongated gardens on its southern side and contoured sidewalks. Despite the fact that there are many compact building around and a settled walk-able area, I have the impression of being in a space that it still unsolved. There are discrepancies in this space.

The contrasts I sense are documented in many ways, in the various plans of the city center, in the photos of the period and recorded in the memoirs of the personalities that have experienced Tirana in these years. In sight of the capitals center, the journalist Montanelli became aware of the discrepancies within the Albanian society embodied in the very same ensemble of “Skanderbeg Square”. After visiting the capital on November 1938, few months before the king was dethroned he wrote: *“To me misbalance is being created, misbalance that tomorrow can become dangerous, in between the insolent modernization of this city and the archaism of its hinterland... (Montanelli, 1939)”*.

While the space I entered appears settled, the buildings around are unbalanced. They are too different. On one side of the square they are clearly a product of a carefully thought program while on the other side they have a smaller scale, they are more informal and uneven. Obviously, I have to focus my research for discrepancies in the built fronts of the square, starting at its most unifying and eye-catching element: the skyline. On my right, in front of me I see the calm

horizontal Bank of the Ministries and the soft curve of Ethem Bey Mosques dome [Figure 64/Above/Middle]. Then suddenly the rhythm changes [Figure 64/Middle/Below]. It reaches a climax in the contours of the mosques minaret and of the clock tower. From there the trend changes and the skyline proceeds through the rugged pace of the bazaar upmost parts, reaching another peak in the Orthodox Church bell tower. The line is finally interrupted by the void of the northern boulevard, named after the King Zog I, and the solitary volume of the Municipality building. After this last overview, I can conclude that the sensed discrepancies are definitively evident in the built front of “Skanderbeg Square”.

Sensing and highlighting the discrepancies of “Skanderbeg Square” is just the first step. I will have to go more in detail, through that part of the squares boundary where they are stronger, along the area where the silhouette is more fragmented. I will focus into the side in between 28 Nentori Street and the Zog 1 Boulevard. More specifically along the segment where the square and bazaar meet.

Where the Square meets the Bazaar

I look again at the uncompleted part of the square. The building of the Municipality on one side, tall and compact, adorned, has as its counterpart on the other side a part of the old city. It is the old bazaar. At distance, I can notice its vibrant atmosphere, enhanced by the narrow alleys filled with exposed goods, by the people, buyers and sellers, walking and chatting out loud. They are constantly barraging in front of flour and coffee bags, clothes, copper utensils, local caps etc. From the quasi-empty void of “Skanderbeg Square”, I can catch these glimpses of everyday lives coming from the bazaar. I see these activities not far away but with a sense of estrangement. There is no mediation in between the space I am staying and the spaces I am looking at. They appear as two different domains having a physical, but not an organic, proximity.

I started my scrutiny of this portion of the bazaar from the roughed skyline. I will go on from where I left. The buildings enclosed under it are of very different heights, from two floors to nothing. There are sudden interruptions of voids that do not even correspond to a street. The very same fragmentation is present in their footprint as well. The outer walls of the buildings of the bazaar are not continuous. They face the square with a multifaceted front of shops and bars, bending along the “Skanderbeg Square” perimeter without obeying to its geometry. Furthermore

I see the characteristic arches of the bazaar porches coming continuous from the inside suddenly interrupted were they reach the space of the square. They don't bend along the bazaar multi sided facades. It seems like their rhythms were somehow interrupted. If I would project them, further they would come toward me, toward "Skanderbeg Square".

Then I look at the Mosques. I see the bare western front of Ethem bey mosque. It participates to the space of the square through its lateral front that was once hidden. It was hidden beyond the walls of adjacent shops and workshops. The surrounding cemetery is no more, only an orderly placed enclosure. The building is now surrounded by a large space cleared from the compactness of the bazar. Then I look for the mosque of Karapici and I do not see it. Where once there was the clearing, in between the initial "Skanderbeg Square" and the Old town, there is an uninterrupted axis going straight forward toward north. The mosque of Karapici, founded by then guild of the Taylors, was demolished to clear the space for the new "Skanderbeg Square" and the main boulevard of the city named after the King. The confrontation announced in the previous itinerary is now already in an advanced state.

I realize that I am in front of a section [Figure 65]; I am looking at Tirana again sideways. Behind the perimeter, I am observing an half of the old bazaar of Tirana, continuing its everyday rhythms. The other half is no more. Its place has been taken by the void of the square where I am standing. The new center of Tirana, designed for Zog I, was partially built on the capitals former vibrant center, its bazaar. The former sign of the Terzi guild was removed. Instead, the trace of the Sultans center, "The Ethem Bey Mosque", was allowed to participate in the new stage.

The Exclusion of the Bazar

With the mosque of Karapici once belonging to the Guild of Terzi, the main patrons of the bazar and a first piece of Tirana's bazar itself where replaced by the void of the "Skanderbeg Square". The picturesque atmosphere of it labyrinths made of many individual dynamics is slowly being pushed away from the center of the city. In 1939 another avenue, with the role of substituting the historic bazar was already built in the eastern side of the city, over one of the largest cemeteries within the urban fabric. Its character is the opposite of the old bazar.

The former was organically incorporated in the town fabric. It was at the core of the city, and main destination of the fluxes going in and out of the town. The new bazar is just a large covered

area [Figure 66], surrounded by streets on all directions. The problem of controlling its potentially subversive promotion of everyday existences, unaware of the presence of the governing authority has been definitely resolved. Now the bazar of Tirana, locally known as the *New*, it is just one of the plots of the superimposed structure of Tirana's spaces.

Zog I and his advisers were probably aware that the private domain, private propriety was indispensable for their state to work, as for the majority of his subjects was indispensable to have at least a limited area of activity, which constituted their sphere of its freedom (Hegel G. W., 1991, p. 73). That is why they dismantled the bazar gradually. The indispensable private sphere was contained in the agricultural land, the private orchards or the products people put on sale on the bazar days. However, this aspect had to be contained, after all the Individuals *highest duty* was to be part of the state. Their *subjective ends* had to be sacrificed for this spiritual union. It was unacceptable for the private domain to deform the domain of the state. Unacceptable because when the personal discretion of the individuals is invested with power than it destroys the divinity of the state⁴⁴ (Hegel G. W., 1991). The bazar of Tirana was responsible for harming the divinity of the Albanian kingdom, of which the center, holding the whole together, was Zog I himself. Similarly, the center of the capital was structured around the void of "Skanderbeg Square", surrounded by the signs of the state authority, and not within the alleys of the bazar.

The Square of the King's State

"The frank and ordered structure of the renaissance urban fabrics, studied with large plazas and open gardens, is like an ample breath affordable only by the regality of generous Princes" (Gallimberti, 1935). This passage quoted by an article from the Italian magazine *Urbanistica* describes the process of the projection of the ideals of Italian renaissance throughout Eastern Europe under the request of local rulers. It describes how the kings and nobles of Russia, Poland or Austria entrusted the Italian architects with the transformation of their palaces and cities. The ideals of the renaissance transformed their existent medieval fabric.

The quotation is pertinent to the case of "Skanderbeg Square", in many ways. It was written within the cultural environment of Fascist Italy, in line with the regimes editorial principles and

⁴⁴ This passage quote Hegel was part of the debate he had with Roussos. It was already mentioned in the first chapter

exactly in the years when Tirana was under transformation following the designs of Italian architects. Despite a delay of many centuries, another eastern ruler, was reordering the center of his kingdom through the patterns of the Renaissance city. "Skanderbeg Square" was also a present for his subjects. Through this section, I base my reasoning over the square on the Hegelian thought in relations to the state, its laws, citizens and the sovereign.

Karl Popper in his work, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, sets light on the philosophies that have inspired totalitarian ideas and regimes. Hegel is one of them. Poppers book published in 1945 in the immediate aftermath of the world war traces a line of reasoning that connects the ideologies that caused that immense conflict to the German philosopher. In the chapter on *Hegel and New Tribalism* he writes: "Most of the modern totalitarians are quite unaware that their ideas can be traced back to Plato. But many know of their indebtedness to Hegel, and all of them have been brought up in the close atmosphere of Hegelianism. They have been taught to worship the state, history, and the nation" (Popper K. , 1945). Hegel became the first official philosopher of Prussia. The Prussian aristocracy, that preserved its social structure during the transition from medievalism authoritarianism to renaissance, felt threatened by the events of the French revolution. Hegel's philosophy was in line with their scope and was adapted to the interests of their state. Namely to the absolutist monarchy led by Frederick William III of Prussia.

The transition to the King of the Albanians has quite some resemblances. Zog's constitutions among other writes: "The King is the highest person in the State... The King is irresponsible and his person inviolable... The King appoints and dismisses the Prime Minister and the Ministers... The King nominates and dismisses State officials... All judges and public prosecutors selected and proposed in conformity with the special law are nominated by Royal decree...The King has the right of pardon. He also has the right to reduce and commute sentences pronounced by the courts... The King has the right to dissolve the Parliament should he deem it necessary...All the armed forces of the State form one body and are under the absolute command and orders of the King" (Fundamental Statue of the Kingdom of Albania, 1928) . Undoubtedly, this Albania is under a Totalitarian regime, controlled by "his majesty". Zog I, represents for Albania exactly what the sovereign represents for the Hegelian state: *In this unity (the majesty of the monarch) lies the unity of the state, and it is only by virtue of its inward and outward immediacy that this unity is*

saved from being dragged down into the sphere of particularity with its arbitrariness, ends, and attitudes, from the strife of factions round the throne, and from the enervation and destruction of the power of the state” (Hegel G. W., 1991).

I notice now the bureaucrats and office workers going in and out from the large doorways of the ministries. I can distinguish even the needy citizens crossing the very same doorsteps discretely. The dwellers of administrative offices dressed in their formal suits appear distinct from the rest of the people. They look confident and different as the spaces and buildings they dwell during the working hours. They are civil servants, they do not own their offices, as the merchants of the bazaar, but they are there because of their presupposed talent. They are distinguishable from the rest, because they are among the few whose *freedoms have, consciously, reached the highest right, to whom is reserved the highest duty that is to be member of the state* (Hegel G. W., Elements of the Philosophy of Right, 1991). They are confident because *“Those who are entrusted with the business of the state find protection in its universal power against another subjective factor, namely the private passions of the governed”* (Hegel G. W., Elements of the Philosophy of Right, 1991).

Time has passed since 1924 when the now former sovereign wasn't the king yet, but only one of the contenders to rule of the country. Zogu's will of the time can be traced from his brief biography written by the former American Ambassador to Albania, Herman Bernstein. The author describes Ahmet Zogu in exile, banished from its country by its politic opposition: *“From across the frontier, Zogu watched the sad condition of his country, and decided to try once more to save it from chaos”*. He clothed his orchestrated return as a restoration of order, *of Legality*. Order became his battle horse during and after his ultimate authoritarian ascension. Order is what he gifted his governed with, he exercised his authority through an ordered structure of institutions, legislations and apparently space. Tirana's centers, its new rectilinear roads and the regulated openness of the main square are the materialization of his present.

Back In 1925, when Zog finally had Tirana under control. Everything, the bazar, the mosques, the few scattered administrative buildings, the old fabric of the town, were under his authority. He could continue the ongoing process of slowly adapting the city to the limited needs of its territory and population. He could have continued exactly the same process initiated 12 years ago, in the

lapse of time from the proclamation of Albania's independence in 1912, to the elevation of Tirana to capital in 1920. However, this was not enough; he was willing to go way beyond the "physical seizure" of the country, its capital and center. He was somehow conscious that what he had reached until that moment wasn't enough. The mode of his control, as Hegel writes, was still "subjective, temporary, and extremely limited in scope". In the unfinished "Skanderbeg Square", I see one of the means used by him to extend his control over his subjects.

This days, while I am experiencing places shaped during Zog's reign, in the immediate aftermath of his rout, in this space just adorned with Italian flag, I can recognize how his design have evolved. He has been capable of marking Tirana with his, once wishful, will. He has placed his will in the spaces all around me. This square is the trace of his State.

4.3. Projects for "Skanderbeg Square"

In this section, I will go through the different ideas for the center of Tirana. There are many versions for it but only one elected at the end, probably evaluated more congruous to the will of Zogu. The drawings for Tirana's center represent spaces never seen before in the country. Symmetry is introduced at urban level. For the first time linear axes and large and regular squares surrounded by dignified neoclassic buildings, grandiose parks and Palaces, appear. This Tirana has an aura of renaissance.

What was about to happen to the capital was already happening to its society. A process that can be considered at the same time progressive and regressive. Ahmet Zogu promulgated by law the parity of sexes, he prohibited burkas, and introduced laws promoting secular values. He, a Muslim, married a Roman Catholic Hungarian noblewoman. On the other side, the governmental model of his regime regressed from a Parliamentary Republic to an Absolutist monarchy. In the same way, over the oriental Tirana he was raising a renaissance fabric, five years after the publication of 'Vers une Architecture'.

The chosen path wasn't a coincidence, after all the first architect selected, that impregnated with his spirit even the successive proposals for "Skanderbeg Square", was Armando Brassini considered, "...one of the great intruders of the Twentieth Century " (Portoghesi, 2001).

There are in Tirana similarities with the political processes of France, and Europe, during the XVII and XVIII century. During the Grand Siècle, was prepared the administrative apparatus that

supported the ancient regime, thanks also to the development of the art and science, to express its authority in grandiose scales. In the XVIII century all over Europe were completed the major works, of immense parks, public squares, boulevards and regal palaces. These works commissioned by the monarchs of the old continent were composed with an increased sense of grandeur and order, *“in this period was shaped the style of the large regal public ceremonies- the coronation of Luis XIV- important funerals, religious festivities, fireworks...[Figure 67]”* (Benevolo, Storia dell'architettura del Rinascimento, 2002). The projects for Tirana and what was happening to its social life is similar, although proportionated to the scale of Tirana and its Monarchy.

The first drawings for Tirana from Paolo Brassini, where followed by the designs of another Italian architect Florestano De Fausto⁴⁵. Their concepts evolve around the themes of the Circle, Semicircle and that of the Oval. The final design reveals that the ellipse, approved by the King, was the more congruous sign for representing his state. In these projects, the main square of Tirana is not alone. It is always designed together with another element, a boulevard stretching toward south. This axis, different from the other boulevards of Tirana, is another of the novelties of the Kings Capital. The growing importance of this others sing will transpire along the remaining sections of the thesis.

The Etoile Structure ⁴⁶

Armando Brassini was the first architect invited to work on Tirana. His latest drawings are from 1927, one year before Ahmet Zogu, President of Albania, declared himself King of the Albanians. From the different projects bearing his signature, there are at least three recognizable versions. The earlier ones evolve around the theme of the circular main square, named Ministries Plaza. In these versions is outlined also the new boulevard stretching south. This vector planned and envisioned in his drawings and permanently decided in the regulatory plan of Tirana of 1929, will become a common denominator of any later proposal for the center of the capital.

⁴⁵ From the signatures on the drawings of Tirana's plan prepared between 1929 and 1931, seems that De Fausto was the architect of the center while city plan was responsibility of another architect, an Austrian, in the drawings signed as Arch. Kohler.

⁴⁶ Project From Armando Brassini

His first version appears difficult to contextualize. The project develops around the theme of two centers, of the main square and of the grandiose residence of the Head of the State **[Figure 68/Above]**. The architect while representing his designs does not even try to represent the existing city. In this version transpires the idea that the capital was just founded. This approach was probably considered to exaggerated, if not for Zogu's ego, at least for his budget. The architect envisions a straight entrance along a new axis proposed toward the northern side of the main square. Although, the exact location of the intervention is hard to identify, the later proposals from Brassini would suggest that his layout is projected more or less were the "Skanderbeg Square" was later located. This would mean that in this versions was first embraced the idea of the *Hausmannian percement's*, that during the reign of Zogu eviscerated the northern fabric of Tirana.

After passing along the large northern boulevard, the walker finds himself in the large circular square. In front of him, there is a continuous perimeter of colonnaded facades. From here, the square embraces the entire city through a series of radial boulevards emanated from its center. The parietal circle of the square is closed on three directions and it is only partially opened toward south, on the opposite side of the northern boulevard. The concentric radial rings, gradually become angulated, suggesting the possibility that further away the radial system turns into a rectangular grid. The architect probably had a broad knowledge of similar experiences. As for the example that of Karlsruhe, were *Karl Wilhelm of Durlach* founded his capital around a central circular space **[Figure 68/Below]**, dominated by his palace. In the German city, the rectangular grid was introduced only two buildings blocks beyond the circular perimeter of the center, preventing the further extension of the inconvenient, awkwardly shaped lots, of the radials (Benevolo, *Storia dell'architettura del Rinascimento*, 2002).

Toward the southern opening, accessible through a giant portico along the perimeter of the square, is located the new Presidential Palace⁴⁷ **[Figure 69/Above]**. The residence of Ahmet Zogu is porous, penetrated by space through a dense formation of 4x4 rows of tall columns **[Figure**

⁴⁷ This proposal is very difficult to localize. The elevated position of the Presidential palace and the relatively short distance in between it and the main square, suggests that the proposed square might be 100 to 300 hundred meters south of its actual position. The presidential gardens starting just after the Lana (here not represented), would be following the gradual ascent of the terrain. In this case Brassini would have avoided the confrontation with the existing city.

69/Middle]. The passage through them leads to another plaza beyond the palace. The complex perspective, gives the impression that the King authority is distant but ever present; the center is, *“paradoxically, within the structure and outside it”* (Derrida, *Structure, Sign and Play*, 2001). The symbolism of the hidden center trespassing the space of Zog’s, residence appears as the manifestation of the divine through the physical center of the King. The proposed scheme, with the central colonnade, the reinforced edges and the inward center is a typical scheme of Brassini, later used in his proposal for the *Palace of the Soviets* **[Figure 69/Below]**.

However, the relationship between the Palace and the square presents some problems. The Palace would have looked awkward trapped behind the colonnades of the central square, too large to be fully embraced in its totality. The Palace, supposed to be the domination center of the Tirana, appears isolated. In Karlsruhe the Palace is within the center, in Tirana it is too far, unable to participate in the square and dominate it. Simultaneously it is also too close to be considered a foci for the main vector passing through the circular plaza and the northern boulevard. The space in between the palace and the main square is bare and nearsighted. The many vectors thrown by the inward center of the Palace are evenly spread all over its anterior gardens failing to create a privileged relationship with the square. The central étoile of the main square, helped by the unresolved position of the Palace and by the inertia of the northern boulevard, becomes (provably accidentally) the foci o Tirana’s main perspective.

This impression is further emphasized by the lack of a vertical center in the façade of the presidential Palace. In Karlsruhe, the important pediment of the entrance achieved this, helped also by a large central tower placed behind the building. In the plans of Brassini’s there is the inward center just mentioned, probably an obelisk placed behind the building, but it was certainly to ephemeral to dominate the perspective.

“Anything that embodies itself with some freedom seeks round shape.” writes Goethe⁴⁸, The sunburst system is a prototype of the centric composition and when a system is free to spread its energy all around, it takes the shape of a sphere (circle) (Arnheim, *The Power of the Center, A study of Composition in the Visual Arts*, 1988). Brassini’s proposal, maybe unaware of the Albanian President regal ambitions, gives freedom to the square surrounded by the institutional

⁴⁸ The quotation was taken By Rudolf Arnheim’s book, *The Power of the Center*

headquarters of the civic powers. The center of the State, here becomes stronger than the center of the President, that indeed very soon was going to proclaim himself king.

The first proposal from Brassini is rejected, but it sets the principal maxims on which the change of the capital will go through: general disregard for the existing; the creation of new centralities; and the central axis, the *Cardo*, the new matrix around which the city and its centralities will be re organized.

The Addition of a Monumental Sequence⁴⁹

After the first scheme is introduced a second one. In it Brassini utilizes new expedients radically altering the character of the first proposal. The circle is gutted [**Figure 70/Above**], conferring a new character to the square. The north-south axis is preserved while the other orthogonal axis is shifted from the center, toward north. As a result the space of the center is charged with a stronger directionality. The architect designs an empty square without landmarks, and by strengthening the longitudinal axis he adapted the space to the man's path⁵⁰ (Zevi, 1993). Another result was the resultant creation of the two wings that despite the opening of the square were still able to enclose its space. The effect would have been similar to that of Bernini's, San Peter Square (Benevolo, *Storia dell'architettura del Rinascimento*, 2002).

The visitor would be attending within a clearly marked "man-made place". One of the first operation man makes while marking a place is its enclosure (Schulz C.-N. , 1979). A surrounding wall [**Figure 70/Above**], here encloses the entire ensemble of the center. To the outer wall is added another enclosure composed of clustered administrative buildings. The axonometric view represents the design of an ideal city enclosed away by a meaningless outer space having the semblances of a desert. The ordered domain of the man-made, here represented by the civic building of the authority is separated by that of the uncontrolled, nature, probably here a simplification of the profane world of the everydayness. The domain of the authority is enclosed by a *Temenos*, giving to the build ensemble, representing the structure of the state apparatus, a perceived sense of holiness, radiated through the will of the Future King.

⁴⁹ Project From Armando Brassini

⁵⁰ Zevi describes the passage from Roman to Christian space. To the inner path of the church was given a dynamic directionality by removing one of the apses of the Roman basilica, and by positioning the entrance there.

The visitor would be at presence of a square, designed as space worth to be admired, surrounded by important civic building, dignified by alternated colonnaded facades. The columns represent the man made environment symbolizing *different modes of the human existence* (Schulz C. N., 1979). They are reserved for the most important buildings, the parliament, Senate, Municipality and the prefecture headquarters. They are used again in the central façade of the Presidential Palace. They are a common signs that connects all the buildings of the authority. The chosen order seems Doric, based on the proportions of man strength and beauty. They might be seen as a manifestation of Zogu's effort to put order on his lands, to domesticate the spirits of his fierce countrymen. The shadowed fronts of these buildings, in between the giant columns, resemble the facades of the archaic Greek temples. Beyond those shadowed passages was supposed to happen the abstract connection to the center of the structure designed by Armando Brassini. The Greek temple was conceived as *impenetrable sanctuary of gods* (Zevi, 1993), and the parietal front of the square was apparently conceived as an impenetrable scenography leading toward the southern axis, that for the first time resembles a boulevard. Here the story of Tirana's Boulevards fully begins.

After resting for a while in the space of the main square, impressed by the surrounding manmade environment, the visitor would be driven to go toward the new Boulevard. Here the sequence continues along a linear succession of uninterrupted buildings. In between each structure there are colonnaded corridors give the impression of a continuous front. This continuity started at the entrance of the lateral wings of the circular plaza ends before the entrance to the Presidential residence. The entire infrastructure of the state apparatus is unified for the visitor's perception. Only the Immense ensemble at the end of the perspective has the freedom to stand alone, the freedom to escape the structure (Derrida, Structure, Sign and Play, 2001). Here the columns disappear, even the connecting passages are made of stocky arcades that do not transmit a sense of porosity. This version of the boulevard was made to be traveled entirely, in one breath. After the being gathered in the main square, the fluxes are oriented by its lateral wings and then pressed by the linear opaque fronts of the boulevard. Together with the fluxes the path of the visitor is similarly manipulated. The entire itinerary ends in front of the raw and squared gateway of the Presidential Palace.

In his study of the Japanese architecture, William H. Coaldrake, explains the way hierarchy in authority is applied through subsequent enclosures and gateways. He shows this process in the *Grand Shrines of Ise and Izumo* [Figure 70/Below-left] where the subsequent spaces were reserved to fewer and fewer personalities, but the right to enter the innermost space of the shrine was granted only to the imperial couple and the Chief Priestess: *“The privilege to enter this sanctum and act as intermediary between this world and the world of the gods of creation and nature was traditionally confined to the members of the imperial institution”* (Coaldrake, 1996). A similar sequence can be traced in Greek Architecture, in the passage from the outermost temenos to the innermost naos. A series of fenced spaces continue to shape the sequence in Tirana, conveying the authority in a particular way, differing from the first proposal. Authority would have been directly acknowledged by the citizens in the space of the main square where they were embraced by the signs of the local authority. The axis was for the signs of the central authorities while the finalization was reserved to the Authority of the ruler embodied in the final phase of the sequence, in the Presidential Palace.

Elevated on the hill, and approached by closed gateways. Surrounded by enclosed terraced gardens, *“Man’s image of the paradise was in fact always an enclosed garden* [Figure 70/Below-right]” (Schulz C.-N. , 1979), the residence of the president-king is there but not perceived. Brassini maintains the very same design of the first proposal, for the Presidential palace, he just stretches the path going there. It has still a horizontal design, with two lateral towers lacking a proper center. Probably only the horizontal palace would be visible from distance and the effect of the opened ascending gardens that would serve as counterpart to the city’s Main Square remain concealed beyond the massive wall of the entrance. In here, *“Authority is established by recourse to a dual strategy of spatial segregation and partial revelation”* (Coaldrake, 1996), different from the European examples of regal residences as that of the Louvre, Versailles or the Neapolitan Caserta. The former are placed at the end of long perspectives clearly visible from the path. In the second proposal from Brassini, the center Palace of Tirana is perceived only partially by the subjects of Zogu. Its strong dominance previewed on plan or in the presented perspective is too weak on eye level.

The Transient Plaza ⁵¹

The third and last version from Brassini brings again another concept for the spatial structure of the main square. The drawings are from 1927, one year before the inauguration of the Kingdom. The first thing immediately notable from the drawing is the appearance of contextual elements. Both the Karapici and “The Ethem Bey Mosque” are involved in the proposed structure for the center. The first is putted along the axis of the Main Square and boulevard while the second is at the center of its own separated adjacent smaller plaza. The locations of these existing landmarks are useful for identifying the exact location of the designed square. The drawing suggests that it was foreseen south-west of its actually implemented location.

In this version **[Figure 71]** the sequence introduced in the previous projects was revised but overall preserved. To the visitor was added another pause before entering the main square. The architect has realized the importance of Durrës and Dibra Street for the Capitals organism and has aligned them together with a new axis proposed toward north, in a trident relationship centered on the minaret of “The Karapici Mosque”. The old monument of Tirana was reintroduced to its historical role of welcoming the wayfarers.

The next act of the sequence, is the passage toward the main plaza. The distribution of the building is an accurate transfiguration of the Albanian state. At the entrance symmetrically on both sides, were foreseen two palaces, hosting the regional and municipal authority. These buildings mediate the transition in between the domain of the metropolitan authorities and the domain of the higher national authorities. After entering in the square, the visitor finds himself in front of two continuous and concave facades, a succession of solid volumes and hollowed columned segments. This façade is actually a mask unifying the whole and magnifying the effect of the otherwise separated buildings. Even the passages in between them are included in the continuum, by linking porches.

The arched build backdrop is interrupted in the middle, by the solid and tall volumes of the Parliament and the Senate headquarters. For the short lapse of time, from 1925 when Zog was elected President of Albania, to 1928 when he was crowned King, the Albanian legislative was

⁵¹ Project From Armando Brassini

divided in two houses (The Parliament of the Republic of Albania, 2018). This particularity was reflected in all proposals from Brassinis. Only one year after the presentation of the third version, the just proclaimed King Zog I, would reintroduce the one house structure for his legislative. Brassini was either not informed of the forthcoming change or Zog hadn't make its mind on how to organize his legislative yet.

These two buildings act as a medium between the other elements of the state apparatus placed along the perimeter of the square and the Ruler, located deep in between them at the end of the boulevard. They represent the legislative power whose role is conceiving laws based on the ideas and the will, of the sovereign. Both buildings do not face directly the square they are revolved by 45 degrees toward the boulevard and the sovereign's residence. By doing this they guide the attention toward the center of the boulevard rather than the square itself. The bended façade and the created bottleneck effect, although in a different scale, is a solutions that will be absorbed by the later proposal from the other Architect Florestano de Fausto.

The symmetrical wings of the main square are shorter than in the previous version, less than a quarter of the circle, implying a less central and a more transitory role for the square. Beyond the unifying structure of the façade, the architect places in succession the ministries. These symmetrical arms are dedicated to the executive power. In front of the viewer are counterpoised Foreign and Internal Affairs, Agriculture and Public Works. The entire frontal ensemble, initiated by the Parliament and the Senate was closed by the ministries of Finances and the counterpoised Ministry of Justice.

At the center of the plaza there isn't only one unique landmark, a statue or fountain, but two columns⁵². In this way the center is dispersed further marking even more the transient role of the place. The twin pillars are an expedient universally known in architecture, in different cultures since ancient times. They are known by Phoenician sacral engravings. Twin obelisks in ancient Egypt were used for flanking the portals of the temples and did represent the sun and its rays projected on earth (Lethaby, 1891). The Japanese Shintoism temples are approached through the Torii (Coaldrake, 1996), gateways enclosed in between imposing pillars. They were used to mark the passage to the sacred place. Similarly the twin columns of Hercules marked the passage

⁵² The Twin Columns appear in plan but not in the Perspectives shown in **[Figure 71]**

toward the unknown. Somehow Brassini bestows with divinity what awaits the visitor attending the center of the capital.

The last operation that mutates profoundly the character of the square from what was previously proposed is the reintroduction of an enclosure on the northern front. This time though the architect doesn't recreate the previous circle but a singularly arched space. Brassini places behind the visitor, standing in front of the two pillars and the concave façades of the ministries, another front curving outwards toward his back and the vector of the boulevard. While the southern facades draws the visitor, the northern convex front pushes him toward the central boulevard. This northern front of the square hosts the other headquarters supporting the structure of the state, as the Bank of Albania, the Court of Justice, The Army and Gendarmerie, in addition to the previously mentioned Municipality and Prefecture. The particular volumetric pace of this side, organized along the lines of the two symmetrical convex wings is another of the features preserved in the later versions.

The last proposal from Brassini deals with the main square. He works on resolving the confused dynamics designed in the previous projects. He mutates again the spatial set up of the plaza, maybe with the aim to reduce its singular significance in the urban environment. In this final version it has finally become a function of the primary center of the Presidential palace.

This never actualized itinerary, was virtually finalized by an arched portal bridging the buildings of the legislative authority. The arch above the man's path it's just another sign, further underlining the effect of the twin columns and the porticos in between the buildings of the plaza: *" When you erect a wall or portico of great elegance and adorn it with a door, columns, or roof, good citizens approve and express joy for their own sake, as well as yours, because they realize that you have used your wealth to increase greatly not only your own honor and glory, but also that of your friends, your descendants, and the whole city"* (Coaldrake, 1996). From here on the path was wide open to the end of the boulevard.

Afterwards the last version Brassini is dismissed. The assignment to conceive the center of the king was handled to the another Italian architect, Florestano de Fausto

The Contextual Particularity of De Fausto's Proposal

There is a strong singularity in De Fausto's first version. In this proposal he designs a particular structure of three squares each one having a distinct character [Figure 72/Middle]. The first serves as a gateway, while the other two, make the proper center of the capital. The center of Tirana, was built in the unconstrained spaces of the weekly bazar, and in all the versions from Brassini, it is designed as a unique void. De Fausto splits this space in two halves, which I named, the *Central* and the *Last Square*. To the unconstrained void of the weekly bazar and the monumental plazas of Brassini, he juxtaposed two separate spaces. The division is done by a linear building placed along the Est-west direction. Before entering the process of analyzing the itinerary envisioned in De Fausto's first version, I will try to understand the reasons behind this particular feature of his project.

The linear divisor building, serving as a wall in between two smaller plazas is located along one of the oldest paths of Tirana [Figure 72/Above]. Its traces practically bridge two historical routes. The first connecting Tirana with the neighboring town of Kavaja later renamed Benito Mussolini Boulevard. The second is 28 Nëntori Street, formerly the nameless main street of the city connecting "The Ethem Bey Mosque" to the Old Mosque before turning toward the southern city of Elbasan. This path, before becoming central during the late ottoman period, was probably traced along the southern edges of the town, an orbital of the bazar and a segment of the route connecting Elbasan to Kavaja through Tirana.

Another element useful for understanding its particular position is the Lana creek. This historical road was also the southern threshold marking the division of the settlement from the almost flat meander of Lana. Its void separated the core of the town from the potential flooding risks of the river⁵³ [Figure 72/Above].

In the XX century the need to keep the river at safe distance had become useless. A problem resolvable by the available engineering technologies. For these reason while the old fabric was

⁵³ In the ottoman itinerary about the bazar, that was central but also at the southern edge of the city. Probably the area in between the bazar and the Lana creek was never built because of flooding risks. Even the void of the weekly bazar was probably left unbuilt for the same reasons. In the topographic surveys is shown that it was positioned on a large meander of the river. Along this same meander where later build "Skanderbeg Square" and the Main Boulevard.

contained around the bazar, the new city could be finally extended through a linear grid in the direction of the flat meander of the Lana.

Apparently, de Fausto understood this feature of Tirana projected also in his regulatory plan of 1929. The odd linear building dividing the main square in two halves was intentionally built on the immaterial edge separating the bazar from the meanders of the river. On both sides of this threshold happens the division in between the irregular fabric of the old settlements and the ordered structure of the new; in between a city developed organically and another planned⁵⁴.

The reformation of the capital's **[Figure 72/Below]** center has passed from Brassini's radical approaches, unconcerned of the existing context to the more careful concepts of De Fausto. The later was favored, for economical reason for sure, and perhaps also for his better understanding of Tirana. Here after I will be analyzing the variants from De Fausto in detail.

The Three Squares ⁵⁵

In the drawings from De Fausto, another process is visible, apparently rich of vicissitudes, similar to that of his predecessor. The space conceived by him has been transformed over and over until the latest version. There is something in common in his drawings, they are based on different centralities, in the earlier version even of subsequent minor centers without an immediate relationship. His compositions are basically eccentric (Arnheim, 1988).

The Ante-Square

In de Fausto's versions the city is approached in accordance to the real situation. Not through the northern boulevard but through the well-known historical axis coming from Durres. In this variant, at the end of the Durres Street⁵⁶, the visitor was received by a concave entrance **[Figure 73]** contoured by two curved buildings forming an almost semicircular ensemble. The gentle recess was probably designed to draw the visitor inside, while its interruption in the middle was an invitation to crossover to the next square. This proposal have similarities with Brassini's

⁵⁴ This inherited feature that has influenced the various plans for the capital is embodied in the present structure of Tirana. Even today the city develops radially around "Skanderbeg Square" and orthogonally along the linear Boulevard.

⁵⁵ Project From Florestano De Fausto

⁵⁶ I am referring again to this street with its original name: Durres. These drawings where prepared when Zogu was still a President and bachelor. The name Queen Mother Street is a later denomination.

second version for the main square, represented by two symmetric wings. However, they have a slight but a crucial difference embodied in the length of the respective wings. While the wings in the proposal of Brassini's, echoing the project of Bernini for San Peters square [Figure 74/Above], were longer than a quarter of the circle outer perimeter, here they are shortened. They do not enclose the space of the plaza. The proposal from De Fausto has more similarities with the proposal for The Invalids Square by Hardouin-Mansart designed with shorter wings [Figure 74/Below]. Consequently, similarly with the last proposal from Brassini for the Main Square, the space gains, a desired, transitory character. It is a passage rather than a pause.

Looking more in detail it seems that these parietal building have no differentiation in their cornice; they are continuously horizontal. Their edges accompanying the visitor toward "Skanderbeg Square" are only modestly pronounced. At the corners, solid walls enclose the rhythm of the hollow arches of both buildings. On both extremities the outline of the ensemble changes. On the right by a remarkable volume of larger proportions, counterbalanced, indeed exceeded, on the opposite side by a preexistence, "The Karapici Mosque".

The mosque, was a former landmark of Tirana, destroyed 1929, historically placed at the entrance of Tirana's most vibrant center, its bazar. In this proposal, the mosque remains the main piece of this ante-square marking the entrance toward the new center of Tirana. Obviously the architect has designed his proposal having in consideration, at least partially, the past of the city. In this version of the square, a piece of the bazar has been erased to make space to the new monumental gateway, the modern propylaea's, leading to "Skanderbeg Square" but its most prominent building is still in place. And it isn't just there, its prominence although altered is still undiscussed in the semicircular square around it. The arches of the mosques vestibule dictate even the design for the facades of the proposed built ensemble, while the vertical of its minaret remains unmatched.

Seen in this perspective the ensemble is a linear vector thrown from the Mosque rather than a series of vectors emanated by the geometric center of its structure. From the first part of this version conceived by De Fausto I deduce that the new spaces of Tirana's center are redrawn around the monuments of the old one. Maybe this finding is also the reasons for the failure of this project.

The Central Square [Figure 75/Above]

About to leave the Ante-square, I look back to the interruption of the curved ensemble, to that modest geometric center. The passage toward the successive square is timidly announced because what is awaiting there doesn't need an introduction.

Looking toward the perspective framed by the modest corridor I understand the dominance of the vector developed along this continuity in comparison to the other released by the Mosque of Karapici. In front of me there is the vertical of Tirana's Clock Tower. It was visible all the time, even before discovering "The Karapici Mosque" on the left, its presence was perceptible since the moment the visitors traveled through the last turn before entering the kilometeric straight line of the axis coming from Durres to Tirana. The Clock Tower, renovated in 1928, comes further enhanced⁵⁷[Figure 75/Below], elevated by a higher and larger pointed roof, adapting the former monument to the scale of the new center. This kind of intervention was not unprecedented for the time [Figure 76]. The landmark presented has the imposing appearance of the European Christian Bell Towers; it is larger and higher than any other structure in the town. In terms of relative impact on the surroundings, it can be paralleled to that of San Marco's Campanile for Venice.

Closing the very same perspective there is another elevated line, slightly decentered from that of the clock tower. It's the vertical of another minaret, as high as the clock tower, it enhances even more the strength and complexity of the approaching scene. If I would consider the space envisioned by De Fausto as a *field of visual forces* (Arnheim, *The Power of the Center, A study of Composition in the Visual Arts*, 1988), undoubtedly I would be attracted by the view of these verticals toward the successive space of the Central Square.

This space has the very same discrepancies of the unfinished "Skanderbeg Square" in the immediate aftermath of the king's rout. There's a difference though. These discrepancies are an integral part of this version, they are well accepted. The central square appears as an open space with an irregular form. On one side is the bazar, almost intact, developing behind "The Karapici Mosque" and the semicircular ensemble of the ante-square. On the other side, there is the bare

⁵⁷ Probably the enhancement proposed in this version was parallel to the actual refurbishment of the clock tower. The drawings from Brassini are from 1929 while the tower was renovated in 1928.

front of a new building, regular, flat with the semblance of a wall rather than of a structure, you could dwell. This building⁵⁸, a solitary new addition to a place dominated by existent elements, has the rear role to support “The Ethem Bey Mosque” and separate the central square from the following, last one.

The visitor is here at the heart of the capital, in a central square divided by the dichotomy of two concepts, the first deriving from the oriental past of the place and the second being conceived in accordance with the King’s ideas. While in the first square one of the old mosques of Tirana was acting as a solitary center within a new and complex fabric in this second space the dominance of former monuments is accentuated even more. So far in this rejected version for the center of the capital, the will of the King to reshape its society through order, isn’t adequately represented. After having fully entered the second square, the further continuation is uncertain. The direction to follow isn’t clear as one would expect. Normally the direction toward the third square should had been wide open but it isn’t. In front of the viewer there is the historical 28 Nentori Street. The street on the southern edge of the bazar; the street that Ahmet Zogu covered with his entourage while going from the parliament to his modest Royal Palace, the day he was proclaimed king; and the very same street that along in ottoman times connected “The Ethem Bey Mosque” with the old Mosque of the founder. This historical vector rather than the access to the third square, dominates the perspectives of the central square of De Fausto. So not just the monuments of Tirana’s past, the mosques and the clock towers, but even the spaces shaped long before Ahmet Zogu, dominate over the newly designed squares of the capital.

Before moving to the third square, the only one foreseen as a completely ex-novo intervention its space is sensed only through partial views of its parietal areas. In order to enter it the visitor has to turn right, around the corner of the anonymous building envisioned as a partition in between the central and the final square. De Fausto’s itinerary has a strange character, normal for the alleys of the ottoman bazar, but not for a newly projected neo-renaissance square designed by an Italian Architect. There is a sense of surprise and discovery, of wandering in the

⁵⁸ It is the building described before, placed in the former southern edge of the city, in between the bazar and the Lana creek.

succession of these three squares. And exactly here in this perceived uncertainty, perhaps lays one of the other reasons for the rejection of this proposal.

Change and uncertainty are phenomena that any historicist leader would refuse to accommodate. It was probably contrary to the will of the Albanian king to have its citizens, subject of his authority and state institutions, bewildered in a city filled with signs of passed authorities, where the bazaar and the main civic square equally shared the space of the center. Plato whose philosophical thought has greatly inspired that of Hegel writes about Change: *“Only the most divine things of all remain ever unchanged and the same”* (Plato, Statesman). Popper in his analysis of Plato’s historicist thought in the *Statesman*, concludes that for the Greek philosopher *“The state which is free from the evil of change and corruption is the best, the perfect state. It is the state of the Golden Age which knew no change. It is the arrested state”* (Popper K. , 1945). In the 25-th article of the Fundamental Statute of the Kingdom of Albania is written: *“The Heir to the Throne shall be the King’s eldest son. And the succession shall continue generation after generation in the direct male line”* (Fundamental Statute of the Kingdom of Albania, 1928). This written will is certainly adverse to uncertainty. A king willing to have an eternal authority over his subject, even beyond his death through his lineage, did surely desire for his capital, a center as unmovable and determinate as possible.

The Last Square

The third act of the succession brings the visitor to another type of space. Everything here is planned and designed from the Architect **[Figure 77]**. None of the building of this square has been inherited from the past. Seen From top down this plaza is developed symmetrically, along an unprecedented planned axis. The square opens south, toward the unbuilt areas of Tirana’s periphery, along similar lines, previously conceived by the other architect, Armando Brassini.

Experienced from the eye level this place is perceived quite differently. The square is approached from a corner, giving to the visitor a twisted diagonal first impression of the square. From this perspective it is hard to perceive immediately the symmetry and regularity of this space. Apparently even this square designed Ex-novo on the empty fields of one of the meanders of Lana creek wears the dichotomies perceived in the two previous squares. In the first act, there is the relationship in between the new semicircular built ensemble and “The Karapici Mosque”. On

the second act there is the encounter dominated by the existent landmarks and paths of the city over the faint new additions.

In this third act, there's an overlapping of two different conceptions, reflected in the static design of the plan, where everything is shaped symmetrically along a central axis, probably in compliance with the king's will and in the more dynamic layout of the elevation, conformed to the more complex experience of the visitor, rendered even more dynamic by the dichotomies of the preceding acts.

This complex experience was probably the architect's will, carefully thought by him, and actualized through the very same means used in the previous squares, by detaching again the actual center from the geometric center of the square. Arnheim points out that the *"The tension between the two antagonistic tendencies trying to achieve equilibrium is the very spice of human experience, and any artistic statement failing to meet the challenge will strike us as insufficient"* (Arnheim, 1988). The reasons behind the decision of the architect are probably to be researched in his attempt to design a work of art, a space that would enrich any visitor with a singular experience. He achieves this by introducing the tension created by eccentric spatial relations. This eccentricity discloses also another event. The signature of the architect bears the date of the drawing. It was signed on November 1928, two months after the coronation of the king. In the new constitution, the legislative was reorganized. The senate identifiable in the previous drawings was removed, from the civic structure, leaving only the house of the parliament. The former dynamics resolved symmetrically by Armando Brassini, were transformed into a new asymmetrical structure. De Fausto, was obviously better informed about the events.

The eccentric diagonal perspective opened in front of the visitor wasn't left untreated, to just lay randomly on the parietal buildings of the square but it is closed by its main building. This volume planned on the south-eastern front of the square is enormous, it is twice larger than any other building in the plaza. Its heights are comparable to those of the nearby Clock Tower, while in terms of visual mass it is way above. The structure, probably the headquarters of the parliament, is supposed to be the highest building in the city, in the country, maybe second only to the new Royal palace, planned at the other extremity of the axis going through the square.

Its ample portal, the large balconied window at the exact center, the giant rusticated pilasters, the large pediment and tympanum outlining the whole, the solitary peak on an otherwise flat skyline, emphasize exponentially its importance. As the plan suggests, the very same operation wasn't repeated on the symmetric southwestern front of the square. This building is definitively the center of this square, it is the most imposing edifice encountered so far. The third square is a celebration of the civic authority of the ordered state wanted by the king. Though it has been planned based on the visitor path rather than on the center of the symmetric square. A choice that may be another reasons for this project to be left unrealized.

The other buildings of the square appear secondary; they evolve around the static and faint lines of the previously encountered buildings. The longest side of the square is delimited by the other front of the linear divisor building placed in between this square and the central one. The axonometric view doesn't allow the visioning of this building southern façade but the visible continuous horizontal cornice suggest that nothing of relevance happens. His privileged spot in the plan of the square, central to its space, concluding the new axis and in front of the king's residence, wasn't exploited.

The path of the visitor continues, traced by the center of the square, signed by the circular fountain, and the symmetric façade of the leading building. In proximity of the fountain is sensed for the first time the full authority of the structure juxtaposed by Zog I, represented by the wide opened perspective leading up to the royal palace.

The divisor building prevents the bazar and monuments of the former authorities from participating to the final act of the progression through Tirana's center also blocks the vector emanated by the King's palace. "When a system is free to spread its energy in space, it sends out its vectors evenly all around, like the rays emanating from a source of light." (Arnheim, *The Power of the Center, A study of Composition in the Visual Arts*, 1988), Because of the barrier the king's freedom isn't perceived in its totality. In the last square the King that is free to change the laws and disband the governments according to his linking, the king that is the only piece of the structure that *escapes it's structurally* (Derrida, *Structure, Sign and Play*, 2001) has its source partially eclipsed.

The description of this itinerary, designed but never implemented, ends here. The experience that comes next along the axis of the boulevard is quite similar in all the versions presented for the center of Tirana. In order to avoid repetition I will analyse only after processing the final, approved, version from Florestano de Fausto.

4.4. The Final Oval Plaza ⁵⁹

The excursus over the projects for Tirana center ends with the last proposal from Florestano De Fausto. His design was approved, included in the regulatory plan of 1929, and partially implemented. In 1939, the southern part of the square was almost entirely completed. Toward north, only the Town Hall was built. In the process, the mosque of Karapici and a part of the bazar was demolished. The “Ethem Bey Mosque” was preserved and included in the overall scheme of the square. The domed Islamic temple, once a reaffirmation of the center of the Ottoman Empire, was considered appropriate for the place. The Clock tower was among the former sign preserved. It was refurbished with a Clock and westernized appearance. The bazar was still contiguous to the main square, however this was just a temporal side-effect until the full implementation of the projects for the capitals center.

The perspicacity of the architect toward the preexisting structure of Tirana, already proved in his preceding projects, is employed again. The field of the weekly bazar was a shapeless elongated clearing created along the Lana meanders. The various streets of the old town where irregularly pouring long it on various points. De Fausto probably found in the ellipse the most congeals form, to regulate the particular circulatory character of Tirana Street. Its eccentricity was the best way to accommodate the many aspects of Tiran’s old fabric to the new city that was about to be developed along the linear boulevard. The perimeter of the square forms a continuum interrupted only by the streets purring in. Even these transitions are often smoothed by funnel like entrances created by the hollowed corners of the new buildings.

De Fausto introduced again an eccentric scheme [Figure 77/Above/Middle], but this time without the previous surprise effect, pleasing the representational needs of the authority. In a first variation, he fully works with the geometrical features of the ellipse. The two foci and the

⁵⁹ Project From Florestano De Fausto

center of the ellipse are emphasized through two lateral fountains and a central monument erected on a pedestal. The proposal has similarities with “Piazza Navona” in Rome [Figure 77/Below]. The former was structured around the center of the obelisk placed above Bernini’s “Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi”, the other center of Santa Agnese in Agone Church completed by Borromini, and the lateral fountains again designed by Bernini. The coherence of De Fausto’s plan was not visible on the eye level. The visitors’ way would be moving all around confused by the incoherence of the space and the facades. The central monument was left alone in between the two foci, without a proper architectonic counterpart. The lateral façade of the “Ethem Bey Mosque” certainly was not the best background for its figure.

The solution comes in the final design [Figure 79]. The space of the square has only one center, de-centered toward the northern part of the elongated square. De Fausto revives the trident of Brassini, but includes it the intersection with the space of the square, and turns it in center. On this point was placed the circular fountain⁶⁰ that I encountered while entering the square.

The solitary decentered center of the oval square was influenced by the position of the bazar and the demolished “Karapici Mosque”, a strong trace of the past was still participating in the new square. The layout of the buildings of the square, was also a happy compromise. They were capable of conferring solidity and order to the main center, without altering to much the informal surroundings. This solution gave the authorities the possibility to prioritize better the phasing of the projects. The ottoman city hidden away in the background was not an issue for the large state ceremonials; by turning the northern foci of the ellipse into a center, De Fausto intentionally deconstructed the self-contained balance of the square. The de-centered square found its equilibrium in the connection with the different axis of the trident but first toward the southern boulevard and its conclusive Regal Palace. In the final solution everything settled, the main square representing the Albanian state established a solid dialogue with the city and dominance over the signs of the past. At the same time, its space was subordinated to the center of the king. Through this square the Sovereign and his subject were fully connected.

⁶⁰ In De Fausto’s Plan is envisioned an equestrian sculpture. The fountain was probably just a provisory solution

4.5. The Itinerary Ends

I am again in “Skanderbeg Square”. I look one more time how its facades form a continuum interrupted only by the streets purring in. Even these transitions are often smoothed by funnel like entrances created by the hollowed corners of the new buildings. The square as it is now is incomplete, full of discrepancies, but after having filled the gap over the vicissitudes of its making, I am aware of its ultimate shape. Around me, many buildings are completed, the “Town Hall”, the “Ministry of Defense”, the “Ministry of the Interior”, the “Ministry of Industry”, the “Civil Works”. Some are in the making as the Ministry of Education and of Justice. Many are still missing, for example the National Museum of History envisioned somewhere along the northern front of the oval.

There is also one building that appears strangely placed compared to the rest, “The Bank of Albania” designed by Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo. Its positioning creates a square widening along the foreseen oval. This apparent conflict was also supposed to be temporal. In De Fausto’s latest plans for the center, The Bank was supposed to be beyond the first row of the buildings on the square. Boulevard Mussolini was supposed to bend around its façade and finalized in front of the old parliament. From there Skanderbeg square was also accessed. This dynamic was completely reshaped later by the architects of Mussolini⁶¹.

The third itinerary ends here. The king was not able to build his residence and the boulevard leading to it. His capital and monarchy were interrupted on the bottleneck designed by Florestano de Fausto along the southern front of “Skanderbeg Square”. After traveling through the linear *Mother Queen Boulevard* and the uncompleted “Skanderbeg Square” toward south, there is nothing but the bare meander of the Lana. However, this Tirana has still its ottoman itinerary; the only walkable direction leads in this direction, to “The Ethem Bey Mosque” the vivisected bazar and the old mosque. Nevertheless, the boulevard of the king, which was never actualized, deserves the last thought.

⁶¹ I will treat it in the other Itinerary

4.6. The “Empty Stage” at the Center of the Structure [Figure 80]

If I would trace two orthogonal straight lines through the eccentric fountain on “Skanderbeg Square” and interrupt them on the perimeter of the square, it will result in a Latin cross. Arnheim suggests, “*The presence of two competing centers enables the layout of the Latin cross to function as a highly dynamic image of the meeting of man and God*” (Arnheim, 1988). In the space of Tirana, this dynamics is translated in the relationship that the main square was supposed to have with the Regal Palace.

The first segment of the long axis leading toward the residence of Zogu, is immediately processed through three spatial sequences. The dilatation of “Skanderbeg Square”, the compression of the bottleneck and a successive expansion along the immense space of the boulevard. The boulevard indeed is not exactly a boulevard; its space resembles more the immense royal gardens of the renaissance. The palace of Zogu at the end of the perspective is surrounded by unconstrained space. The Founder of Tirana built his mosque over the former wild forest. The mosques of Tirana were the guardians of the neighborhoods. They were open and thoroughly visible because of elevated minarets and large surrounding graveyard. The King of the Albanians “*dared to turn the large Mohammedan cemeteries (generally situated in the heart of every town) into beautiful parks*” (Sarachi, 1940). In a way, he deprived the ottoman signs of their monumentality. In his Tirana, the only buildings embraced with space where the symbols of his state. “Skanderbeg Square” and his Palace.

The only way to reach the residence of the King was through the *infinite-curvilinear perspective* of a kilometric park. Norberg Schulz offers an interesting key of interpretation for the boulevards sequence, through the verses of a poem, “*A winter evening*” (Schulz C. N., 1979, p. 8). Man wanders through the domain of nature, through the path of life he tries to orient himself, scattered man-made traces and nature help his growth, but only in the last sequence when he is fully embraced by a man-made environment he his illuminated. This itinerary is the story of Tirana, from the king’s perspective. The small town, oriented by the center of Dajti Mountain, was built over a forest, and grew fearing the river. Now all this belongs to the past. After entering inside the acclimated gardens, the Albanian society can now finally proceed orientated by the

interior foci of the park. This “meaningful” artifact on its southern extremity is the large Palace dwelled by Zog I.

The boulevard designed for the Albanian Kingdom is a byproduct of the “French Gardens” envisioned first by le Notre. The French Landscaper designed and experimented his ideas in the *Tuileries Gardens* or in the large parks of Vaux. In Vaux the *precise and coherent* gardens were also finalized by an elevated Palace. Perspective applied on immense scale was the key of his solutions, because only through the large scale the infinite dimension of perspective was sensed at full strength. His parks were among the rare places where the Cartesian Order, normally lost in the chaotic universe, was rendered visible. Benevolo quotes an interesting decree of 1672 that shows how the itineraries of the king through the parks of Versailles and his interaction with its various elements were minutely planned. For Leonardo Benevolo this apparently ridiculous cure for the details was important for sustaining the structure of absolutism. Versailles and on its own way, Zogu’s unimplemented project, are significant examples of spaces designed as an “Empty Stage” (Benevolo, 2002, p. 674), for the King.

The final sequence of the path is the close encounter with the Palace of the king. The palace stands above everything, even higher than the clock tower of the slim minaret of Ethem bey. The gardens leading to it are deliberately extended to the southern hills of Tirana, granting the place dwelled by the head of the state an elevated position. We are bound to the earth through “*the eccentric power of gravity that pulls us down*”, and we strive “*to liberate ourselves from the coercion of our earthbound condition*”. This tension, “*a vital component of the artistic creations*” is stronger in the artifact of the Palace, the only building able to stand tall in spite of the eccentric power of gravity (Arnheim, 1988). By standing high on the hills, the Palace controls the city, the main path, liberated from the underlying plain. *It certainly is “The very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality”* (Derrida, *Structure, Sign and Play*, 2001, p. 352).

The final thought is about the architecture of the Palace. Its volumetric is deducible from the drawings of the regulatory plan of 1929 and from the first axonometric of De Fausto for the center of the city. The building proposed by the architect differs from the proposals of Brassini. The Regal Palace of De Fausto has a unique massive tower right in the middle of the building. The

symbolic of the building is direct, devoid of Brassini's abstractions. A monumental central tower for the unique center of the King.

"Power is justice, and I have power. The strongman is always alone" (Sarachi, 1940), confided Ahmet Zogu to his entrust counselor Chatin Saraçi (Sarachi, 1940). The unschooled Albanian chieftain was surprisingly talking as one of Plato's disciples. His will to rule alone his country from his residence at the center of Tirana was surely more than instinctive intuition. On both flanks of the boulevard, beyond its lush edges, smaller plot of lands were located. These parcels were probably for the other dignitaries and members of Zogu court. Zogu considered them his *Circus*, "*What they know and what their feelings are does not interest me. As long as they submit to my whip, I am satisfied, and I keep them*" (Sarachi, 1940).

The long perspectives, ordered layouts, monumentality, the hierarchical distribution of the grid (Coaldrake, 1996), are all instruments used by the rulers of the past, from ancient Japan to the renaissance. Ahmet Zogu's architects used the same expedients. By transforming his capital with the same conceptual schemes of the autocrats of the past, the king imprinted on Tirana its first historicist structure.

On the 7th of April 1939, Zogu abandoned his home, "a type of house which, in countries like England, would not even be honored with the title cottage" (Sarachi, 1940). During his way out of the city, pressured by the approaching Italian armies, he probably did not have the chance to travel one more time along his itinerary or to look at the squares and boulevards built during his reign. He took the opposite direction along the historical ottoman itinerary. He first exited the regal ensemble, on the former domains of the Toptani. Once outside the complex, he saw for the last time the Old Mosque. His convoy turned right along the namazgjah, finally crossed the bridge of Terzi, and proceeded toward the Greek border. This was the beginning of his exile, which lasted until he passed away on 9 April 1961 in Paris.

4.7. Chapter 4 Figures

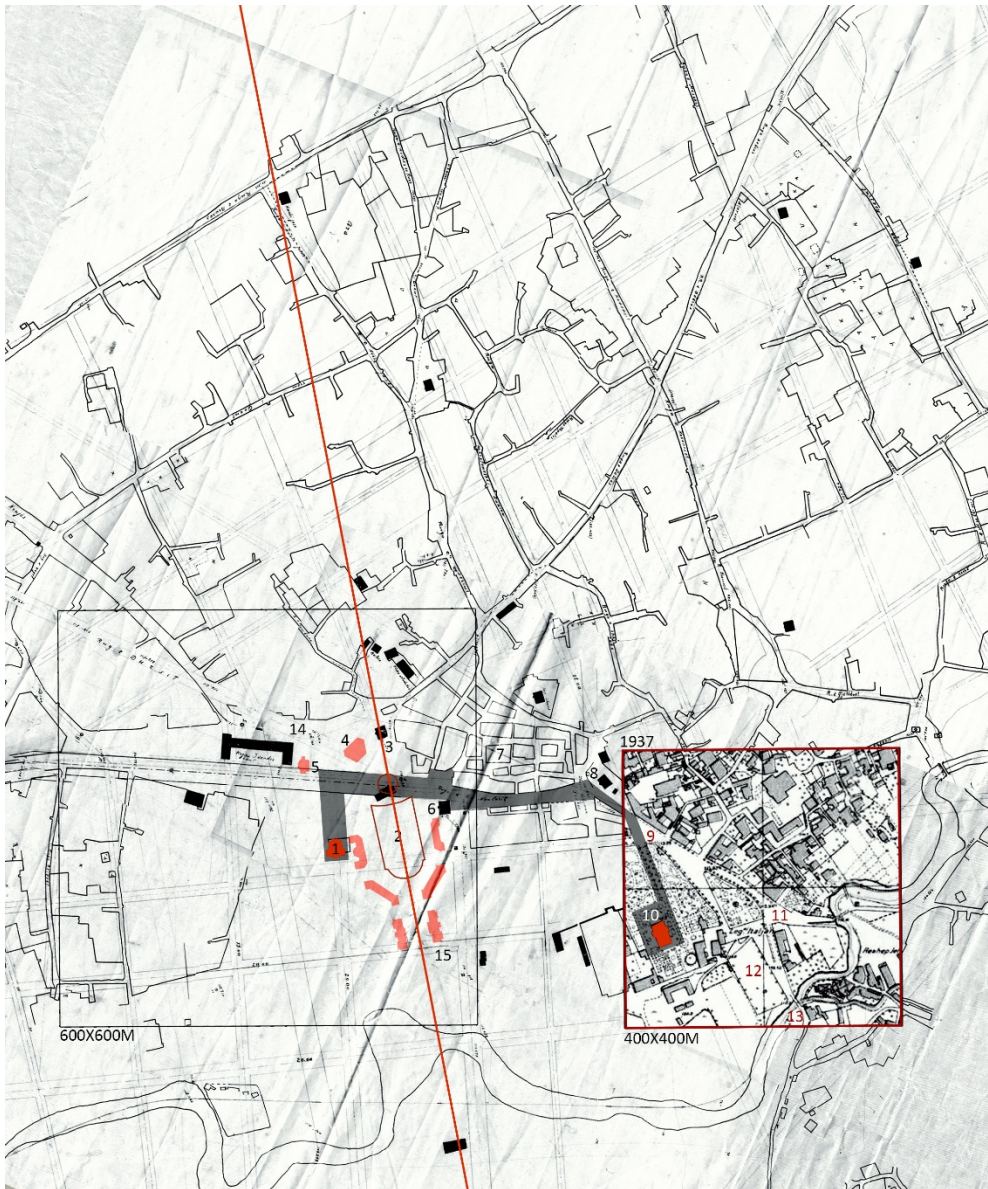


Figure 58. The Reversed Ottoman Itinerary. 1929. Tirana. This scheme shows the itinerary followed by the king on the day of his coronation. He attended the ceremony at the Parliament [1] and then preceded along the former signs of the city, The Karapici Mosque [3], The Ethem Bey Mosque [6], The bazar [7], the Old Mosque [8] he then went through the private street of his residence [9], and concluded at his Palace [10]. Close by to his destination was located the Italian Embassy [11], the Namazgja [12] and the Bridge of Terzi [13]. In the plan are also located other buildings that were not present in 1929, and build during the 30s: Café Coursal [5], The Town Hall [4] and the Ministerial Complex [in the scheme] divided by the trace of the future boulevards [15]. This scheme is a combination of two plans, one from 1923, the first where the parliament appears, and a plan of 1937. Scheme credits: Endrit Marku; Original Plan: Albanian National Construction Archives.



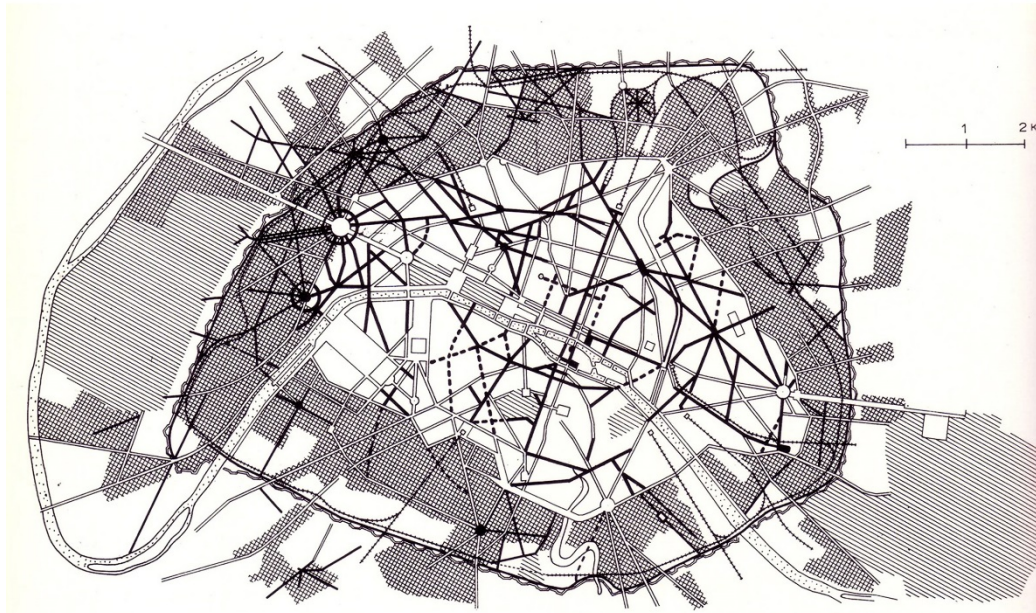
Figure 59. The Proclamation of the Monarchy. 1929. Tirana. [Clockwise]. The First Aerial images shows the old monuments of the city, a piece of the bazaar and the Old Mosque. The Second Aerial Photo shows the Italian Embassy [on the left] and the Regal Complex, placed on the former domains of the Toptani [on the right]. The third image shows the ceremonial corridor honoring the future king and in the background the first Skanderbeg square and the Mosque of Karapici. The last image shows the procession of the capitals toward the Kings Palace. In the background the cypresses of the dead in front of the old mosque. Scheme credits: Endrit Marku; Photo Credits: Luce Institute.



Figure 60. The Vicissitudes of the Kings Center. Tirana. 1939. This is the main itinerary described in this chapter. Through the rectilinear Quinn Mother Street [Durrës Street][1], the visitors reaches the square along the lateral front of The Town Hall [2] and cafe Cursal [7]. Skanderbeg square has a decentered fountain [3] and the lower southern gardens [5]. The square is countered by the ordered front of The Bank of Albania [11] the Parliament [8] and Ministerial Complex[12] and the uneven front of the Ethem Bey Mosque , Clock tower [9], and the sectioned bazar [10]. The Karapici Mosque is no more, while the Bank [11] was only provisionally included in the space. At the end it was planned behind the unbuilt western front [12][Signed with a white contour] of the square. Toward north was already opened the Northern Boulevard named after Zog I [4], while toward south the works on the Gardened Boulevard of the King, where only in the initial phases. Scheme credit: Endrit Marku. Original Plan of 1937: Albanian National Construction Archives.



Figure 61. The New Rectilinear streets of Tirana. [Above] Durres Street in the 30s. With his new sidewalks and linear rows of trees. On the sides are evident the former dwellings [hidden behind walls] and new building typologies no more introverted, but showcasing their westernized facades along the street front. In the background appears the Clock tower and Ethem Bey Mosque. [Middle] The meeting junction of Durres Street and the Skanderbeg Square. The photo was taken from the rooftop of the Town Hall. Durres Street is now a boulevard named after the Quinn Mother. [Below] The percement's of Tirana. The photo is from 1939, and shows the ongoing operations of ordering the urban structure of Tirana during the years of Zog I rule. The images is form the Regal Street, once passing around the eastern side of the bazar and connecting the Old Mosque [Its minaret and cypresses are evident in the background], and Dibra Street. Photo Credit: Richard Busch-Zatner.



79 - Esquema de los *percements* efectuados por Haussmann; en blanco las calles ya existentes, en negro las abiertas durante el Segundo Imperio; en cuadrícula los nuevos barrios; en rayado las zonas verdes.



Figure 62. The Haussmannization of Tirana. [Above] Percement and Ordering operations in Paris [Below] The Planned Intervention of Tirana. The same operation used by Haussmann, were reused one almost one century later in the Albanian Capital. The Drawing is from the first regulatory Plan of The city in between 1929-31. Credits: Albanian National Construction Archives.



Figure 63. The two major operation of cutting through the old fabric of the Tirana. The Queen Mother Boulevard [Former Durres Street] on the left, and the main intervention led during Ahmet Zogu's rule, which was Boulevard Zog I, on the right. The later was created ex-novo through the percement of the capitals northern neighborhoods. Tirana. 30s. Source: Old Postcard.



Figure 64. Discrepancies of Skanderbeg Square. Photos taken in the late 30s. [Top-Bottom]. The Images present an overview from the south-western [Above]] to the eastern front of the Square [Below]. The discrepancies are evident in the differences in between the regular silhouettes of the new Ministries to the uneven front of the Ethem Bey mosque, Clock Tower and the Sectioned bazar.



Figure 65. The Section of the Old Bazar on Skanderbeg Square. Tirana. 1936. The alleys of the bazar pour into the void of Skanderbeg Square. The Everydayness of its space was accidentally rendered visible sideways from Skanderbeg Square. The effect was supposed to be temporary until the full implementation of the project for Skanderbeg Square. Photo Credit: Marion Dönhoff.



Figure 66. The New Bazar. Tirana. 1940. On the Background is visible the large sheltered Place. The new infrastructure was built during Ahmet Zogu's Rule. The activities previously held in the Old Bazar and in the Field of the Weekly Bazar where gradually moved to this new controlled venue. The Image is from 1939, and shows Italian Soldiers working on the Round Square in the adjacencies of the New Bazar. Photo Credit: Luce Institute.



Figure 67. First Nocturne Celebrations in the Capital. Tirana. 1937. The image shows the Celebrations for the Albanian 25 anniversary of Independence held in Skanderbeg Square. Photo Credit: The Postcard Collection of Edwin Jacques.

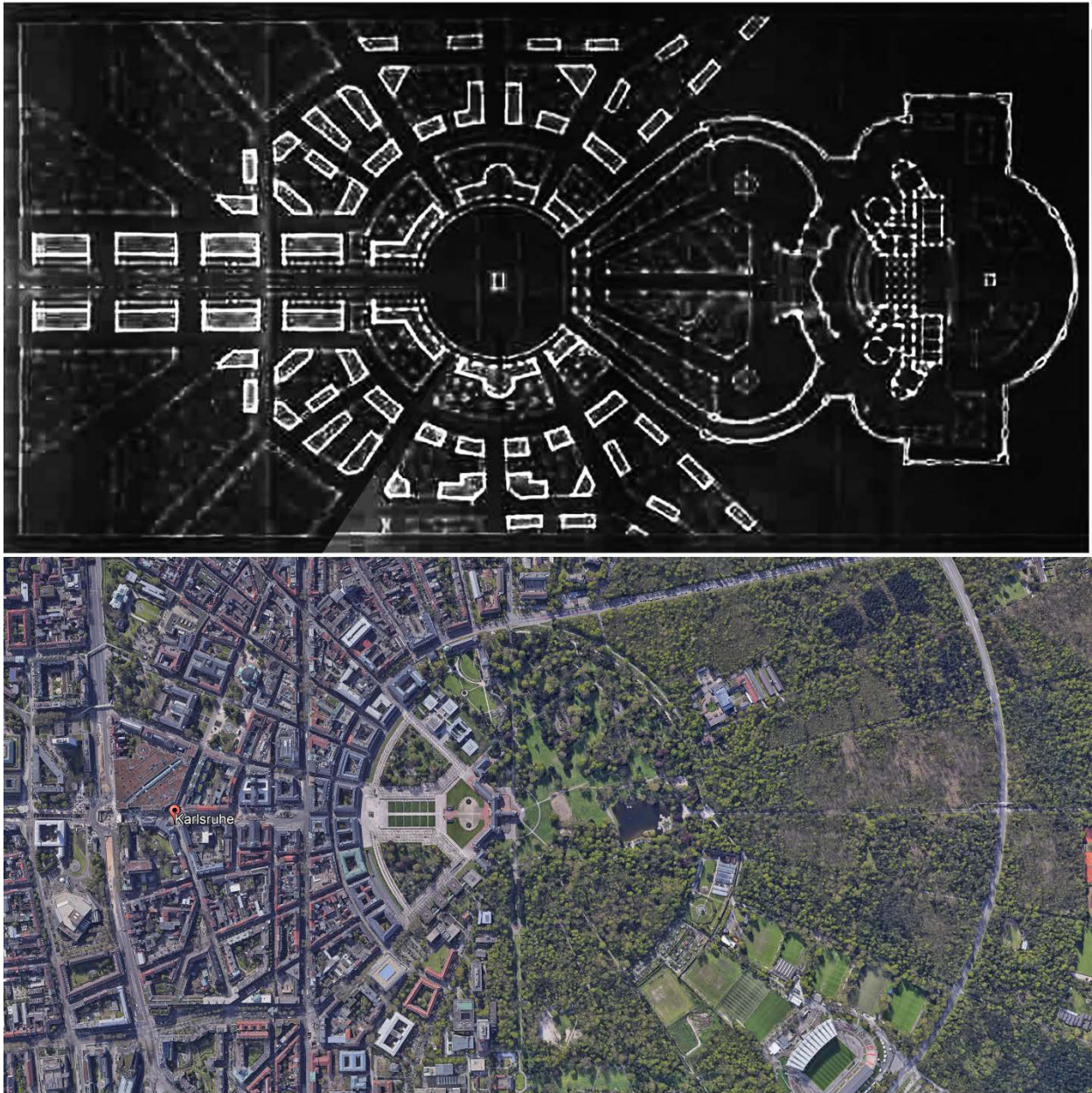


Figure 68. The Etoile Structure. [Above] The first Proposal of Armando Brassini, around 1928. The square is Circular and the Large Presidential [Regal Palace] Is excluded hidden behind a columned porch. Credits: Albanian National Construction Archives. [Below] Karlsruhe Center. Founded by Karl Wilhelm of Durlach in XVIII Century. The Palaces of the Founder and Ruler of The city, is here instead placed in the center. Credit: Google Earth.

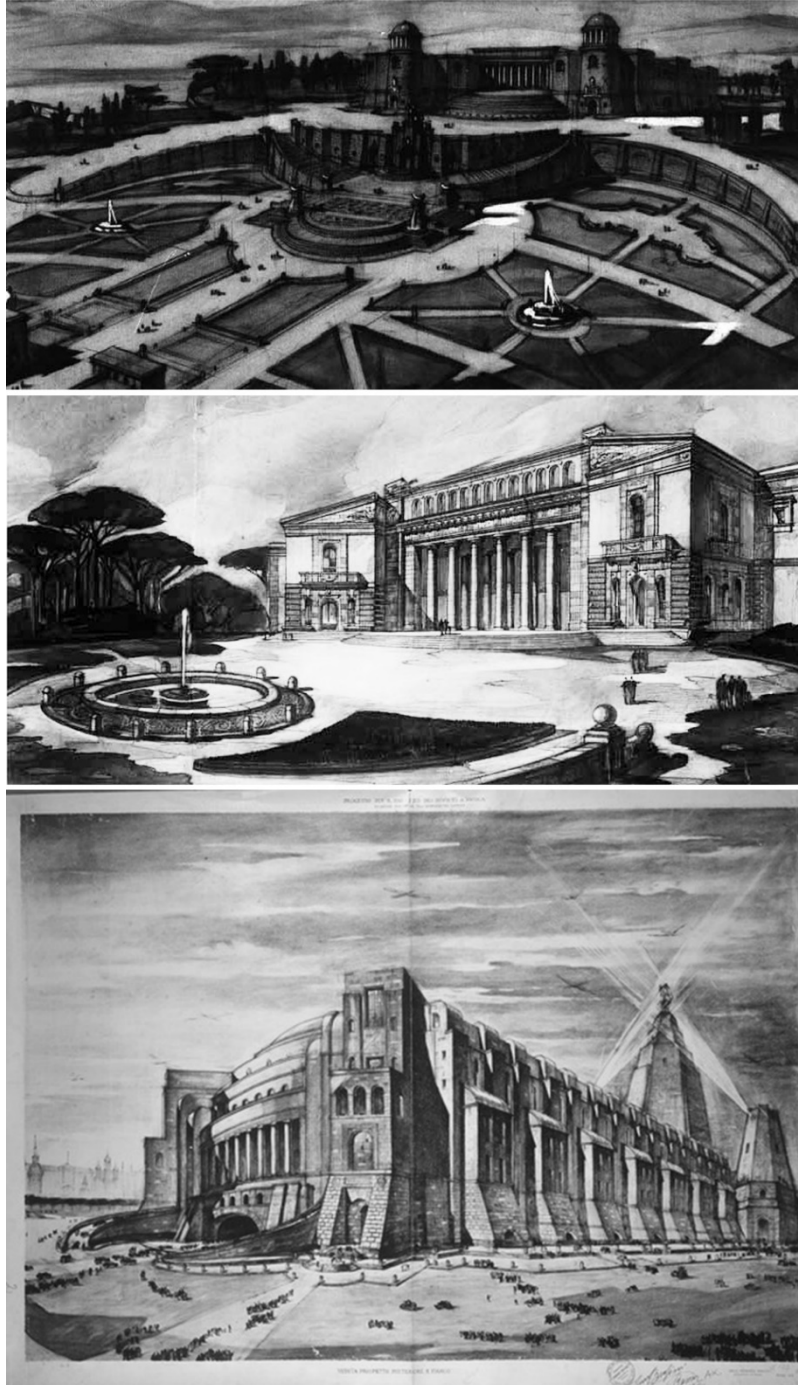


Figure 69. Comparison of Armando Brasini Works. [Above][Middle] Various Schemes for Tirana's Presidential Palace. Tirana. 1928. [Below] Brasini's proposal for the palace of the Soviets. He competed in the second Round, against Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius and Erich Mendelsohn. His proposal repeated the schemes of Tirana: overall elevation, symmetry, the central colonnade, the lateral bulwarks [towers] and the recessed symmetrical center. Moscow. 1931.

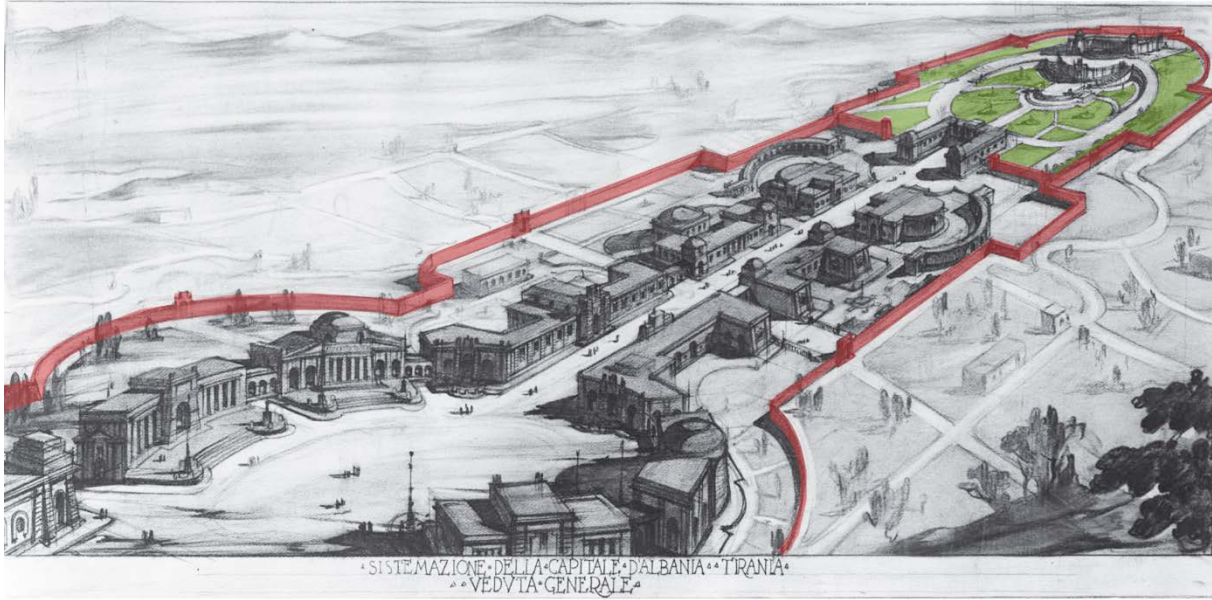


Figure 70. [Above]The Monumental Sequence by Armando Brassini. The circle was gutted toward North [Left-Bottom Corner of the Photo] emphasizing the axis rather than the center of the square. The architects adds a series of parietal walls around the ensemble, where the uppermost closure belongs to the Enclosed Gardens of the Presidential palace. Tirana. 1928. [Below-Left] Ise Grand Shrine. The sequence of the inner perimeters are accessed by fewer and fewer people. The innermost closure is accessed only by the Imperial Family. [Below-Right] The Little Garden of Paradise. The Walled Gardens. Or the so called “Hortus Conclusus”, is surely an analogy of Eden or of the Paradise. It symbolizes a place for few chosen one that have a unique connection with the Divine. 1410-20. Städel Museum. Author: Upper Rhenish Master

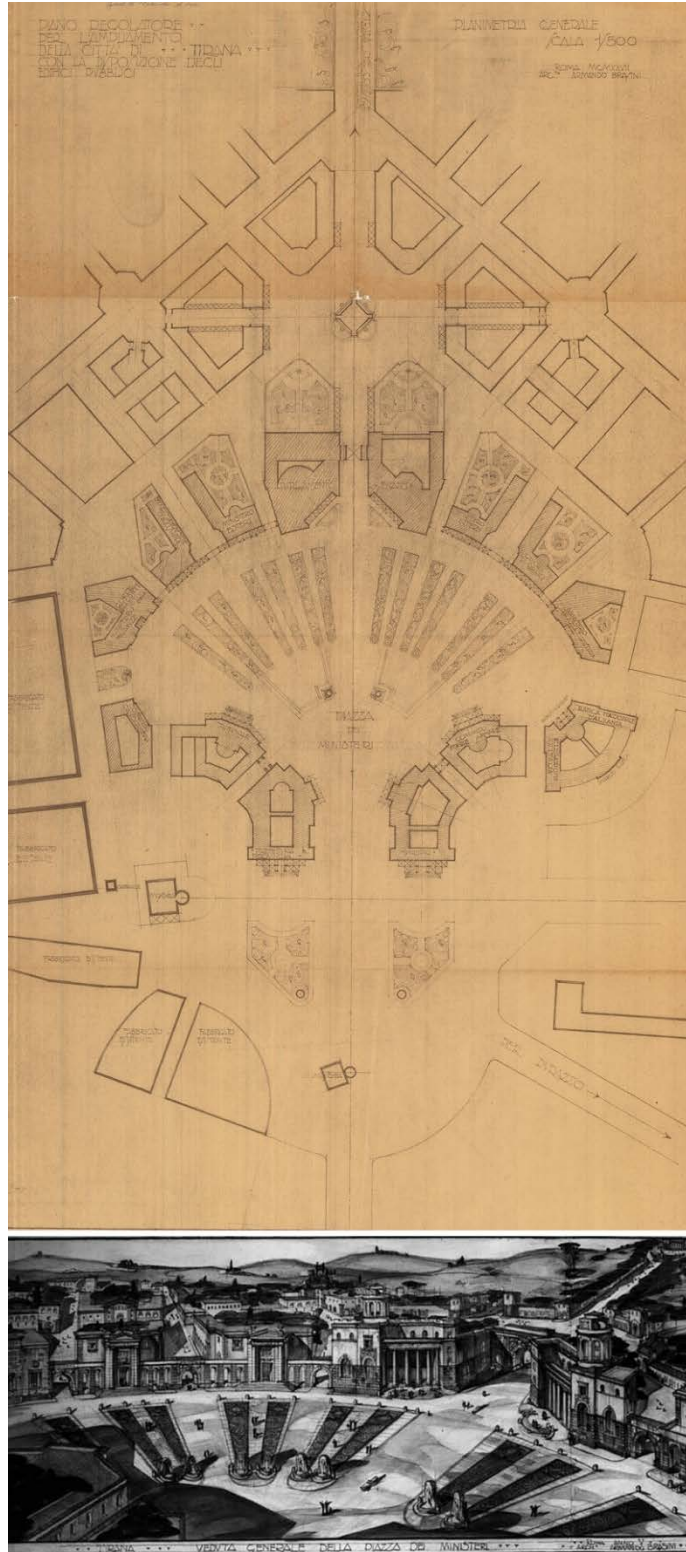


Figure 71. The Transient Square. Final Proposal from Brassini. Tirana. 1928. Source: Albanian National Construction Archives.

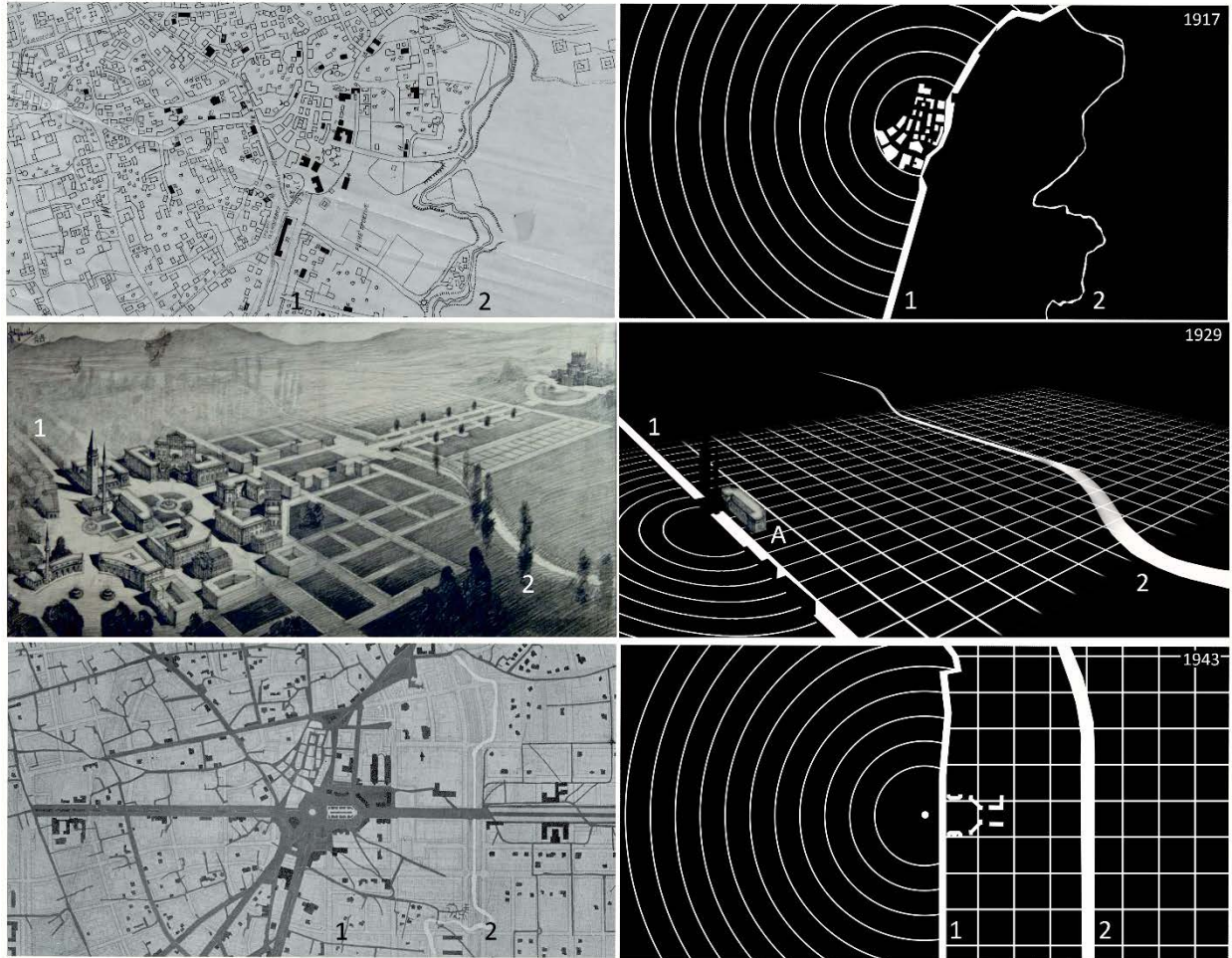


Figure 72. The Contextual Particularity of De Fausto's Proposal. [East direction on Top] [Above] Tirana developed at distance from the Lana River [2] and through an approximately radial pattern around the bazaar. The edge of the urban development was the road connecting Tirana with Elbasan to the south-east, and Kavaja to the west. [Middle] De Fausto's Intuition. Florestano De Fausto separated Skanderbeg Square in two halves. He positioned the building [A], in the middle of the space. The separation line was the former edged [1]. On the North of the former edge he re-ordered the irregular existing radial. Toward south on the former unadaptable meander of the Lana he envisioned the new linear city with a reticular structure. [Below] A drawing from the Regulatory Plan of 1940-1943, repressing the Juxtaposition of the old fabric of Tirana with the new structure proposed in the plan. The combination of the radial and the grid, the first intuition of de Fausto, has definitively become part of Tirana's future character. Scheme Credit: Endrit Marku; Original Drawings credits: Albanian National Construction Archives.

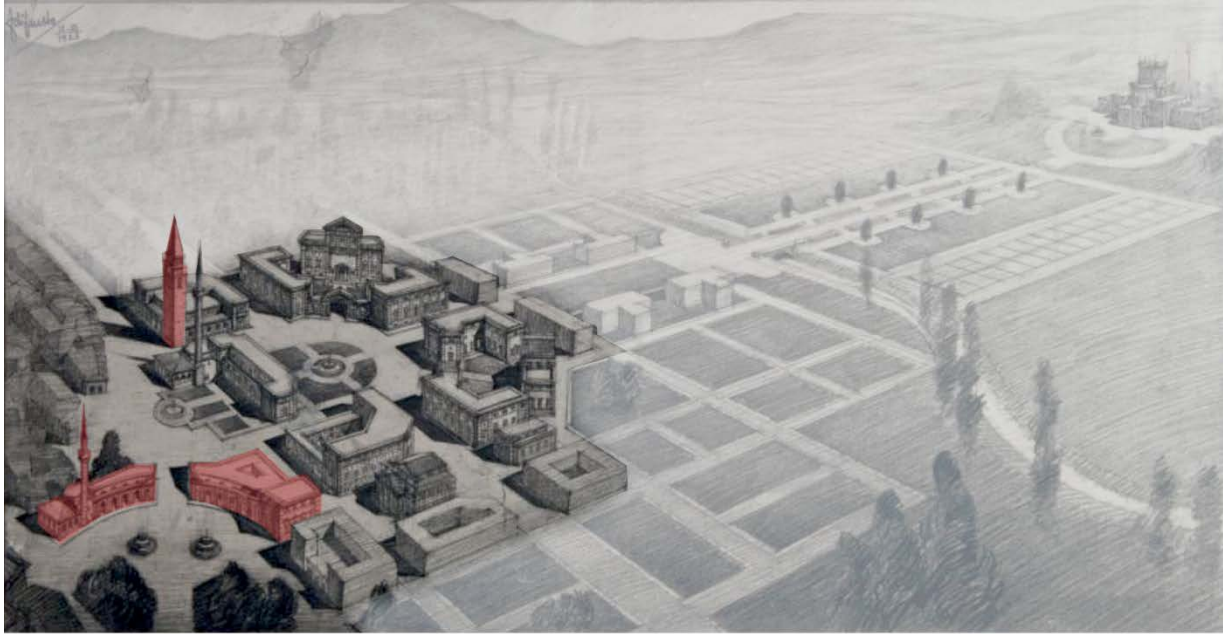


Figure 73. The Ante Square. [Above] Drawing from Florestano De Fausto. With the red color are underlined the Two wings, and the Foci of the Clock tower. Tirana. 1929. [Below] Reconstruction of the Ante Square. Drawing: Endrit Marku.

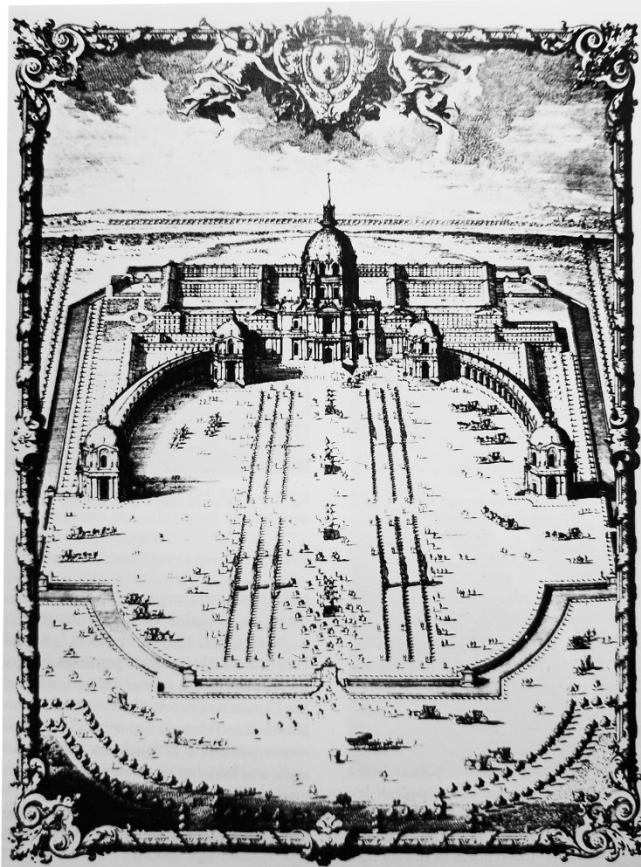


Figure 74. Typologies of Winged Plazas. [Above] San Peter Square, from Bernini. The elongated wings encircling more than half of the perimeter invite the walker to stop in this place. A similar, methodology was used in Brassini's second Proposal. [Below] Le invalids square, a design from Hardouin-Manasart. The Shorter Wings, rather than stopping orient the transition of the walker toward the center. Similar methodologies where used in Brassinis final Proposal and in the first Proposal for the Ante-Square from de Fausto.

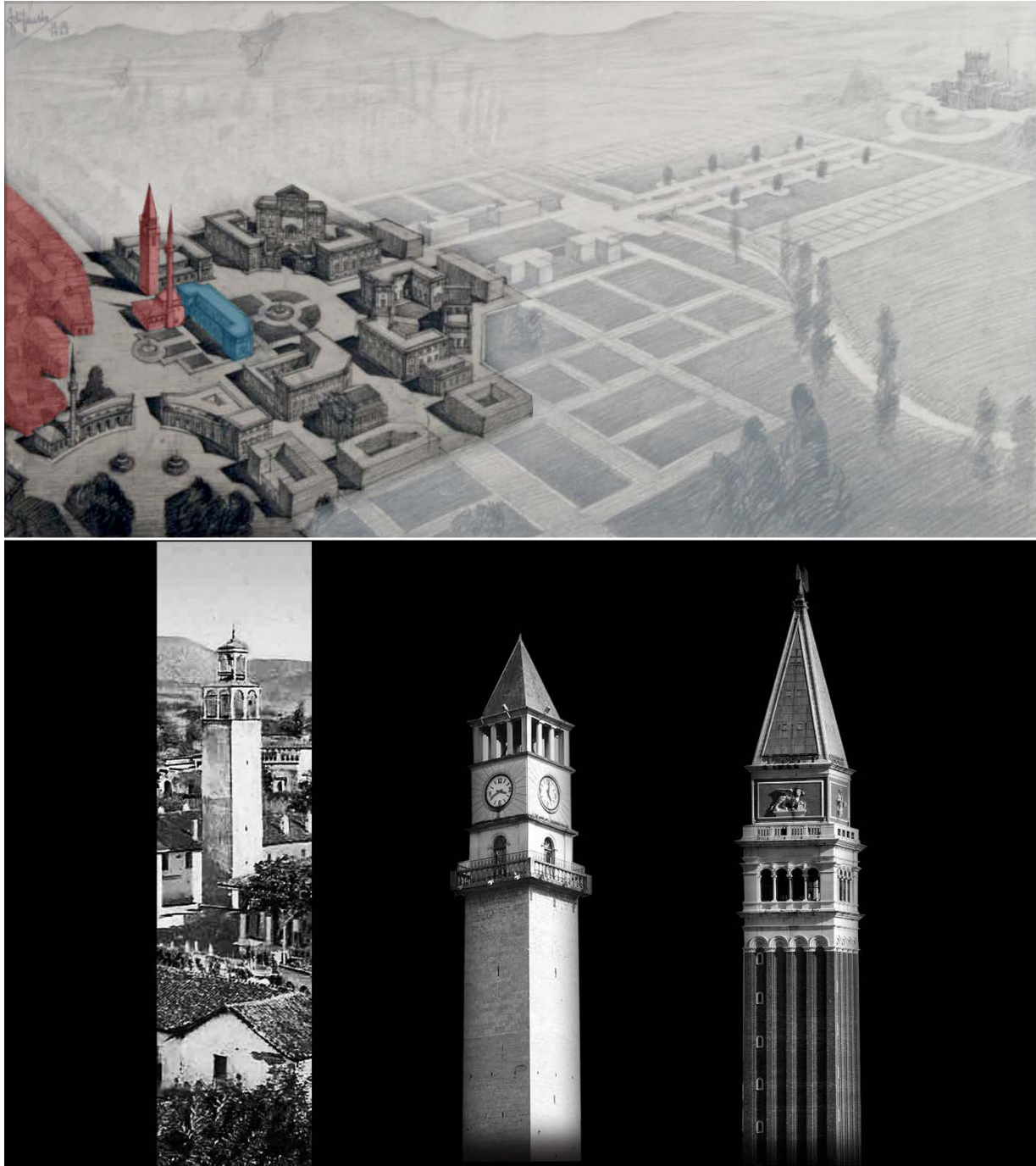


Figure 75. The Central Square [Above] in red are underlined the dominant preexistent elements of the square. With blue is signed the divisor building that separates the two spaces of the potentially same square, and the existing city from the new designed one. [Below] [Form Left to the Right] The Bell Tower of Tirana, in 1928 was enhanced and a clock was installed. De Fausto proposed a further monumentalization of the tower, following Italian examples [San Marco Bell Tower].



Figure 76. An Example of Monumentalization. Paço dos Duques de Bragança. [Above] The Building originally erected in 1452 by the Dukes of Braganza. [Below] The Radical transformation done to the building in 1935. The building overall sense of monumentality was enhanced by the Portuguese regime of Salazar. Guimaraes. 1935. Source: SIPA

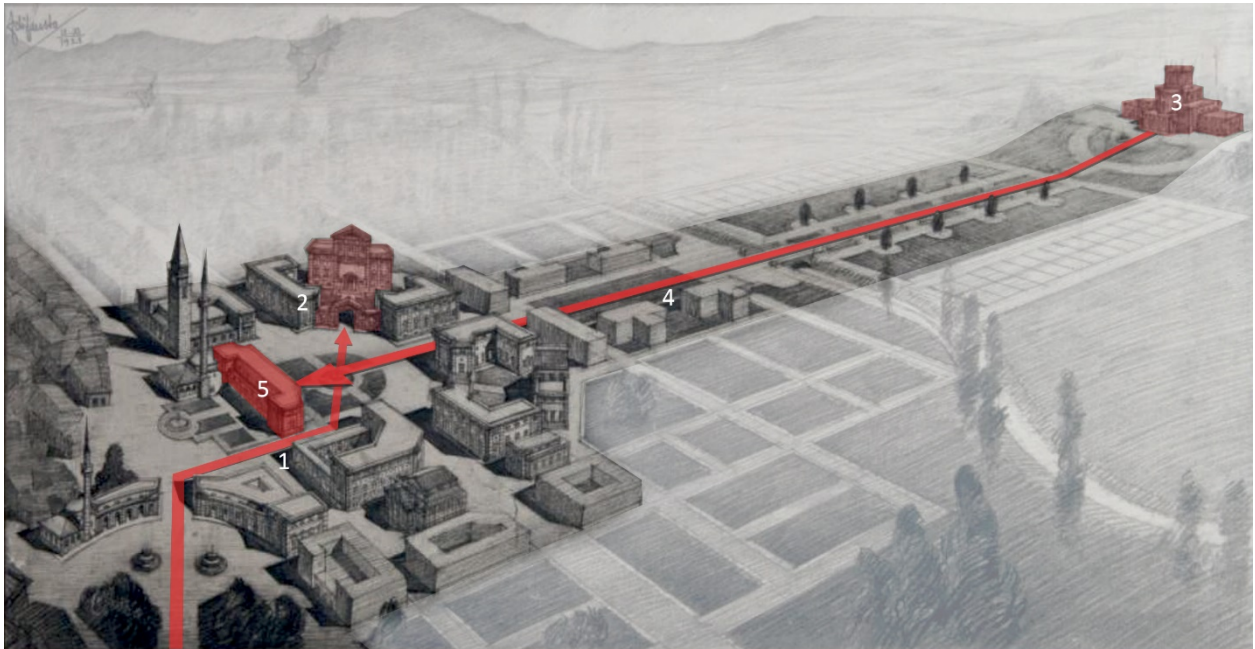


Figure 77. The Last Square. The Square is entered diagonally [1] and the building of the parliament is eccentrically placed in the space. The layout is similar with the 3rd proposal of Brassini. In Brassini's proposal the parliament had another symmetrical counterpart on the opposing side of the square, which was the building of the Senate. The new setting reveals Zogu's political decision to remove one of the chambers of the parliament. The Divisor building [5] creates a problem for the Presidential Palace [3] by blocking the further expansion of the vector emanated by its center toward the city. Scheme Credit: Endrit Marku



Figure 78. The Ellipsoidal Square. [Above][Middle]The [almost] Final project for Skanderbeg Square, from De Fausto works on the two foci and center of the Ellipse, but the order of the plan is unrelated to the square fronts. [Below] Piazza Navona. In Rome the intervention worked on both levels. On plan, on the foci and the center of the Fountains [and Obelisk] done By Bernini, and in the elevated central background the Church Of Santa Agnese, refurbished by Bernini.

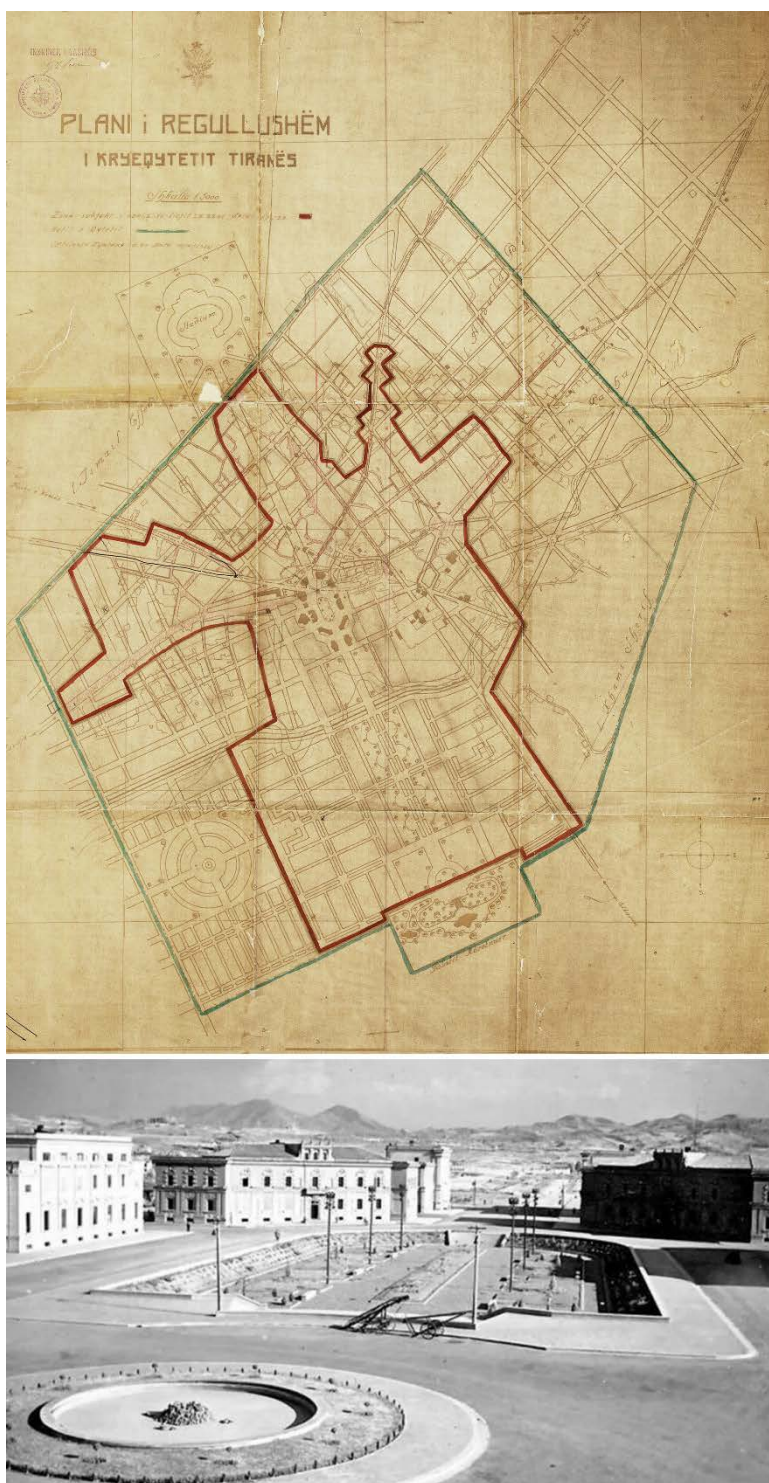


Figure 79. The Approved Square. [Above]The Final layout represented in the final version of Tirana's Regulatory Plan {Below} The Project partially implemented.



Figure 80. The Empty Stage. [Above] The Gardens of the Albanian King. The Palace lays elevated on the hill [1], separated from the rest of the city by the French inspired gardens [2]. On both sides of the gardens are the spaces reserved for the court [3]. [Middle] The Gardens of Vaux, one of the archetypes of the French Garden. 1657. Andre le Notre/ [Below] The Villas of the members of the court already in an advance stage, while the boulevard hasn't started yet.

5. THE READAPTED HISTORICIST STRUCTURE OF ITALY [1939-1943]

The Albanian-Italian common history, as one state, started on April 7, 1939. The union dismantled only four years later and its duration corresponded to the Italian active involvement on the Second World War. On September 8, 1943, after a delusional campaign, and an increasing crisis the Prime minister of Italy Pietro Badoglio, publicly announced the capitulation of its country. By that day was clear that Fascism had failed and with it the dream of a modern Roman empire. Together with Mussolini's campaign where interrupted the works on Tirana's construction sites of *Nuova Albania*, of whom the *Boulevard the Empire* was the most important. The last itinerary of this thesis goes through the traces left by the Italian regime in the short period stretching from 1939 to 1943. I will experience the actuality of Tirana in 1944, a city that despite the Italian efforts was still impregnated with the many contrasts observed in the previous itinerary.

The manifested discrepancies of "Skanderbeg Square" left by Zog I, were supposed to be temporal, just an intermediate result before the complete implementation of the program for center of the capital. Contrasts were supposed to gradually fade, or at least that is what the authorities that were reshaping the city were hoping for. Nor Zog I, Vittorio Emanuele III or Mussolini wanted these contrasts to be part of Tirana anymore, their aspiration of unity and order could not accept the informality of the former city. The Italian Fascism interrupted Ahmet Zogu's confrontation with Tirana's oriental decentralized past. They in turn had to deal with more heritages left from both the oriental city and the dethroned King.

5.1. Again the Reversed itinerary [1939]

Eleven years after Ahmet Zogu's most important day, his coronation, history is repeated. On that occasion, on the back seat of his cabriolet automobile, he traveled through the traces of past authorities. The short trip started at the parliament and concluded at his residence, less than one hundred meters before the friendly Italian embassy. The proximity of the buildings was not only spatial, Zogu's self-appointment was first agreed with Mussolini's and he didn't forget to mention Italy in his Inaugurating speech. In 1939, the mood has shifted, Tirana is about to acknowledge another transition of power. Toward a different authority but through the same rituals [Figure 81].

On the seven of April, the day of the invasion, Count Ciano immediately visited Albania. From his plane, he enjoyed the beautiful spectacle of *“motionless and solemn”* warships in the Bay of Durres and of the *“high and massive”* mountains of the countryside. He proceeded toward the Capital in the countryside. In his visits in Tirana, he meet his staff barricaded in the building of embassy. They waited there for the arrival of the Italian army, threatened by *“the bandits ransacking the (neighboring) royal palace”* (Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries, 1939-1943, 2001*). Upon his return to Rome, the plan for the formal union of Italy and Albania was immediately prepared. The plan was as follows: *“to create a movement council, to announce a body of elections for April 12, to have it vote the decision which will sanction the union between the two countries, conferring on King Victor Emanuel III, the crown of Albania”* (Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries, 1939-1943, 2001, p. 63*). *Therefore, it was sanction the day of the official transition of the power.*

On April 11, Galeazzo Ciano, prepared himself for the tomorrow's ceremony. He wrote his speech. On that very same day, he communicated to Mussolini the decision to erect a Mosque in Rome, a necessary sign to placate the spirits of the recently added Islamic subjects. The next morning he departed for Tirana. The capital received him *“triumphantly”*, although he sensed the disaccord of the many young Albanians attending his arrival. Ciano avoided any intermediary stop and ended his procession only at Italian embassy. There he began his waiting.

On April 12, 1939, was dismantled the regime initiated on September 1, 1928 by Zogu. The events of the day where documented in the Diaries of Count Ciano and in another video chronicle prepared by the Luce Institute. 11 years ago, Ahmet Zogu attended his coronation ceremony in the parliament; he entered the building as President and left as a King. Count Ciano instead did not move from his office. He was there representing his king. He was in Albania as the savior of the small nation. For this, he was waiting for the parliament to come to him and consign the authority of the former Albanian king.

The documentary of the Luce institute shows the sequence of the events of that day **[Figure 82]**. The first sequence starts with video plans of groups of Parliament deputies. They are shown while going through an improvised corridor, flanked not by ceremonial guards but by crowd people. The space of their gathering is the little square in front of the parliament, once belonging to the

weekly bazar, at the edge to the new "Skanderbeg Square" designed by Florestano De Fausto. Acclaimed by the people, they enter the modest building.

The next sequence staged inside the floodlit chamber. The members of the parliament through an open vote decide their new ruler. The parliament of Albania, once a symbol of the state, resuscitated for one day after a decade of uselessness. It was the last formal act played in this avenue, which only few months later was going to change its destination. The fascist governments was going to use the building for the activities of the *National Council of Corporations*.

The third sequence shows the members of the parliament leaving the building and move as a whole toward the new center of the capital. They first pass through "Skanderbeg Square" and the newly built ministerial headquarters. Then they entered, the historical 28 Nentori Street named after the Albanian Independence date. They proceeded through the street flanked by "The Ethem Bey Mosque" and the bazar. Meanwhile the deputies were joined by the spectating crowds. The documentary shows a dramatic escalation. The video piece of the Luce Archives is not a random chronicle but more of an orchestrated cinematographic sequence. What started as a parade of few chosen dignitaries turned into a popular march. The small march of Tirana, in the propaganda video, appears as energetic as Mussolini's march on Rome **[Figure 83]**. Once arriving at the turn of the old mosque, next to the twin sequoias of the dead, the dozens had already become hundreds. They proceed aligned along the road section, none leads, and they are untied as if they just realized that: "*Union is true content and end, and the destiny of individuals*" (Hegel G. W., 1991, p. 276). They are one-step from the final union with the Empire of Italy.

In the last meters of their path, after the passage in between the mausoleums of the former ottoman rulers, they faced a turning point. On the right is the private road leading to the abandoned Palace of Zogu, straightforward is the building the Italian embassy. Without hesitation, they proceeded forward, toward their future. Count Ciano is waiting for them at the elevated landing of the monumental steps of the entrance. The crowd reversed along the enclosing wall, and through its gate in the inner court. The building and the ambassadors of Italy were embraced by them and asked to lead.

Galeazzo Ciano accepted the Albanian crown, which was going to be handled directly to Vittorio Emanuele III, in a pompous ceremony to be organized in Rome.

Ciano concluded the staged revolution of Tirana. While speaking to the crowds from the balcony of the Italian legacy in Tirana, he reassured that what happened was not going to “*prejudice neither the form nor the substance of the Albanian Independence*” (Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries, 1939-1943*, 2001). Later that day he would confide to his diary his impressions of the very same moment: “*I see (saw) the eyes of some patriots flaming with anger and tears running down their faces. Independent Albania is no more*” (Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries, 1939-1943*, 2001).

5.2. Interrupted Square

After having walked again along the street coming from Durres [Figure 84], the well-established main entrance of Tirana, I have in sight, again “Skanderbeg Square” [Figure 84/1]. The first impression is immediate; the space I am experiencing is still incomplete and has not taken its final form. The present state of the square many months after the Italian Capitulation of September 1943 is almost the same of the state experienced by the Italians soldiers, entering Tirana on their army trucks during the annexation days, of April 1939 [Figure 85]. There are some minor changes though. The small Albanian parliament it is no more, or at least its façade. The modest building symbolizing one of the major achievements of the Albanians, the formation of its state, was hidden under a thick brand new façade. Three massive arches have completely changed its appearance. Now it hosts the *National Council of Corporations*, the new holder of the legislative power (Dell'Elba, 1997), one of the constitutional institutions of fascist Italy “*one of those creations of social legislation at the very foundation of the regime*” (Mussolini & Gentile, 1933, p. 236). Close to it, lays the other novelty of the square. It is the completed headquarter of the Bank of Albania, designed by Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo. Both institutions initiated the Italian economical grip over Albania that followed by the military and political seizure. These institutions are again the first symbols immediately placed in the spaces of Tirana's center, probably necessary for preparing the ground for further, radical, transformations.

Despite these transformations, “Skanderbeg Square” is the same left by Zogu [Figure 86], it almost hasn't changed during the four years of Italian rule. Its development has stopped and

maybe was arrested on purpose. Perhaps for a budget issue, motivated by the enormous expenditures that Italy was having from its involvement in the war. Maybe, the Liras needed for its completion were addressed elsewhere, toward south, along the unending Greek front.

Nevertheless, on the way to Tirana's center I traveled along a brand new highway, and saw dozens of new structures, some completed and some interrupted. Obviously, the building activity never stopped in Tirana, it stopped only here, in the main Square of Tirana. Less than two weeks after the annexation, on April 21, 1939, the Italian Council of Ministers approved the allocation of a 430 million Lira budget, for the newly conquered territories of Albania, enough to carry out important interventions (Ciano, 2001). It seems that money was not a problem.

Franco Benanti, an official and a doctor of the Italian army gave an account of his experience in "Skanderbeg Square". In his description, he disclosed the reason for interruption of the works. *"It (Tirana) was in the process of becoming a modern city of almost one hundred thousand inhabitants. A grandiose and modern neighborhood had risen at the side of the beautiful boulevard, large more than twenty meters, opened south of Scanderbeg square [Figure 87]"* (Benanti, 1966). Definitely, the budget was not a problem.

The Italian architects, engineers and workers that flooded from all over Italy to Albania, where more than capable to carry out the task of completing "Skanderbeg Square", but another project apparently was more important. Their efforts focused on the construction site of the *Boulevard of the Empire*.

The Occurred Succession of Centers.

While walking toward the center of the square I find more clues reconfirming the motives behind the arrest of this space. The impression of dominance of "Skanderbeg Square's" space and architecture over the surrounding neighborhoods and streets does not radiate toward all directions with the same strength. While reaching its central fountain and roundabout I recognize the transition that has happened in the last years.

On my right, toward south, lays the new axis, the boulevard mentioned by Benanti. It has taken an almost definitive shape. Before its realization, the other boulevards of Tirana were unified by the space of "Skanderbeg Square", envisioned by the local monarchy. The new axis seems

more than that, it breaks through the square, slowed down but not interrupted. Apparently It has the potential to make the square just an act, although important, of its proper plot.

Changed Odonym's [Figure 88]

The main protagonist of this itinerary was just disclosed to me, but there is more to be understood from the former protagonist, "Skanderbeg Square". After all, it seems strange that the zealous constructive campaign over the Capital have left unaltered the main trace of the past regime. A deeper introspection into this space before proceeding along the next sequences of the Itinerary is needed. I will look again on its surroundings before following the urge to walk through the boulevard of the Empire.

The new boulevard is mirrored by another axis that goes north. Among the many streets flowing to the square it's the only, together with the Boulevard of the Empire itself, that hasn't been traced on existent paths. I have already described it in the previous chapter. Its importance is emphasized also by its name, *Viale Vittorio Emanuele* now King of the Albanians. Until 1939 it was named after *Zog I* the discharged monarch of Albania. The changed odonym, of the strongest trace of Tirana's Haussmanization, sheds light on unexpected transformative processes happening in the square.

There are at least six streets, some of them boulevards, flowing in the space of the square from all around the town. The axes now radiating from the center once where named after the cities they were connecting, then after figures related to Zogu's lineage and now almost exclusively after Italian figures. Obviously not everything in the square has halted; this place has been part of the new authority's attention. The names of the streets, their modification, are the swifter manifestation of the transition that was underway.

In the northwest direction stretches the street I just traversed on the way here, named after *Principe Umberto*, dauphin of Vittorio Emanuele. The street was once named after the *Queen Mother*, spouse of *Zog I*.

In the western side of the square, sideways of the Bank of Albania, I see Boulevard Mussolini, named after the other representative of the Italian ruling diarchy. The name of this axis remained

the same, because the Albanian authorities, when no one would have imagined, before the annexation of the country dedicated the important arterial road to the Duce.

The historical path going toward the eastern city of Dibra, previously named after Zogu's own father, Xhemal Pash Zogu, was renamed after Bajram Curri, a bitter adversary of Zogu, assassinated by his troops during the years of his rise to power.

Then finally, toward east there is the 28 November Street, named after the date of the Albanian proclamation of the independence. This name remains unchanged too. A minor and maybe a temporary concession. After all, despite their true reasons, the Italian operation in Albania was disguised as an intervention directed toward the former incompetent ruling class. It was in support of the people of Albania. In one of his reports to Mussolini, his Minister of foreign affairs, Count Ciano described the imminent invasion as an intervention that would free Albanians from a court living in extreme luxury despite the poverty of the masses, *"whose miserable living conditions call to mind those of Chinese villages scattered along the banks of the Yangtse river"* (Roselli, 2006) .

After reflecting on the streets there still a reflection to be made on the name of the place I am located. This space is named after Skanderbeg, again. Part of the Albanian national identity was built around him. His radiant influence on the people together with his historical remoteness made him the perfect personality to obfuscate King Zog. His legacy of four centuries ago transferred to Vittorio Emanuele, overstepping the 11 years long kingdom of Zogu. Mussolini in his speech of April 15, 1939, in front of the Albanian delegation offering the Albanian crown, stated, that the flag of Skanderbeg, would wave from that day across Italy, next to the tricolor⁶² (Mussolini, www.adamoli.org, 1939) , affirming the adherence of the figure of Skanderbeg, to the Italian objectives.

The last quote from Mussolini brings my excursus of the spaces pouring inside "Skanderbeg Square", to a conclusion. I turn again versus the Boulevard of the Empire. I am in the center of a city representing a past era and looking toward a city, along the new boulevard, representing a fresh Imperial era. Scanderbeg, Mussolini, Vittorio Emanuele and even Bajram Curri, are all

⁶² Italian Flag

names of the people, and events that eventually led toward the alignment of the Albanian history to that of Italy.

5.3. Undoing “Skanderbeg Square” and Environs

From the overview of the transformation of the place names around “Skanderbeg Square”, is deduced that its arrest is only apparent. Another overview, of the Albanian archives reconfirms these deductions. Among the many projects designed by the Italian architects during the years of the annexation, there are several variants for “Skanderbeg Square” as well. The final version was approved on 25, January 1943.

In the drawings corresponding to the final versions appear at least three names, Gherardo Bosio, Ferdinando Poggi and Ivo Lambertini. Bosio (who died in 1941) probably was mentioned because of his position. He was the director of the *Central Office of Building and Urbanistic of Albania* and all projects were probably approved by him. Ferdinando Poggio is mentioned as an advising architect. Ivo Lambertini instead is the designer of the project. The project for “Skanderbeg Square” was probably his work.

Although no larger works initiated during the years of the invasion, “Skanderbeg Square” was part of a vigorous designing and redrawing processes. The Italians first built the boulevard ex-novo, after all *“just an organism created an realized in on piece, with his own blueprint and vision could give the sensation of the renown Italian spirit”* (Piacentini, 1942). The new authority was going to deal with the most important remnant of the fallen Albanian monarchy, “Skanderbeg Square” only later.

The Inadequateness of the Former Center

“Skanderbeg Square” was originally designed by Italian architects, fascist architects belonging to a regime under ideological consolidation. After the annexation of Albania, for the ideologist of fascism it was a symbol of a past made of not so forward-looking ideas, of missed occasions, of mistakes that when possible had to be redone. An example supporting this thesis can be found in an article written few months after the Italian conquest of Ethiopia. The issue was underlined in a special editorial signed by the direction of *Architettura*, a periodical directed by Marcelo

Piacentini. The plea was for all Italian Architects, *“no more romantic revivals of pseudo-Arab, pseudo-Moresque, pseudo-tropical, stylistic morphologies that turned in ridiculous architectonic aborts, generated in our Colonies in epochs that are not that far away, and that, seems impossible but it's not regretted by the intellectuals and Public Institutions”* (Piacentini, 1936).

The Fascist Architects had no reasons to hide their intentions in Ethiopia, they stepped there openly as colonialist and the same openness could be manifested in their Urban and Architectonic works. Piacentini asked them to leave aside any regard or sensibility toward the local architecture. They had a mission, the unitary representation of the empire. Italy was trying to matchup with other long-standing Colonialist states, as England and France. However, in terms of Urbanism and Architecture their model was the Roman Empire. In the very same editorial, Piacentini writes, *“it (the Roman Empire) well understood the expansive value of the autochthonous⁶³ architecture and considered as its first priority, marking with its vestige the conquered lands: roads, bridges, aqueducts, theaters and temples: works that were all a perfect synthesis of utility and beauty: and that offered an unmatched character of unity, strength and Grandeur for the entire Mediterranean Empire.”* (Piacentini, 1936).

In Albania during the reign of Zogu things were different. The Italian architects that worked for him, were designing for a foreign legitimate ruler, officially accepted and supported by Italy. They had to conform to his Idea of the state. Fan Noli, the political adversary of Ahmet Zogu had an idea about his vision since the first days after the proclamation of the monarchy of 1928. From his Boston exile, he wrote *“This monarchic operetta is being played in Europe, right in the middle of the XX century, which saw the fall of hundreds of year old dynasties, that laugh at the latest monarchy”* (Noli, 1928). Brassini and De Fausto designed for Zogu one of those *“romantic revivals”* of renaissance models, despised by Piacentini, but coherent with the *“monarchic operetta”* of Tirana.

After the fall of Zog I, the architects of fascism started to operate under the ideological directives of Rome. They had to undo many things. In the boulevard, the process was easier. The implementation of the project of De Fausto for the Monumental gardens of the King never

⁶³ With the term autochthonous Piacentini means Roman architecture and not the architecture of the lands conquered by Ancient Rome.

started, so they had to revise only the project. The empty meander of the Lana south of Tirana's center was still a blank page, ready to be signed with a fascist subject. Only the action of tracing the linear sign of the boulevard and of monumental buildings extruded from the empty earth could express the true character of fascism, "Fascism is action and it is thought; action in which doctrine is immanent" (Mussolini & Gentile, 1933). For these reasons, the new Italian administration decided to begin with the *Boulevard of the Empire*, known also as *New Albania* construction site.

In "Skanderbeg Square" things were more complicated. It was the most vibrant part of the city. Around it were the functional civic offices, the shops of the bazar, the coffee shops on the main streets and the neighborhoods. Its space was already half built based on Zogu's will. Revising the project was not enough and what was already implemented had to be undone. For these reasons, "Skanderbeg Square" and its surroundings, were halted at their pre-annexation state and carefully redesigned for a forthcoming implementation.

From the changed place names and the new designs transpires that new center considered the old, inadequate. The architects of the *Central Office* and the Bulldozers of the Italian firms were slowly transforming the ideas and signs of the past regimes into "architectonic abortions". Among the first designed victims of the projected intervention on "Skanderbeg Square" and *Surroundings*⁶⁴, were the town hall and the rest of the bazar.

The Seized Center of the Albanian State⁶⁵

The center of Tirana was going to change again [Figure 89/Above]. The shapeless field of the weekly bazar, and the Oval of De Fausto soon would become the Elbow shaped plaza of Ivo Albertini. Only the southern ministerial complex in the direction of Boulevard of the Empire was maintained. The other half of the square, was shortened toward north and stretched to the opposite east-west direction. Through this operation, "Skanderbeg Square" becomes an elongated rectangle with its longest side being orthogonal to the future Boulevard of the empire. The other part of the Square, surrounded by the already implemented ministries of Zogu,

⁶⁴ The drawings of the project are entitled: Sistemazione della Piazza Skanderbeg e Adiacenze.

⁶⁵ Project From Ivo Lambertini

becomes an ante square of the Boulevard. The whole organism appears smaller because of its awkward new angulated shape.

White cuboidal buildings enclosed Lambertini's "Skanderbeg Square" **[Figure 90]**, made of bright and opaque travertine walls and focused shadowed recesses. In their sharp lines, stone surfaces and static solidity was sensed the reason, determination, strength and the supposed permanence of the regime. The dark recesses were the metaphysical spaces dwelled by the spirit of the fascist state. The gate of Tirana's center was designed with the principles of the *New classical* professed by Erich Mendelson and supported by Marcello Piacentini, extracted from "*the basic conditions of space, the more conceptual plan, equilibrated construction and the perfect shape*" (Mendelson, 1932). The Albanian capital was obliged to respond to the appeal of the leading Italian Architect and made to all the Mediterranean nations, to "*participate in the ultimate battle for the new civilization, to believe in the new classical that was going to give to all of them an eternal law*". The white and equilibrate buildings of Tirana where the signs of a presumed Mediterranean culture, common to all its people. Nevertheless the history of this sea was too diverse to categorize, made of struggles for dominance in between its nations and of variegated cultural patterns. Unity was achieved only through the power of Rome, of which Italy professed a privileged legacy. The appeal for a Mediterranean unity of Piacentini was indeed an advocacy of the Italian renovated imperialism and the new buildings of Tirana, where indeed signs of the imperialistic Idea of Italy. The conquered center of the Albanian state, was about to be marked with the vestige of the Italian Empire, exactly as Rome used to do (Piacentini, 1936).

In the project of Ivo Lambertini, "Skanderbeg Square" **[Figure 89/Below]** was still accessed from the west, but not anymore through the street coming from Durres. The new privileged access was Boulevard Mussolini. "Skanderbeg Square" was made smaller and its northern part occupied by a new row of buildings. For this reason, the former boulevard of Durres renamed after Prince Umberto was bound to pass behind the added constructions and outside the Square. Apparently this operation had different purposes: The position of Mussolini's vector in the center of Tirana was enhanced. To the fascist leader was given a position more congruous to the real balances of power of the Italian politics. The new main accesses to the square became Boulevard Mussolini and Boulevard Vittorio Emanuele. The Boulevard of the formal Italian emperor was shadowed by

the Contiguous Boulevard of the Empire, while Mussolini's street was left alone to dominate its eastern-western direction. "Skanderbeg Square" was traversed by two dominant traces, the Boulevard of Empire, named after Mussolini's will and Boulevard Mussolini, named after Duce's himself. Tirana was structured along the crosscutting of two axis, closely following the cardinal directions. They were basically a *Cardo* and a *Decumanus* [Figure 91], ancient revivals of a modern Roman Empire; the other purpose was the reduction of Skanderbeg plaza. The place that was supposed to be encircled by the symbols of the Albanian state surely had a strong significance for the locals. Its reduction and angulation replicated the recent processes of the Albanian society. Of a state whose authority severely diminished and of a future realigned along the Italian course.

The visitor accessing "Skanderbeg Square" from Boulevard Mussolini was immediately oriented toward the center of the space, by the smoothed corner of the National Bank, placed on the visitors right. From a more central position the space was embraced thoroughly. Taken out of the context, the dominant building was the New City Hall, however it had an eccentric position which shadowed its imposing appearance. The path of the *decumanus*, passed too near to it, preventing the viewer from having a clear and full vision of its bulk. In the created relationship the headquarter of *Banco di Napoli* [Figure 92], at the eastern edge square, where once was the bazar, was intended as the center of the square.

The National Council of Corporations and the National Bank were the first new additions made to "Skanderbeg Square" space. While the Lambertinis project envisioned the addition of other institutions related to the economic aspects of the regime. The above-mentioned Bank of Naples, the I.N.A, National Institute of Insurances and Ministry of Finances. The Ministry was the link with another category of institutions participating in the square, the last remaining of the supposed Albanian autonomy. They were the buildings of The National Defense Comity, The Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice, and the figurehead Council of Ministers. It seems that the few remaining local institutions and the Town hall were organized in the same whole with the economic institution of the Fascist state, of the Empire. "Skanderbeg Square" embodies the act of the new relationship of Italy and Albania, a Hegelian relationship of *lordship and bondage*. The other acts of the entire narrative are revealed through a simple elevated view of this designed Tirana.

The spatial narrative started in the norther extremity of Tirana **[Figure 93]**, at the starting point of Vittorio Emanuele Boulevard, formerly entitled to Zog I. The building closing its perspective⁶⁶ and starting the sequence was the Headquarter of the *Granatieri*. The choice seems well thought, the Grenadier's were created by *Vittorio Amedeo II di Savoia*, The first king of of Vittorio Emanueles III dynasty, and capabale of prevailing over the armies of France and Spain.

The Northern axis was interrupted at the central junction, by the dilatation of Skanderbeg's square toward west. Its spatial extrusion opened room for the other axis, named after Mussolini. The boulevard of Mussolini introduced to the narrative only halfway, revolutionizes the whole spatial structure, the former pace is interrupted. What it was doing to the space was done to the Italian society by fascism, an ideology that according to Mussolini didn't believe in "*neither the possibility nor the utility of perpetual peace*" (Mussolini & Gentile, 1933). The political dynamics of Italy and Albania resolved by the annexation of 1939 are embodied in the contorted space of "*Skanderbeg Square*". At "*Skanderbeg Square*" ended the Albanian state of Zogu and started the Fascist state of Mussolini. The signs of the empire's economic might, are symbols of the initial Italian penetration and the first component of its state structure, of the "*Embodied will to power and government*" (Mussolini & Gentile, 1933) of the Fascist State. From here, one was supposed to continue the monumental sequential narrative of the rest of the Fascist State progression through History, through the Boulevard of Empire.

The designed "*Skanderbeg Square*" was actually just a dilatation of the boulevard space. The visitor entering this place was simultaneously entering in the domain of the Boulevard. What I perceived on my walk along the Interrupted Skanderbeg was correct, the Boulevard of empire was actually going to turn "*Skanderbeg Square*" in one of the acts of its narrative.

The Last Trace of Impermanence⁶⁷ [Last thoughts on the Bazar]

The everydayness of Tirana is almost absent from the imageries of the Luce Institute. Some exception appear in the photos coinciding with the downfall of the Italian war and regime **[Figure 94]**. The Scenes of the bazar, of the new one though, grotesque races of waiters dressed in their

⁶⁶ This fact is evident from the drawings of Titans regulatory plan of 1943. The complex is named *Caserma Granatieri*.

⁶⁷ Project From Ivo Lambertini

uniforms and holding their arranged trays and even a small group of gamblers playing in the vicinities of the old mosques were probably minor concessions, showing that the subjects of the empire were calm, despite the ongoing disastrous conflict. However, despite these minor concession, the Capital perceived by photographic archives of Luce, appears unusual. It looks as a city in perennial festive state. Almost daily, photographs portray a restless city, congruous to the *lively character* of Fascism. The life of the Albanian citizens of the empire seems dominated by extraordinary events rather than their ordinary every day. The spaces of the existing city are continually filled by crowds: attending the pompous state visits coming from overseas⁶⁸; hearing the Duce's discourses from the loudspeakers installed on the facades of administrative buildings; watching at the parading Italian battalions; participating in the religious processions; welcoming schoolgirls in uniform, returning from their organized vacations in Italy; or enjoying the sight of the brand-new buses of the Tirana's first urban lines.

In the sequences of the relatively short lapse of time, is perceived the change of the politic situation. In the first years and months the streets of the center are the background of happy events celebrating great achievements. With time going by, these rituals became growlingly related to the tragic events of the war. Nevertheless the pompous state funerals, and the public farewell to the armies departing for the front, were still depicted as extraordinary events, anguishing but necessary. The heroes paraded through the places of Tirana's center were "*people that knew how to die*" (Mussolini & Gentile, 1933, p. 237), necessary martyrs before the final victory.

The aversion toward impermanence translated also in concrete actions over space. By an official decree of the 52nd meeting of the Central Commission, of 2 February 1942, on larger areas of Tirana's center were banned concessions for kiosks or provisory constructions **[Figure 95]** functioning as shops or agencies. The large red-stain outlining the banned areas in the related plan, has a visible central uncolored island, corresponding to the core of the old bazar. In sight of more radical transformations, the former center of the guilds was left unclaimed by the decree, despite its proximity to the center.

⁶⁸ Vittorio Emanuele himself payed an official visit to Albania.

The project from Ivo Lambertini was supposed to terminate the process initiated by De Fausto. The alleys of the bazar, carefully controlled by the messianic signs of the Sultan, in the past excluded from participating in the sign⁶⁹ of the King were soon going to be superseded by a new district. Under the denomination *Environs*, within the project for "Skanderbeg Square" was planned the destruction of the space better representing the subjective ends (Hegel G. W., 1991) of the Albanian individuals.

The new district **[Figure 96]** was hidden beyond the monumental front of the *Bank of Naples*, large as the section of the bazar. However its presence behind Skanderbeg's square was sensed in the particular conformation of the building of the bank. The central volume of the building main façade was flanked by two minor lateral volumes. The central and the lateral components had different openings, the first had vertical right-angled recesses, and the second had a central arched gap. These arches were then repeated in the buildings of the newer district, on the fronts facing the streets juxtaposed to the former bazar. The rectangular openings of the economic center of "Skanderbeg Square" were transformed into arched porticoes in the adjacent neighborhoods **[Figure 97]**.

The continuous arcades on the ground floor of the new buildings reverberated sensations experienced before. They had similitudes with the porticoes of the last segment of the bazar connecting "The Ethem Bey Mosque" to the mosque of Karapici (Terzi). A last segment that was also the first to be destroyed by Ahmet Zogu. The presence of the porticoes seems the only ephemeral concession to the past of Tirana, in a project otherwise entirely detached from the local context. Even this connection seems a fortunate coincidence, created by the universality of the roman arch, indiscriminately used by the empire of Rome, the ottoman feudalists and merchants of Tirana, and by the Italian regime.

The bazar was replaced **[Figure 98]** by the new district but the former messianic signs surrounding it, are kept. The old Mosque, the Mosque of Ethem Bey and the Orthodox Church were preserved but the world around was changed. In the model of Ivo Lambertini the religious landmarks of the past are enclosed in rectangular plazas, hidden after porches but nevertheless maintained. Walter Benjamin in its essay on the concept of History gives a possible interpretation

⁶⁹ De Fausto's project for "Skanderbeg Square"

of the created situation, “to articulate what is past does not mean to recognize “how it really was.” It means to take control of a memory” (Benjamin, 2009). By isolating existing landmarks in the new environments, the Italian took control of former signs that were still part of the lives of the inhabitants of Tirana and vivid in their memories. Besides their sensitiveness, those signs had also some coincidences with the new regime, adaptable to its needs. After all fascism had too, its own dose of messianism. The minarets, the bell tower⁷⁰, once guarding over the bazar and potential holders and promoters of rebellious spirits were carefully sanitized behind the cordons of the arched porticoes.

After having experienced the deceptive arrest of “Skanderbeg Square”, and analyzed its projected future, it's time to proceed further through my itinerary corresponding to the path traced by Fascist Italy. I proceed toward the square of the ministries. This horseshoe shaped space before the boulevard of the empire, is another rare exception. The Architects of Mussolini didn't demolish the ensemble built after the will of Zog I. They unexpectedly preserved it.

5.4. The Unchanged junction of Corresponding Goals

The traveling around the horseshoe gardens in the square of the ministries is the same now as in 1939, and it still leads toward the straight southern corridor. It is the last segment built by Ahmet Zogu. I am at the exact junction of two juxtaposed spaces, the “Skanderbeg Square” and the Boulevard of the Empire. After leaving its past, now I am in the present of the city ready to approach its future, toward the former construction yard of the *New Albania*.

The awareness on the importance of this space was evident since autumn 1939 when the construction works for the boulevard and its buildings were at the very early phases. On those days the boulevard's space was still a flat clearing. Nothing elevated had appeared yet, its layout was only partially flattened. On 11 November 1939, [Figure 99] at the ceremony celebrating the birthday of the Vittorio Emanuele III, the authorities selected exactly this spot for their tribune. In front of them there were three grandiose and belligerent looking squadrons of soldiers wearing their combat metal helmets. They looked as an army that had just approached the center of the city through the boulevard, a path still taking shape. Between the soldiers, right in the

⁷⁰ The bellow of the Orthodox Church not the Clock tower of Tirana.

middle of the space and in front of the tribune was raised a sky-high pole, higher than the adjacent buildings of the ministries, weaving the flag of the Italian kingdom.

On November 28, on the anniversary of the Albanian Independence [Figure 100], less than three weeks after celebrating the king, the very same spot was included in the celebratory itinerary. In this day another flag makes its appearance, a present from Italy to the Albanians, it is red and black and there is a double headed eagle in it, but the former Albanian symbols are not alone, they are included in between two *Lictor Fasces*. In the photographs made for the occasion the Viceroy Francesco Jacomoni is portrayed unfolding the new flag and showcasing it to a peaceful crowd on the flanks of the empty space of the future boulevard. Later on that day, very close to the spot where, before was standing only the Italian flag was raised the new Albanian flag, the new symbol under which the Albanians would march from that day, aligned within the path of the empire. I am in the spot where the transition in between two Tirana's happens.

The first Tirana belongs to the past, to a recent past and not to the now remote ottoman years. A past shaped by a king that decided to build its capital next to the old city, in proximity to the bazaar and its numerous alleys. I am in a bottleneck were the path of the New Tirana started, where the radial center becomes a linear city finalized by the Real Palace. Here started his empty stage, the passage from the past and present of Tirana and the connection in between the structures of the state oriented by the detached center of the sovereign.

The second Tirana instead is being developed along the boulevard, beyond the old center of the Zog I and the older center of the Sultan. It has a new inception. It is based completely on a path, within which even "Skanderbeg Square" is just a sequence, an ensemble of compact and monumental buildings, each one representing one of the components of the fascist state. The bottleneck easily reconverted to the new goals. It was a transition point in between past, present and a future still in progress. And it was also one of the passages from one component of the state to another. The goals of the two regimes were corresponding in this junction and therefore changing it was pointless.

5.5. The Image [Boulevard] of the Empire⁷¹

I am now entering the boulevard, [Figure 101] designed by the very same architects of “Skanderbeg Square”, Ivo Lambertini, Ferdinando Poggi and Gherardo Bosio. The latter was probably involved in the design of the buildings and the final Littoral Square.

The instant the open space, longer than the course I have traveled so far, is opened to me, it becomes obvious that there is more to it, even though most of it is disclosed almost immediately. I perceived the totality of this space from the very moment I approached it. Without even setting my first step inside it, the end of my path is already clear in front of me. The meaning of this path was underlined by Mussolini in his speech to the visiting Albanian delegates consigning the Albanian crown to Italy: *“Your presence here signs the beginning of a new era for your people that enters – as an equal – in the imperial community of Rome”* (Mussolini, www.adamoli.org, 1939).

From where I stand the space seems ready to be used. The boulevard is hollow, I can see its blueprint following a light depression and then ascending again smoothly toward the final square. Maybe it was planned or it was a fortuitous coincidence but the result is perfectly fitting to the criterions of the oblique perspectives of the Renaissance. Helped by the natural topography of the former meander of the river, the gently curbed boulevard eases down its own perspective and allows the viewer to have a partially lifted view of the path to be followed. The people walking there, the potential crowds, can be seen unobstructed form up close and from distance as well.

This space makes the perfect avenue for celebrations, for celebrating anniversaries, as the independence of the country, the king’s birthdays or the anniversaries or its kingdom, for the military parades of the Italian armies, for saluting them toward further conquests. This space is long and large, enough to host rows of parading soldiers and their heavy machinery, there is plenty of space on the sides as well, for the large cheering crowds. This avenue though, won’t be the stage for the ceremonials of the people that initiated it, either Zogu, Vittorio Emanuele or Mussolini. Although they lacked the time and never saw their project completed, the Italians

⁷¹ Project from Ivo Lambertini

tried to gradually include the spaces of the boulevard in the frequent ceremonials organized in Tirana's places of public display. However it didn't overcome "Skanderbeg Square". The first time the Boulevard of the empire was included in an official ceremonial, was on the occasion of the first anniversary of the Albanian annexation **[Figure 102/Above]**. Only one year later the works were already in an advanced state. The honor to give the first speech on the future Littoral Square was given to Ciano, the main architect of the forced political union. He is seen speaking in front of hundreds of workers and party officials. The first time the space of the boulevard was open to a public procession was on December 1940, for the funeral of Xhaferr Ypi, the Minister of Justice of the puppet Albanian government **[Figure 102/Above-middle]** ; the first parade on the almost finished boulevard, was held on 28 November 1942, in the 30th anniversary, of the Albanian independence. The ceremonies were not extended to the entire space of the boulevard because its final segment, of the Littoral Square was still in progress; Only on May 9th, 1943 the boulevard was finally used as a whole, for the anniversary of the institution of the empire **[Figure 102/Below-middle]**. The final sequence of the boulevard made the perfect stage for celebrating the crucial event of the Italian Empire; the last time the venue was used by the Italian administration was a few days before the capitulation of September, on 20 August, 1943 **[Figure 102/Below]**. On that special occasion the military unit of the *Cacciatori Albananesi* was founded. Alberto Pariani, the Italian General, and viceroy that replaced Francesco Jacomoni, consigned the official flag to the new unit. The ceremony started at the Littoral Square, at the end of the boulevard. The parading armies, proceeded north along the completed trace of the monumental axis. They were greeted by the party and army officials from the platform designated in front of the newly built Hotel Dajti. The procession continued through enthusiastic crowds within "Skanderbeg Square" until it was concluded in front and inside the Town Hall.

But there's another aspect to the boulevard, mostly belonging to the places along it and especially the western flank, a stripe starting behind the bottleneck of Zogu and extended to the riverbed of Lana. Their location contiguous to the field of the weekly bazar was perfect for provisory uses **[Figure 103]** **[Figure 84/8]** and therefore these places seem to have the same seed of impermanence. In the past the large fairs extended to these areas, and later on, the only sport field of Tirana was located here. In the photographs of the Luce they are documented quite often

as the adjacent boulevard progresses: the spaces behind the ministries of Zogu, and the former Albanian parliament, were a privileged location for improvised amusement parks. A few meters from the field of the weekly bazar and several decades later, in 1940, the very same scenes of Tirana's inhabitants amused by the view of wooden carousels, were repeated. In the images is shown also the evolvement of these spaces, modern carousels were added and more people were participating. Among the riders there were even Italian soldiers probably enjoying a short leave from the front; further south the field extended parallel to the first segment. Here other mundane events took place. On September 1941, dozens of workers, were photographed working for the instalment of the scenography for the nomadic theater *Carro de Tespi*. The artistic troupe became the protagonist of Tirana. Large crowds were shown participating in their performances, and in no time, at least for some days, their bogus city shadowed even the adjacent Travertine Giants of the Boulevard; the last part of the stripe was still occupied by one of the sources of the nomadic spirit of the area. Few meters behind the sport field and along the riverbed of Lana was the historical Rom village. The small neighborhood of humble barracks, despite the growing pressure, of the Boulevard of the Empire, adjacent modern housing blocks and of the ongoing reclamation works over the river, outlived the Italian regime. On the eve of the last Italian year, the Luce institute has document the day, the trace of the boulevard was leveled out to the lower adjacent spaces. The above-mentioned estrangement of the western stripe from the new structure of Tirana's center about to changes. The camions filled with earth were shown frenetically trading places in order to fill the gap as soon as possible. As if it was an emergency to include in the domains of the boulevard the adjacent areas contaminated by the disliked impermanence of the everyday.

The king of Albania fled from Tirana on April 1939, pressured by the approaching Italian Army. At that moment the space of the boulevard although planned was still a large stretch of grassland. On September 1943, the very same Italian troops stationed in Albania were left drifting without leadership after the King of Italy fled Rome pressured by the allied bombardments. The efforts of fascism and Italy became suddenly pointless. In those days their "*Home Land died*" (Loggia, 2003), signing the end of an era, of a state that since its foundation was based on the promotion

of strong nationalistic values. With the dissolution of its structure the very same prerequisites for another historicist space ceased to exist.

The three and a half years invested on the implementation of the boulevard of Tirana, corresponded to the involvement of Italy in the Second World War and to its sudden and dramatic transition toward a democratic model of government. The defeat of the Italian army had consequences going way beyond the debacle of fascism. The very idea of the homeland founded on Unity was altered and with it the same Unity that the space of the boulevards was beginning to emanate in Tirana.

While making my first steps in the boulevard, I am crossing a space whose author has died but whose subject is still alive, ready to be reused by another regime. I progress further, in a space that is almost completed. The central road, the sidewalks, buildings and their connection to the ground, the rows of trees, the parks on both sides, the bridge right in the middle and in the lowest point of the path, are all contoured and almost completed.

The Project

The boulevard of the empire is perfectly contoured but uncompleted. It is mostly empty surrounded by untreated spaces, far from reaching the final designed form **[Figure 104]**. From where I stand, at the southern edge of the bottleneck, I see few building laying on its side. The first, on my left and east of the paved street is Hotel Dajti. The hotel is on the northern shore of Lana. Further away, it's the other building on the same side of Dajti, but past the river. This building hosts the offices of Luogo-Tenenza. It is the main executive institution in Tirana (Dell'Elba, 1997, p. 37), superior to the local Albanian Council of ministers, exercising the will and power of the government of Rome, of Vittorio Emanuele the III, and of course of Mussolini. Both buildings the Luogo-tenenza and Hotel Dajti are still alone waiting for the construction of the rest of the ensemble. Further away, at the end of my perspective is visible a concluded urban complex. It is the Littoral square, composed by the building of Casa dell Fascio, Albanian Opera Dopolavoro (ODA), the Albanian Littoral Youth (GLA) headquarter and the Stadium. The last place of the sequence was the first completed maybe to present the impatient Albanians with a concrete sign of the grandeur of the regime.

However, in order to understand the Boulevard of the Empire better in relation to what was already built, and to the project of “Skanderbeg Square”, again, an analysis of the projects designed for this space is necessary. The drawings signed from Ivo Albertini, show the complete work of the Italian empire, quite different from Zogu’s Gardens.

Minor Centers along the Axis

The plan of the Boulevard adds another perspective to the space experienced. The designed boulevard of the Empire was supposed to be quite different from the actual void of self-standing monuments. Lambertini envisioned an alternation of channel like spaces and sequential dilatations. These extrusions of the boulevards space created pauses, *minor centers* (Arnehim, 1977, p. 158) overlooked by buildings holding distinct functions **[Figure 105]**. From the comparison in between the project and the actual state of the boulevard left by the Italians, I understand that they were able to complete only these smaller centralities, distinct buildings dominating the respective squares. The sequence initiated in “Skanderbeg Square”, dominated by the bank of Napoli, was repeated several times.

Hotel Dajti was supposed to have its own anterior square and the same was foreseen for the Luogo-Teneneza headquarter. The completed buildings that I saw were in fact designed as recessed structures invisible to the eye until their respective square was approached. Despite the existence of these centralities, the unitary whole is preserved. The widenings were alternated by narrowing of compact urban fronts almost at the edge of the boulevard sidewalks. Their length is twice the extension of the dilated squares.

The dominance of the channel, the line and the symbolic path was thus maintained. The minor centralities of the boulevard were evenly aligned, dominated by the immobile and always visible center of Littoral square. The moment the visitor entered a square he was always accompanied by the ever-present visual of Casa Del Fascio at the end of the perspective. These smaller centers continued what was started on “Skanderbeg Square”, and they too were plots within the narrative of the Boulevard of the Empire. The concepts of “*seeing big and unitarily*” (Piacentini, 1942) already implemented on the sites of the International Exposition of Rome of 1942 (E42), were guiding also the development of Tirana.

A First Temporary Retardation

The walk, that started immediately after the bottleneck of Zogu and oriented by the ensemble of Littoral Square, was temporarily slowed down by the first square of the new Boulevard [Figure 106/3]. This first space was actually another ante square to the modern boulevard, asymmetrically widened on both sides. The buildings of the Postal Offices and the Theater [Figure 107] repeated here a similar relationship with the one previously created by the counterpoised Bank of Napoli and National Bank, on “Skanderbeg Square” [Figure 106/0]. This place further emphasized the interruption with the past sign of Zogu still hosting the leftovers of the Albanian institutions. The first was a “conspicuous example of the teasing baroque play the attraction and retardation of movement” (Arnehim, 1977, p. 159). The second was a straightforward interruption commanding the viewer to take a temporary look at the rationally articulated rectangular square and proceed forward toward the designed goal. The eccentric positioning of the square⁷² contributed further to the idea of action in which the fascist *doctrine was imminent* (Mussolini & Gentile, 1933). The signs of the fascist state and the traces of the Albania state were contagious but separated so one could separately confront them and deduce the evident conclusions.

The introduction of this pause, and of the following ones, produced the *temporary retardation* effect theorized by Rudolf Arnheim. This means, used also in music and drama before a “*new surge of power*”, activated contradictory sensations on the visitors walking in the boulevard: “Suspense derives from the temporary suspensions of action, *“The overcoming of obstacles similarly intensifies a walkers or runners striving toward his goal”* (Arnehim, 1977, p. 158).

Passed the first square, the visitor’s passage continued between a narrower corridor of compact buildings, the first of the sequence. This ‘*tension of constriction*’ created by the temporary narrowing enhanced the experience with further dynamism, which is about to be resolved in the other expansion dominate by the Hotel Dajti [Figure 106/4].

⁷² The square is pushed deeper on the eastern side toward the building of the Postal offices, while on the other side the theater is underlined by a smaller recess.

Diversity within the Authority ⁷³

The other minor center after the first square of the Post Offices and the Theater was Hotel Dajti. This volume was different from the rest, different from the buildings designed for “Skanderbeg Square”, or from the other buildings about to be approached on my walk toward Littoral Square. Hotel Dajti has⁷⁴ a different volumetric composition compared to the other buildings of the boulevard [Figure 108/Above]. It is made of two separated volumes on top of each other. The base is broad and elongated, adapted to the pace of the horizontal boulevard. The elevated volume is circumscribed in the volume of the base and despite its height has still a horizontal tendency. The limited verticality of Hotel Dajti’s expansion, gives to the building the dominion over the immediate surroundings, without prejudicing its subordinated role in the boulevard⁷⁵. The effect of Hotel Dajti is not a novelty, the buildings of the ministries build for Zogu, where also made of overlapped volumes. Similar dynamics were observed also in the mosque of Ethem Bey, along the first itinerary. However, Hotel Dajti presents some more particularities. The two volumes of the Hotel have a very distinct character.

The base, designed to host the more public functions of the hotel is heavier, dominated by the opacity of its walls rather than the vertical openings. The facades are coated with travertine layers conferring to the lower floors a sense of timeless monumentality. Around the windows appear classic style cornices, the base is further subdivided by a molded ribbon, and the corner of the base is slightly re-inflated at the junction in between the main and the southern lateral, façade. The base of Hotel Dajti despite its dominant sobriety shows signs of flirting with gaudy ornamental programs. This part of the Hotel is coherent to the new architecture of Tirana and perfectly fits to the canons of the new Classical, or the so called Stile Littorio, praised by Piacentini and his followers.

⁷³ Project from Gherardo Bosio

⁷⁴ The project for Hotel Dajti is described in present tense, because the building was already implemented in the time this itinerary takes place.

⁷⁵ The particular combination of volumes of Hotel Dajti was repeated in Hotel Tirana; built at the corner of “Skanderbeg Square” in the late 70s. The slim base and vertical elevated volume of the building erected during socialism has produced another effect, although through the same means. In fact, Hotel Tirana is a stronger landmark of the city compared to Hotel Dajti.

The upper volume of hotel Dajti is different. Instead of the costly travertine, cheaper and more pragmatic plaster is used. The volume appearance is faithful to the function its hosts. This part of the hotel, is the most private, made of continuous rows of rooms extending vertically and horizontally. The façade is lighter, created by the simple projection of the inner space of the rooms outside. The monumentality of the base isn't repeated in the functionalist elevation. The second volume looks much more coherent to the ideals of another cultural current of fascist Italy, the rationalists represented by renowned architects, Pagano, Persico or Terragni **[Figure 108/Below]**.

Hotel Dajti and its embodied dichotomy is the only representation of the *"aesthetic pluralism"* (Fuller, 2007), that pervaded fascism in its first decades, in Tirana. The long cultural battle fought by the two currents had, among the privileged venues, the pages of the antagonist magazines, *Architettura* directed by Piacentini and *Casabella* directed by Giuseppe Pagano. The inner cultural debate had its culmination in the project for E42. The project signed also the end of the conflict and the definite failure of the Rationalists. Giuseppe Pagano admitted defeat in one of his editorials, written when the E42 was already in an advanced state: *"victorious revolutions, in need of legitimation, crave to dress themselves with clothes representing the most orthodox of the traditions"* (Pagano, 1941)

Pagano further writes *"...We shouldn't go backwards; it's immoral to use concrete and then drown it inside invented forms, pretending to be existing walls"* (Pagano, 1941). These lines could fit very well into a potential description of Hotel Dajti, of a rationalist upper volume, trapped in the Monumentality of the lower one. The outcome of the *"babel confusion"* (Pagano, 1941) that surrounded the competition, design and implementations of the EUR, Rome's Universal exposition, *"produced a monumentality that was totally divorced form social reality"* (Frampton K. , 2007, p. 215). The defeat of the rationalist in the heart of the capital prevented any further debate in the periphery, including Tirana. Despite the ephemeral exception, the upper floors of Hotel Dajti and the Boulevard of the Empire were among the symbols of the victory *"of the sacred Roman tradition"* (Pagano, 1941).

A last diagonal Deviation

Along the rest of the walk the alternation of narrowing and widening's was repeated again. Passed the Lana River, channeled in between two concrete banks, there was another narrowing. Few minutes later another square was approached dominated by the other completed building of the boulevard, the headquarters of Luogo-teneza [Figure 109]. The architects of the boulevard were quite careful in not repeating the same *"small visual shock"* every time. They always changed the spatial dynamics. The first square of the Post offices was extruded more toward the eastern side of the boulevard, the second widening was rendered special by the presence of the wide channel of the river. The third square has its own distinct particularities as well.

Luogo-teneza headquarters was another discovery of the walk along the boulevard, supposed to be hidden by the preceding narrowing. There, recessed on the eastern side of the path (exactly as Hotel Dajti) laid the most reserved building of the itinerary. All dressed in stone, without apparent volumetric escalations. *"While normally mobility is linear and forward oriented"* (Arnhem, 1977, p. 152), here this was changed. Probably a conscious concession made to the Second important⁷⁶ building of Tirana.

The Luogo-Teneza had a decentered entrance, placed forward at the opposite side of the visitor's entrance in the recessed square. The entryway was emphasized by a giant bas-relief and by a vertical full-height narrow opening connected by a long elevated balcony. Eccentricity was introduced again, as the viewer was pulled diagonally forward by the decentered center on the façade of Luogo-Teneza [Figure 106/6]. For a moment, he would be in between the just perceived diagonal pull and the straight forward pull of the ever present Casa dell Fascio. The sense of adventure and power created by the contemporary action of two centers was only temporary. Passed the center of the square of Luogentenza, the diagonal pull was immediately counter balanced by another diagonal posed on the opposite side. This further pull came from another sequential square, placed on the other side of the boulevard, dominated by the Headquarter of the Army. Both these minor centers were soon counterbalanced and the main center at the end of the perspective was again alone and unquestioned. What was created by

⁷⁶ The first was Casa del Fascio

the partnership of Lambertini's plan and Bosios façade of Luogo-Teneza, was an ambiguous effect, as a deviation from the overall direction that could create spatial confusion" (Arnehim, 1977, p. 153).

However, this was not the case. The image of Casa dell Fascio was well impressed on the walker path since hundreds of meters ago, since the origin of the itinerary. It was visible from the *Headquarter of the Grenadiers* on the northern extremity of contiguous boulevard Vittorio Emmanuele, and from Skanderbeg's square junction with boulevard Mussolini. It was clear that it was the end of the path, and no retardation, or deviation could shadow its importance. The dynamics created from the architects were probably aimed more toward showing the action-driven, dynamic spirit of fascism, to illustrate its past and future historic path and the components of its society and state that would render the triumph of the empire possible.

"Skanderbeg Square" represented the economy of the fascist state, The Post Offices, The Theater, the Art Gallery and Hotel Dajti, Its efficiency, culture and hospitality. Around the diagonal squares of the Luogo Tenenza and the Command of the Armed Forces, there were other institutions representing the Political Center, The Healthcare and the military might of the regime. Further, away, on Littoral Square, there were other institutions, devoted to the ideological education of the youth, working class and of the fascist society as a whole.

The boulevard I analyzed and experienced represents the fascist state. Zogu's Civic "Skanderbeg Square", controlled by the distant Center of the real Palace through the empty stage of the monumental gardens were also a representation of the Albanian monarchy. The Italians altered and adapted the traces of the local monarchy to their idea. They reshaped Tirana through the will of Mussolini by extending the structure of the state beyond "Skanderbeg Square", to its environs and along the boulevard of the Empire. This vision is reconfirmed through Mussolini's own words: "(The state) leads men from primitive tribal life to that highest expression of human power which is empire...Whoever says "fascism" Implies the state".

"When we see the image of a king, we react, or we tend to react emotionally, as if the king himself is presented" (Freedberg, 2013), this is what the historicist center of the Albanian capital is, an image, it was conceived as such since the beginning. The image of the center was in the Dome of the central Ethem Bey Mosque, in the Monumental plazas of Brassini, the gardens of De Fausto

and the Urban Plans and Buildings of Lambertini and Bosio. On the next section I will experience the last sequence of the boulevard that it is none other than an Image of Fascism.

The Final Act⁷⁷ (Littoral Square)

I look again at the approaching building at the end of my perspective. Its large mass was perceivable since the beginning of my walk, when I was kilometers away [Figure 110/Above]. I could not catch the details of its materiality, the texture, but its essence was already there. Its size and symmetry were among the first elements noticed. It is probably larger and taller than anything else manmade in the surrounding landscape; it is probably taller than anything ever built in Tirana, or Albania, up to date. The shape of the rolling greenish hill behind its body, instead of clouding it, creates a darker tonal background underlining the whiteness of its mass. The ratio in between the voids and the planar mass and the resulting shades of grey of the façade are clear and visible from far distance.

This building stands alone. Its standing is very different from that of the building of the municipality left behind. The former was alone unbalanced only temporarily as a piece of an uncompleted ensemble waiting for a twin counterpart on the opposite corner of “Skanderbeg Square”. Its disequilibrium was one of the reasons for its planned destruction⁷⁸.

The white building at the end of the boulevard looks autonomous. Independent enough to maintain by itself the entire front of a square, yet to be discovered [Figure 110/Below], to hold alone the main perspective of the city, to seal both of them. It is not by chance that this building main traits are made to be seen equally from up close, from “Skanderbeg Square”, or the opposite corner of the boulevard. This building gives meaning to the narrative of the boulevard. Without it, the axis would be just an abnormally large road leading nowhere.

Tirana is already familiar with straighter and larger streets and the resulting deeper perspectives. In the decades left behind many new streets were juxtaposed to the structure of the older urban

⁷⁷ A Project from Gherardo Bosio

⁷⁸ Other thesis on the reasons of the planned destruction of the Town Hall were treated before. However, it seems plausible to add to the reasons of its imminent demolition, the fact that the northern side of the square was uncompleted. ON the contrary, the southern side, here named as the bottleneck of Zog I or the square of the ministries, already fully completed was included in the plans of Lambertini.

fabric. Kavaje⁷⁹ and Durres⁸⁰ Street are among the axes shaped mostly by the intent of connectivity, their function, the traffic they were supposed to hold, their outer destinations were more than enough to justify their striations. The boulevard in front of me is different, it goes toward one of the many hilly areas around Tirana, and it has no relevant destination. Function wise it leads nowhere. On utilitarian bases, its construction was unreasonable. This is not the monumental garden designed by the Albanian King, but an axes packed with administrative and cultural buildings, finalized by the *House of the Fascio*⁸¹. The boulevard I traveled and the building at the end of the perspective are embodiments of the fascist state, ideologically retied to the *Lex Romana*. In his 1924 speech to the citizens of Rome, Benito Mussolini addressed a similar issue, *“And here it’s the Fascism in front of the issues of the Capital. I like to divide the problems of Rome, of this XX century, in two categories: problems of necessity and problems of grandeur.”* (Mussolini, 1924). These words of the Duce confirm the reasons behind the boulevard of Tirana. This axis eventually leads somewhere, not by the intended connectivity, but because of the necessity of grandeur.

It leads toward the tall, white and symmetric building at the end of its perspective. The destination gives meaning to the path leading to it, and so does this building to the boulevard. The destination needs a clear path in order to be approachable, and this is what the boulevard does. It opens this building to the other parts of city, making it the new center of Tirana. Before transitioning further, I am already well aware and doubtless, of the imminent phase and the path I followed so far. I am already in a space which reason of being goes beyond its functionality and lays within the domain of historicism.

I finally approached the last sequences of the last itinerary. Guided by the central volume of the Casa dell Fascio, I enter in the space of its rectangular square **[Figure 111]**. The space is empty, devoid of added centralities. I am again in an empty stage, designed to leave the surrounding architectonic allegory free to express itself. The entrance to the square occurs through an interruption on a large horizontal wall. The concept of the *temenos* already introduced by

⁷⁹ Boulevard Mussolini

⁸⁰ Boulevard Principe Umberto

⁸¹ Casa Del Fascio, the building at the end of Tirana’s boulevard and now hosting the headquarters of the University of Tirana.

Brassini, reappears here. The threshold I just stepped leads to another space, whose significance, is again vested with holiness.

The travertine wall has another volumetric conformation on its opposite side. Inside the square, the wall is transformed into rows of terraced steps. They are long and continuous and embrace most of the northern side of the square and partially its lateral sides. They start in the segment where the channel of the boulevard enters Littoral Square and they bend orthogonally until they reach the other lateral building of the square. Through this privileged platform of the steps, I can finally sit down and enjoy from different frontal perspectives the benefits of the autarchic spectacle on the other side of the square. I am in a stage **[Figure 112]**. Seating on the travertine northern terraced Cavea, I see at the large steps leading to the main building, the large platform extending from its base and the central balcony positioned at the geometrical center of the façade. The space in front of me is the *Proscenium*, where the different rituals of the authority are played. The Casa Del Fascio is the *Scaenae Frons*, of the stage, designed as the unchangeable and perennial front of the stage.

On my back is the traveled path, in front of me the center of the structure, and further way the background of nature reappears again. Nature already subjugated in the past, by the founder of Tirana, or by the geometrical gardens of Ahmet Zogu, is again adapted to the needs of a man made place. The white and autarchic ensemble of Littoral Square is surrounded by the docile southern hills of the capital, by masses of round pine trees and pointy cypresses. A classic scenery is recreated, mindful of the regions where Rome was first originated and of the conquered Mediterranean domains. This nature is the re-staged primitive setting from where the spirit of Rome first actualized into the Roman state (Hegel G. W., 1991).

Only after reaching the center of the square, I have a clear overview of its complexity. Sideways two important buildings delimit the square. On the western side is the Headquarter of the O.D.A.⁸² **[Figure 113/Above]**, the institution envisioned to organize the free time of the subjects of the empire. In its circles and venues, the adult citizens of the regime were invited to organize the rest of their day after work, in a healthy ideological environment, away from the triviality of the everydayness. What the architects of the regime tried to do to the fabric of the bazar and to

⁸² Opera Dopolavoro Albanese.

the Rom village in the adjacencies of the Boulevard, the institution of O.D.A. did to the individual man, *“the latter is deprived of all useless and possibly harmful freedom”* (Mussolini & Gentile, 1933).

On the eastern side lies the other lateral building of Littoral Square, the headquarter of the G.L.A⁸³ [Figure 113/Middle], another institution devoted to the ideological education of the citizens through the norms of fascism. This venue was dedicated to the youth, to the younger generation of the regime. The center of the building is empty, the stone is dematerialized by an open space, sustained by elegant but firm columns. The columned passage leads to the other square, marked by another building.

At the end of this new perspective orthogonal to the main axis of Littoral Square lays the low horizontal façade of the stadium [Figure 113/Below]. In the other square in front of the stadium, nature is present again. It participates in the space through one of the sides of the plaza, wide-open toward the southern hill of the city. Its setting has similarities with Foro Mussolini in Rome, *“positioned in the suitable hollow hillside of Monte Mario, where once Villa Madame was built as a solitary witness of the art’s among silent forests, where the dense vegetation suggested the classical backgrounds surrounding the theaters and stadiums of antiquity”* (Piacentini, 1933). The stadium of Tirana, like the athletic complex of Rome, are both expressions *“of the importance given by the regime to the formation of the character of the new generations...a new direction in the education of the Italians through the character of the everlasting Rome”* (Piacentini, 1933).

From the center of Littoral Square, I am now fully aware of the character of this space; the common fulcrum of educating the citizens of the empire connects all its components [Figure 114/Above]. The orthogonal space connecting the Stadium the GLA and the ODA, is rendered almost visible by the perceived horizontal vector connecting the three buildings. The vector starts from the rusticated front of the stadium [Figure 114/Below/5], raw but perfect for extracting the *materia prima* of the regime. The body of the subjects was first prepared, through harsh physical training; the vector is processed further through the porous colonnade of the headquarter of the Littoral Youth [Figure 114/Below/6]. Here action is extended to the spirits and minds of the young citizens, raised with the ideals of the regime. The vector is lastly projected on the central

⁸³ Gioventu Littorea Albanese.

recess of the ODA [Figure 114/Below/7]. Here the education of the citizens is completed solidified within the rigid windowless travertine skin and the daily activities organized inside the cuboidal building. Littoral Square is the mold through which a fascist is shaped.

From the center of the square I turn again toward Casa Del Fascio [Figure 114/Below/9], the center of the structure, sustaining the whole, the boulevard of the Italian Empire [Figure 114/Below/1] and the shorter but firm axis of the ideological education. The final reflection is on Casa Del Fascio, the headquarter of the Albanian Fascist party. Despite its relative integration with the rest of the structure, Casa Del Fascio dominates the whole as the regal palace of Zog I, planned on the same spot, was supposed to do. Similarly, the fascist sign is unique and composed by a central volume, the intermediate proposals of Bosio suggesting a twofold center were rejected [Figure 115]. Following the example of De Fausto, Bosio elevated the volume on the foot of the hill, and further helped the vertical action with the monumental steps leading toward it. The square façade, clad entirely with rusticated stone, is a “metaphor for temporal and spiritual power” (Arnheim, 1977). The heavy building transmits a sense of calm and dignity. The pull of gravity is neutralized by the vertical central volume and the recessed horizontal wings, organized along the Cartesian axis. The raw appearance gives the idea of an archaic being, an earlier presence compared to the rest. In a way it is, it is the house of the Idea, from which the rest of the social and spatial structure was conceived.

The base of the central volume is sustained by three large round arches⁸⁴, the Roman structure par excellence (Luciano, 2001). The dark arched recesses stand out after the long walk along facades of exclusively squared openings. They are the dynamic but strong foundation on which the regime is elevated. The round arches spread their vectors in different direction but they are ultimately enclosed and balanced within the squared frame of the façade contours, “*the centrality of the tondo tends to lift the subject matter above the weightiness of the human condition by evoking religious transcendence...the square, with its allegiance to the gravitational grid, shares the ability of rectangular formats to report solidly about existence in this world*” (Arnheim, 1988, pp. 96-97). The meticulousness of the project is disclosed also by the ratio of the rectangle of the central body. The division of its height (30m) and width (20m), is 1,45, the exact

⁸⁴ Maybe an abstraction of the Roman *Triade Capitolina*, or Triumvirate.

average of the golden section ($34/21=1.62$), and the preferred ratio for pictorial representation ($5/4+1.46$) (Arnheim, 1988, p. 63) . Probably, the architect, conscious of the perspectival distortion on the volume, decided to give a further ascend to the compacter 5x4 ratio, closer to the golden section, in order to avoid the risk of producing a stubby volume.

The ambiguity of the distinguished lower arches makes the transition from the lower to the upper body of the building more fluid. The porous base is followed by an overhead closed façade, which weight is further emphasized by its coarsen surface. The first delicate interruption of this wall is done by a row of five rectangular windows. These openings have the exact ratio of the main volume and retake the motives of the other administrative buildings of the boulevard. The elongated continuum of the five windows, strengthened by the continuous loggias on top of the lateral façades mark the horizontal golden section of the central volume. In the crosscutting of the horizontal golden section and the vertical line of symmetry of the Casa Del Fascio, is projected a Balcony, The Balcony. Its protrusion is contained, small as Mussolini's Balcony on Piazza Venezia. Different from the large platform on the ground floor this space is reserved for the leader, the head of the fascist party. The balcony is the locus of public display of the dictator whose will shaped the wide-open spectacle of the New Tirana. Above the balcony the rusticated façade proceeds, interrupted only by a final row of smaller arches, also the final complement of the volume, contained and controlled by the latter.

Almost at the end of the preset itinerary, I look again at the square around me. The buildings on Littoral Square are surrounded by space and not densely aligned as the other buildings of the center. In this scenery the closed building of Casa Del Fascio looks even more forbidding (Arnheim, 1988). I look again at the arcades of the base, and in them, I see the traces of the metaphysical spaces painted by De Chirico. Behind them, in semidarkness, the cosmic space is present, "*a cosmic drama that is vital for the development of man, and that forces them within it spiral*"⁸⁵ (Calvesi & Mori, 1988). The winning proposal for the Palace of the Italian Civilization in Rome was a literal realization of De Chirico's '*The enigma of the Hour*'. The mood of the painting, the architectonic language, its materiality and its separation from social reality (Frampton K. , 2007, p. 215) were embodied in the design of Giovanni Guerrini, Ernesto La Padula and Mario

⁸⁵ The quoted paragraph, is from de Chirico, and describes the architectonic backgrounds in Giotto paintings.

Romano. The same spirit, apart from its rough skin, pervades the building of Tirana. The polished surfaces of the arcades of De Chirico and of the Palace of Rome, speak of a metaphysical domain transcending time, and of a higher civilization transcending history. The small Albanian nation although on the right path, is not complete yet **[Figure 116]**.

On April 12 1939, in front of the crowds, on the balcony of the modest Italian embassy, Count Ciano revealed the mission of Italy: *"I hereby reaffirm the will of Italy, to lead the Albanian nation, from today tied to the destinies of Rome, toward a new era of progress and civilization"*. Four years later the will of Italy was partially imprinted in the center of Tirana and fully realized in Littoral Square. Toward south, on the hill behind Casa Del Fascio, a circular plaza was designed but never realized. Hidden to the walker, it was designed as the real finalization of the path. Its position outside the structure of the boulevard, brings back Brassini's first proposals for Tirana, and the already addressed discussion of a sign symbolizing the connection of God with the sovereign. In this case, of God and the path of the empire. The revived scheme is coherent with the aims of the Empire, after all Fascism was self-defined a *living religion*, the universal in all the past doctrines guiding the *human spirit* through the ages of history (Mussolini & Gentile, 1933).

5.6. The Aftermath

In the days following the Italian surrender, the vacuum of authority in Tirana was immediately counterbalanced by the armies of Nazi Germany. They found a capital in the making, the trimmed ottoman bazar, the interrupted "Skanderbeg Square" of the Albanian King and Mussolini's interrupted Boulevard of the Empire. They did not show an interest on continuing the large public works of Italy and limited themselves to the administration of the country in relation to their broader strategic vision of the ongoing war. Hermann Neubacher, a Nazi diplomat involved in Balkan matters and former Mayor of Vienna described its first impression of Tirana: *After a nice flight over the magnificent and wild mountains, Tirana with its minarets came into view in the green valley at the foot of Mount Dajti"* (Neubacher, 1956). One century after the first documented visit of Edward Lear, Tirana's first impression still preserved its original traces, the mountain, the valley and the Mosques. Certainly, the historicist structures of Zogu and the Italians were strong but not enough to eradicate Tirana's survived Genius Loci.

The German left on 17 November 1944, pushed away by the Allies' pressure and by the Partisan Guerrilla, commanded by Enver Hoxha. They left behind only military fortifications and few road signs in German script. Hoxha, the man that was going to control Albania for the next decades until death in 1985, entered the capital, through the former ottoman itinerary described in the second chapter of this thesis, which is also the same reversed path traveled by the last Albanian ruler, Ahmet Zogu during his escape from the capital.

On the morning of 28 November⁸⁶, on the 32nd anniversary of the Albanian independence, the communist leader decided to stage his triumphal entrance in the capital. Meanwhile the German Armies were about to complete their retreat on the northern Albanian borders. The most important day of Enver Hoxha's life, started in the southeastern city of Elbasan. From the balcony of "Hotel Moderno", still preserving its Italian name he saluted the crowd before departing for Tirana. In his path, he was guided by the traces of the recent man made⁸⁷ battle. In his memories he described his symbolic interpretation of the passage over the German scrap: *The victors proudly passed through the broken armies and waste of the defeated, of the invaders*" (Hoxha, 1977, p. 470). From the Road of Elbasan directly to the center of Tirana, Enver Hoxha's convoy finally entered the capital, his capital. The eastern itinerary was reviewed again, by the Partisans, bearers of an ideology centered on the eastern side of Europe, the distant Moscow. After five centuries of ottoman rule oriented by the center of Istanbul, and 32 years after the declaration of their independence, the Albanians were again, about to turn their back to the western part of the world.

On his way along the old streets of Tirana, Hoxha saw the almost entirely destroyed Old Mosque and the beheaded minaret of "The Ethem Bey Mosque". Obviously, the fronts opposed in the battle for the capital, did not care that much for these old messianic Islamic signs, probably to them just leftovers of a primitive past. The trace of the founder, The Old Mosque of Sulejman Pashe Bargjini was never rebuilt. Its ruins were cleaned and on its location was erected the

⁸⁷ The south-western hill of Tirana, the hills of Krraba where the location of a conspicuous bombardment of the Allies over the retreating German convoys.

statue of the “Unknown Partisan” the sign of the communist come to power. The nearby grave of Kapllan pasha, the leader of the Toptani, survived.

The Partisan commander concluded his day in front of another hotel built by the Italians, Hotel Dajti **[Figure 117/Below]**. There, on an improvised platform looking at the boulevard, he read the long speech announcing the new regime. He choose the very same locating used by the Italian General and Viceroy of Albania Alberto Pariani **[Figure 117/Above]**, few weeks before the final fall of Fascism. From his semi-elevated position, he could see at the boulevard, the Luogo-Tenenza, Casa Del Fascio and the other buildings of Littoral Square. Toward north, he probably saw the nearby-completed ministerial ensemble of Zogu. While speaking to the citizens of Tirana, the future dictator probably enjoyed the view of the space in front of him, almost perfect for the needs of his growing authority, and added: *“We shall give anything for power⁸⁸, let’s strengthen it, so we can rebuild our country”* (Hoxha, 1977, p. 472). The stage was mostly there, he had only to complete it, corresponding to the image of his regime. On that day, over the traces of the Ottoman Empire, of the short-lived Albanian political pluralism, of the self-proclaimed King Zog I and of Fascist Italy, started the new historicist signs of the Albanian Socialism.

⁸⁸ He speaks about the power of the People.

5.7. Chapter 5 Figures

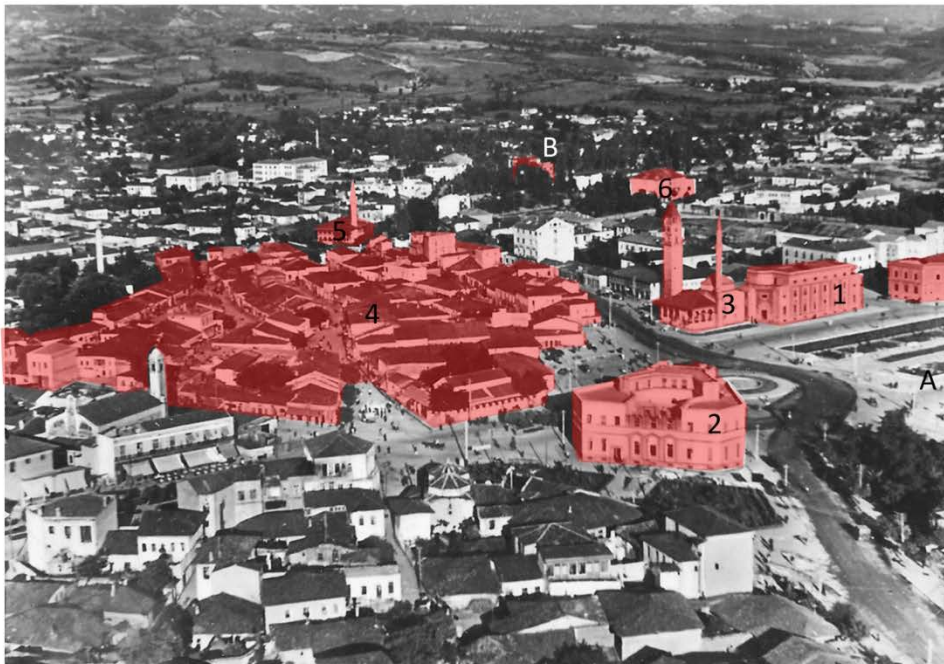


Figure 81. Again the reversed Itinerary. Tirana. April 1939. The procession from the Parliament to the Italian Embassy on the day when the Albanian crown was offered to Italy. The delegates of the Parliament paraded through the former's sings of Tirana. From the Parliament [A]. They passed through Skanderbeg Square in Between the Ministerial ensemble [1], the Town Hall [2]. They proceeded along the Ethem Bey Mosque [3] and the Bazaar [4]. In front of The Old Mosque [5] they turned right. This time the procession avoided the Real Palace [6] and went toward the end of the destination, straight to the Italian Embassy [B]. Schemes Credits: Endrit Marku.



Figure 82. The Transition of Power from the Albanian Parliament to the King of Italy. Tirana. April 1939. The Albanian Deputies proceeded toward the parliament flanked by an exited crowd [1]. They enter the parliamentary chamber [2]. The Union with Italy is voted unanimously and declared by the head of the assembly [3]. The deputies leave the chamber, proceed along the historical itinerary of Tirana, to the Italian embassy [4]. There they embrace as a whole Count Ciano, waiting on top of entryway stairs of the building [5]. The ritual is concluded with the speech of Ciano from the elevated balcony of the embassy [6]. Photo Credits: Luce Institute.



Figure 83. The Staged Revolution of Tirana. Tirana. April 1939. In the documentary of the Luce Institute the small group of Albanian delegated soon turns, into a large marching crowd, walking as a whole silently and aligned toward the new Authority. The scenes resembles the March of Rome, through which Mussolini seized political power in Italy. The events of that day were clearly staged to make it look, as if the transition was indeed what the Albanian people wanted. Photo Credit: Luce Institute.

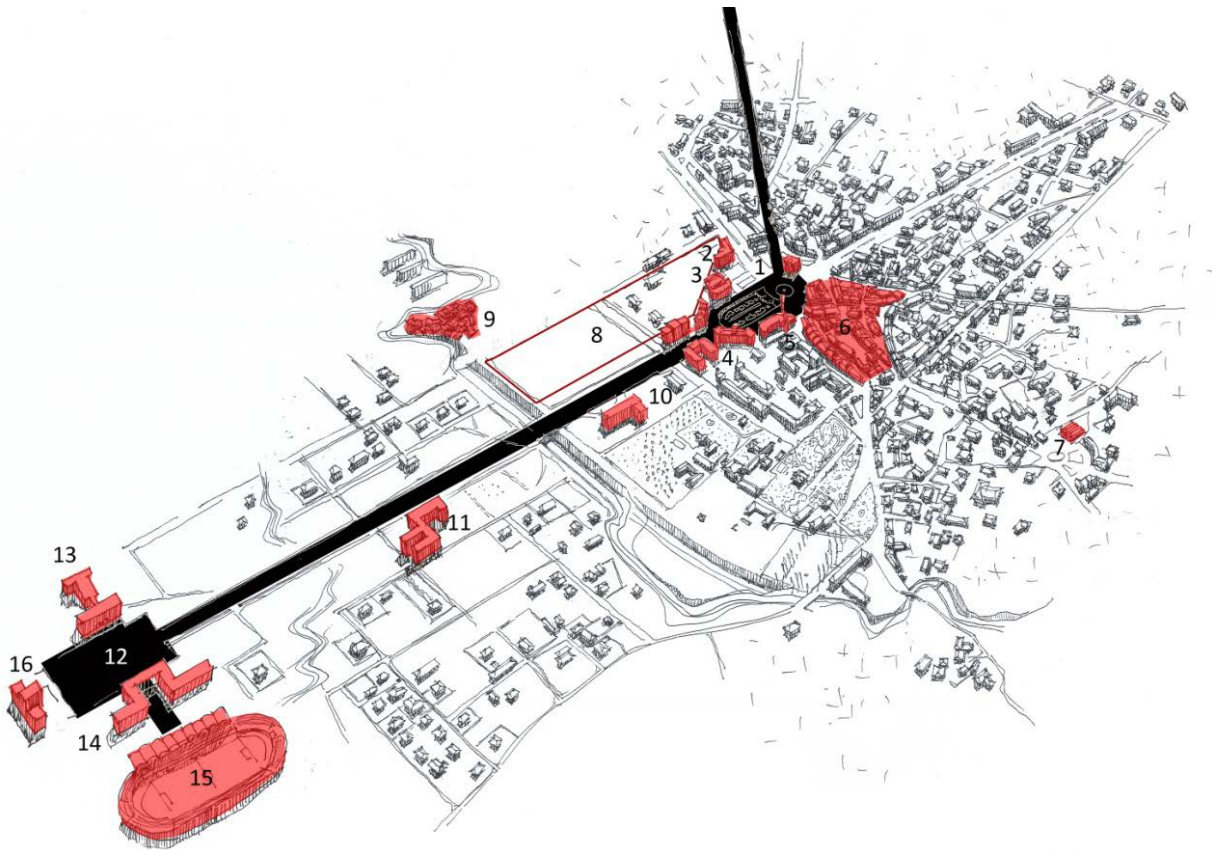


Figure 84. Through the readapted Historicist Structure. Tirana. 1939-43. the main axis is oriented from south to north [upper part of the drawings] Tirana after the Italian occupation. The square is entered from Principe Umberto Street, in proximity of the Town Hall [1]. Around its perimeter is the Bank of Albania [2], the former Parliament and here Council of Corporations [3], the Ministerial Complex and Bottle-Neck built by Zogu, the Ottoman Mosque of Ethem Bey [5]. Toward east still exists the Old Bazaar [6], while further east is the New Covered Bazaar [7]. Toward south is the uncompleted boulevard of the empire: Hotel Dajti [10], Luogotenenza [11], The Littoral Square [12] and its buildings, Opera Dopolavoro [13], Littoral youth [14], the Stadium [15] and the final Casa Del Fascio [16]. On the western side of the boulevard where located the areas for provisory activities [8] and the Rom Village along the Lana [9]. Scheme Credits: Endrit Marku.



Figure 85. The Italian Army Entering Skanderbeg Square. Tirana. April 8, 1939. The photo was taken at the end of Durrës Street [Quinn Mother Boulevard], soon to be renamed Principe Umberto I. Skanderbeg square remained the same, even when the Italian left, because their construction efforts were concentrated in the sites of The Boulevard of the Empire. Photo Credit: The Luce Institute

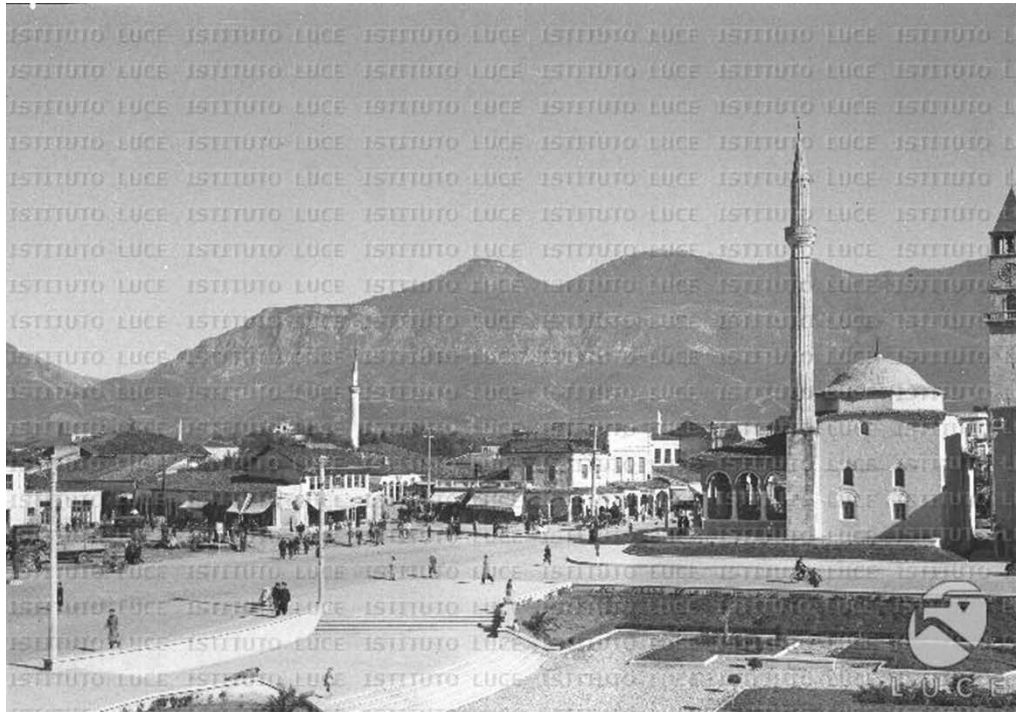


Figure 86, The Interrupted Skanderbeg Square. [Above] A photo of Skanderbeg Square in 1939. [Below] A photo of Tirana's center in 1943, showing an identical situation. Photo Credit: Luce Institute.



Figure 87. The Ongoing Boulevard of the Empire one year after the Occupation. Tirana. April 1939.
Photo Credit: Luce Institute.

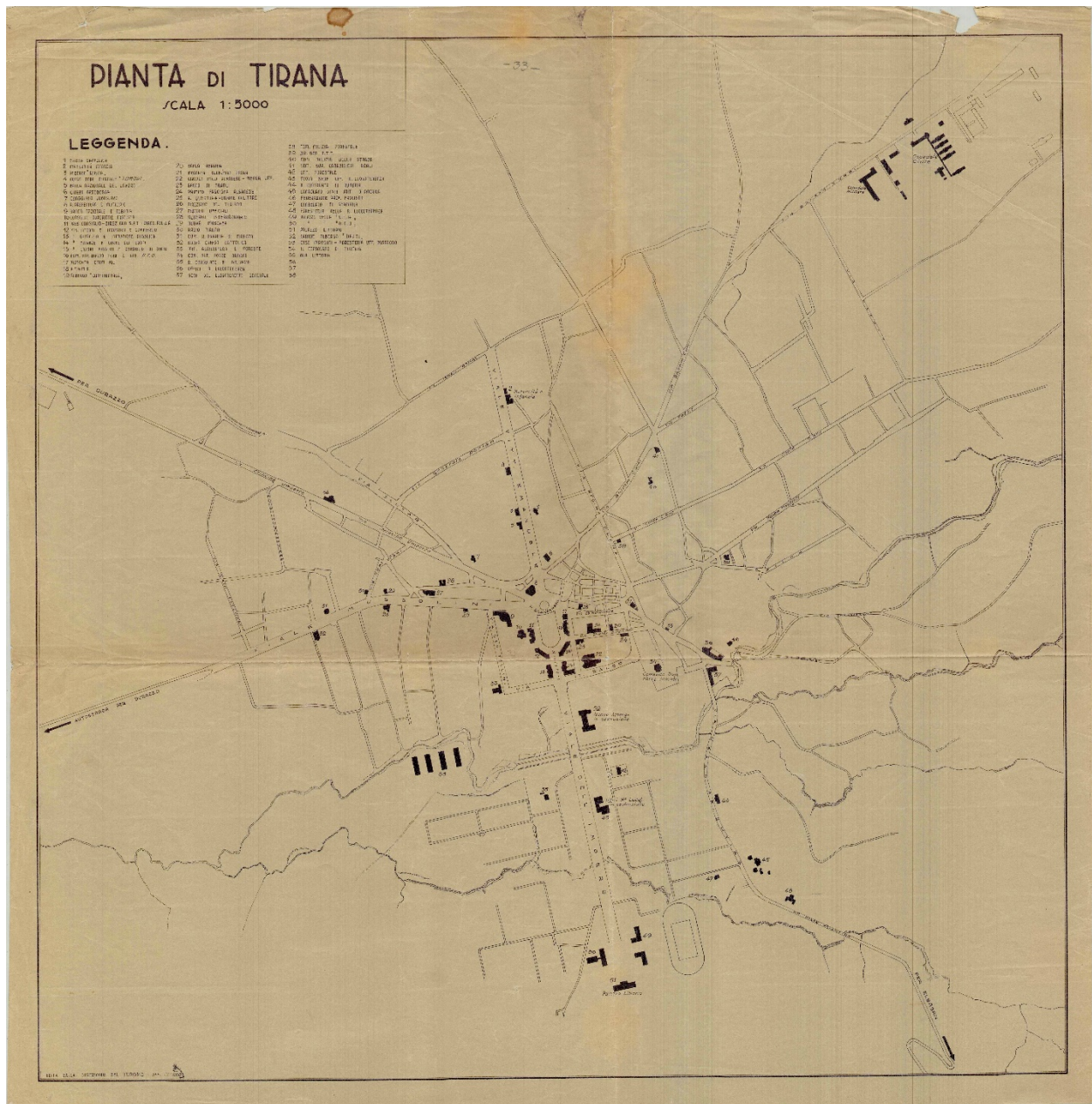


Figure 88. The Changed Name Streets around the Boulevard. Source: The Albanian National Construction Archives.



Figure 89. The New Plan for Skanderbeg Square by Ivo Lambertini. [Above] The Project [Below] Analysis of the Transformations. The Detoured P. Umberto I Boulevard [A]; The New entry-point of P. Umberto I Boulevard [B]; Boulevard Vittorio Emanuele III [C]. Boulevard Mussolini [D] enter the square at point [E], becoming the new Decumanus [F]. The Joint Vectors of Boulevard Mussolini and Vittorio Emanuele III proceed along the Cardo of the Boulevard of the Empire. Juxtaposed to the drawing of Lambertini is the old layout of De Fausto [7]. The Bank of Albania [2] that in the new plan becomes the western front of the square was counterpoised to the Bank of Naples on the eastern front [1]. Other Added Buildings were the Insurances Institute Headquarter [6] and the New Town Hall [3], replacing the Old [7]. The ministerial complex [4] and the Ethem Bey Mosque were included in the future plans but the old Parliament was removed [7]. Scheme Credit: Endrit Marku; Original drawing: The Albanian National Construction Archives.



Figure 90. The Model of Skanderbeg Square designed by Ivo Lambertini. Source: The Albanian National Construction Archives



Figure 91. The Cardo and Decumanus of Tirana. The original drawing is from the Regulatory plan of 39-43, designed during the Italian Occupation. The scheme is similar with the precedents and, shows again the envisioned central itinerary. The Cardo [A]; the Decumanus [B]; The Grenadiers Headquarters [1]; the concrete and symbolic breach of Mussolini Boulevard [3]; The rectangular new Skanderbeg Square[2]; The unchanged Bottle-neck [4]; the new centralities of the Boulevard [5]; The axis of education [6]; The circular plaza with metaphysical symbolic. Scheme credits: Endrit Marku; Original Drawing: The Albanian National Construction Archives.



Figure 92. The Bank of Naples. The most important Building planned on Skanderbeg Square. Source: The Albanian National Construction Archives

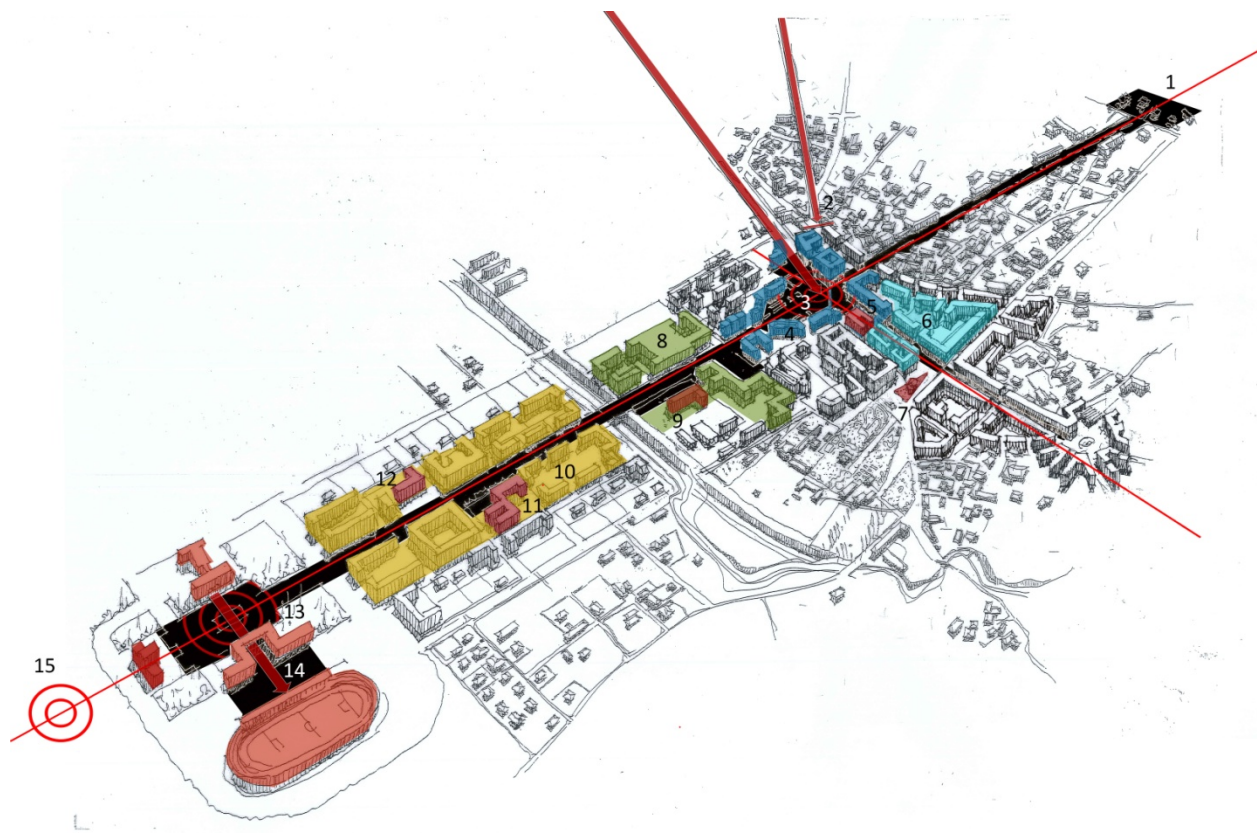


Figure 93. Through the Designed Historicist Structure. Tirana. 1939-43. the main axis is oriented from south to north [upper part of the drawings] the projected itinerary of the boulevard was supposed to start at the northern extremity, of Boulevard Vittorio Emanuele III, at the Headquarter of the Grenadiers [1]. Durres Street [Principe Umberto Boulevard] was detoured outside Skanderbeg Square [2]. Boulevard Mussolini [Kavaja Street] envisioned as the Decumanus of Tirana, became the privileged entry point to Skanderbeg Square [3]. From here the character of the spaces changed. Skanderbeg square dominated by the Bank of Naples Headquarters [5], was envisioned as new economic center of Tirana [Blue]. Toward east, on the site of the Old Bazaar [6] was projected a new district [light blue]. In between the new Constructions, the Old Mosque was preserved [7]. From the central Square, started the boulevard: the first in sequence was the existing bottle-neck of unchanging goals preserving the last institutions of the Albanian state [4];The second was the other district of the boulevard with services and cultural venues [8/Green], centered around Hotel Dajti [9]; Than followed the district of the Executive power [10/Yellow], centered around the Luogotenenza [11] and the Army Command[12]; the last sequence was the district of Ideological Education [13] centered along Casa Del Fascio and Littoral Square. Underlined [14] is also the shorter vector of education. Further south was planned the hidden circular center [plaza] outside the structure. Scheme Credits: Endrit Marku.



Figure 94. The Everydayness of Tirana. Tirana. 1942-43. these scenes are situated around the Bazaars of Tirana, in the New and the Old. The everydayness, normally excluded, was included in the reportages of Luce probably to transmit a sense of normality to the public. [Above] Daily scenes in new Bazaar. [Middle] Waiters racing along the 28 Nentori Street, [Below] Gamblers in the alleys of the Old Bazaar. Photo Credit: Luce Institute.

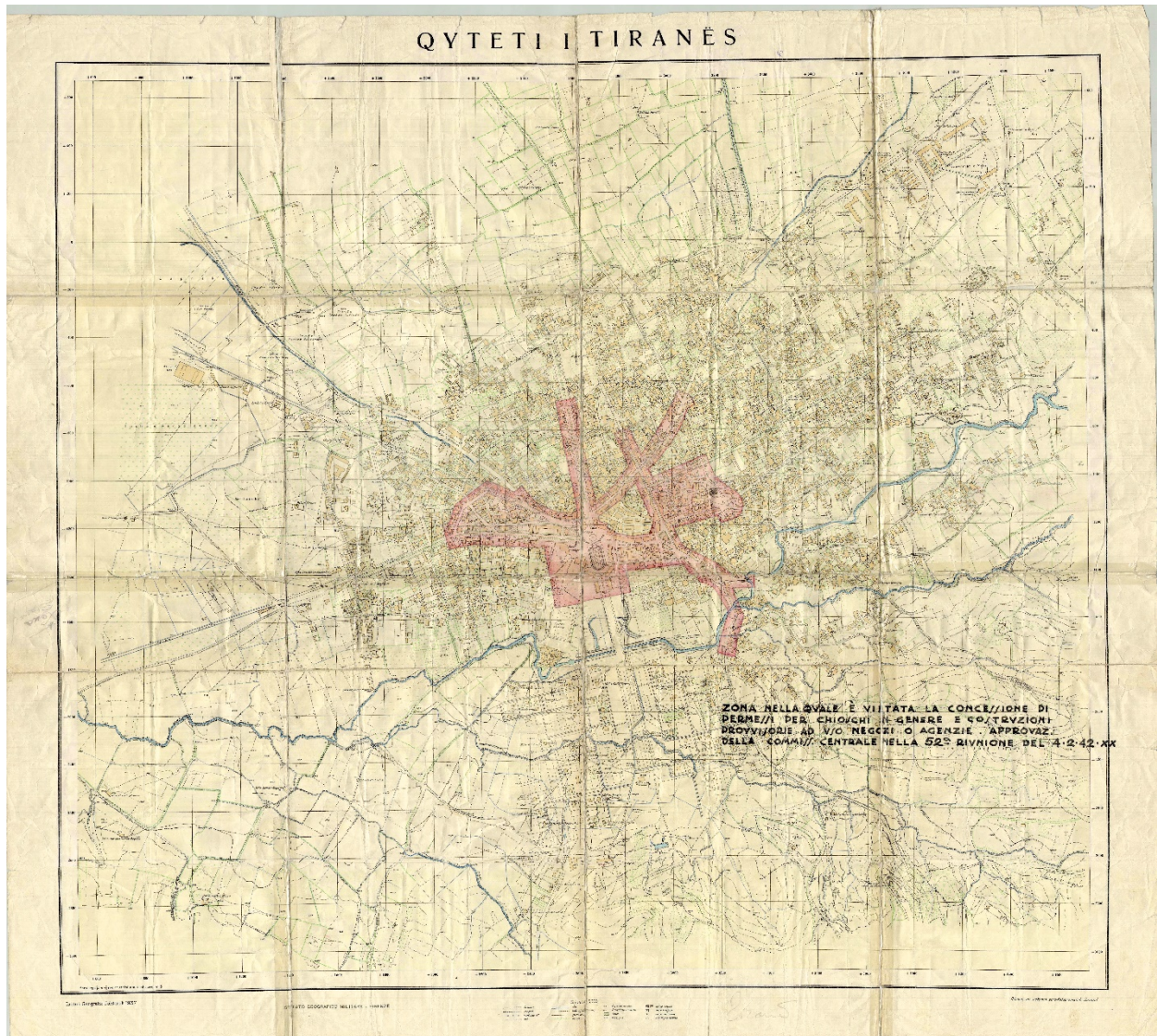


Figure 95. The subversive seed of impermanence. 1942. In this plan are traced the areas where provisional structures are prohibited. The old bazaar is an Island in an otherwise overregulated center. Source: The Albanian National Construction Archives.

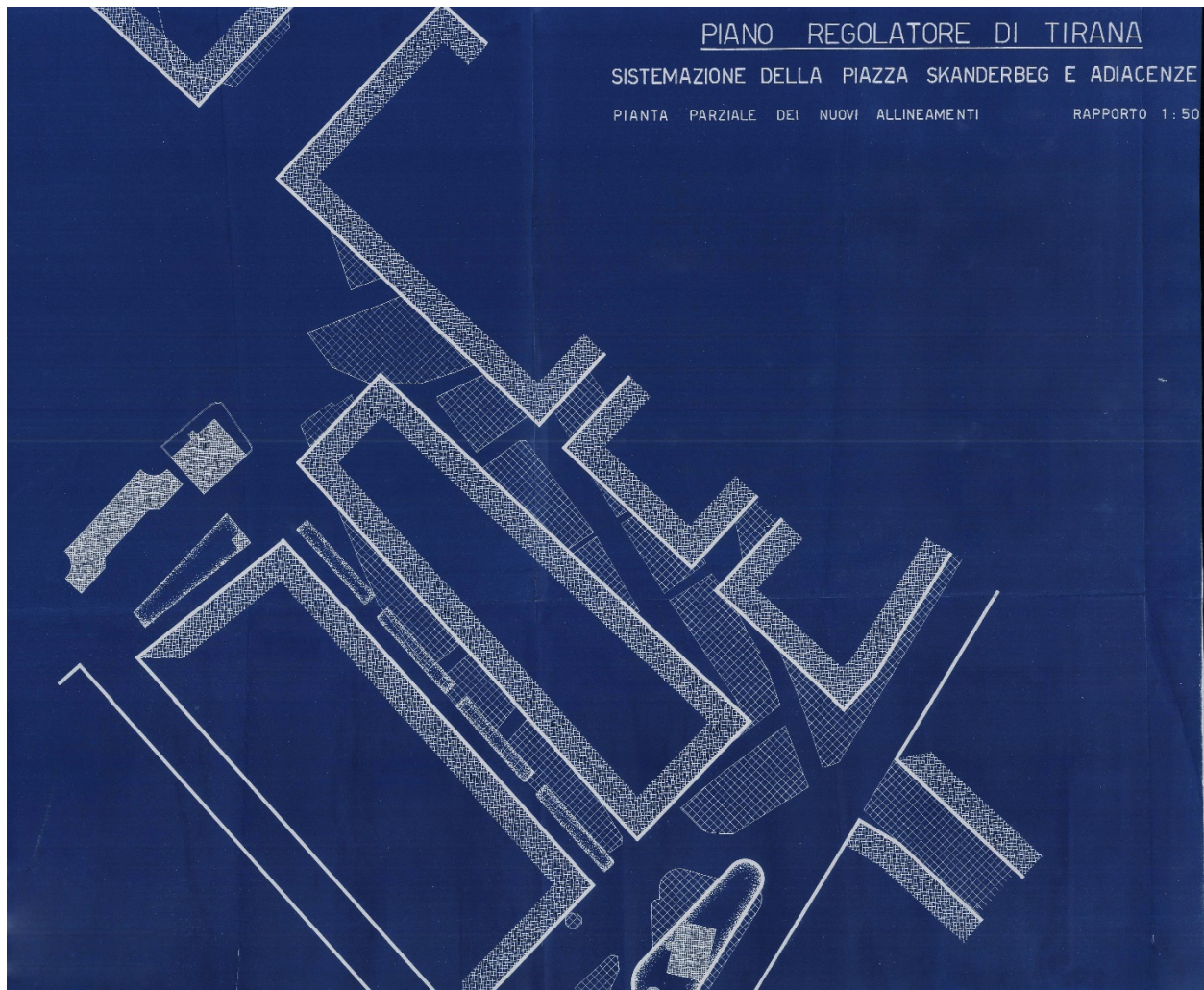


Figure 96. The structure of the New Districts over the structure of the Old Bazar. This drawing is also a last verdict on the bazar, which obviously wasn't in the future plans of the capital. Source: The Albanian National Construction Archives.



Figure 97. Church of San Bartolomeo. Prato. Work from Ivo Lambertini. The building's sober monumentality, the arches of the façade and the poorer materials, are a good example of the possible character of Tirana's Capital, especially of its more modest neighborhoods planned around the Travertine Monuments of the center.



Figure 98. Skanderbeg Square and Environs. Everything was going to be reshaped in the Center of Tirana, but its messianic signs of the past. However even them were carefully encircled as the later did in the past with the Bazar. Scheme credits: Endrit Marku; Original Image: The Albanian National Construction Archives.

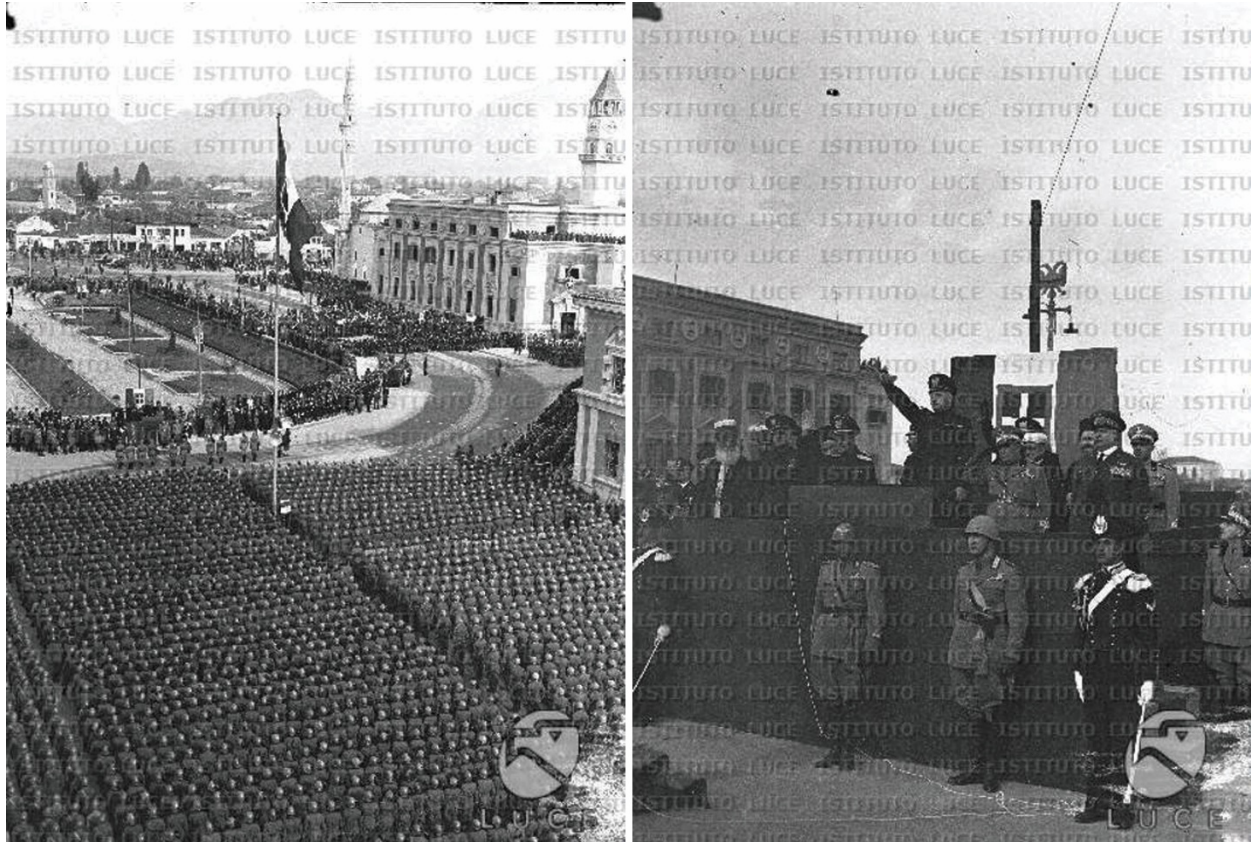


Figure 99. The Symbolic of the Bottle-Neck. The Day of the King. 11 November 1939. The Italian Flag is raised in the threshold in between the square build by the removed Albanian King and the Site of the Boulevard of the Empire. The Viceroy saluted toward the boulevard [still under construction], that represents the future. Photo Credit: Luce Institute.

Figure 100. Albania undertakes the commune path of the Empire. 28 November 1939. Few days after the celebrations for the King, Albanian is “gifted” with its new flag, designed with a double headed eagle in between to Littoral fascies. The Italian flag is removed and on the same spot was raised the new symbol of vassalage. The Viceroy, Jacomoni, show the flag to the void of the ongoing boulevard. Photo Credit: Luce Institute



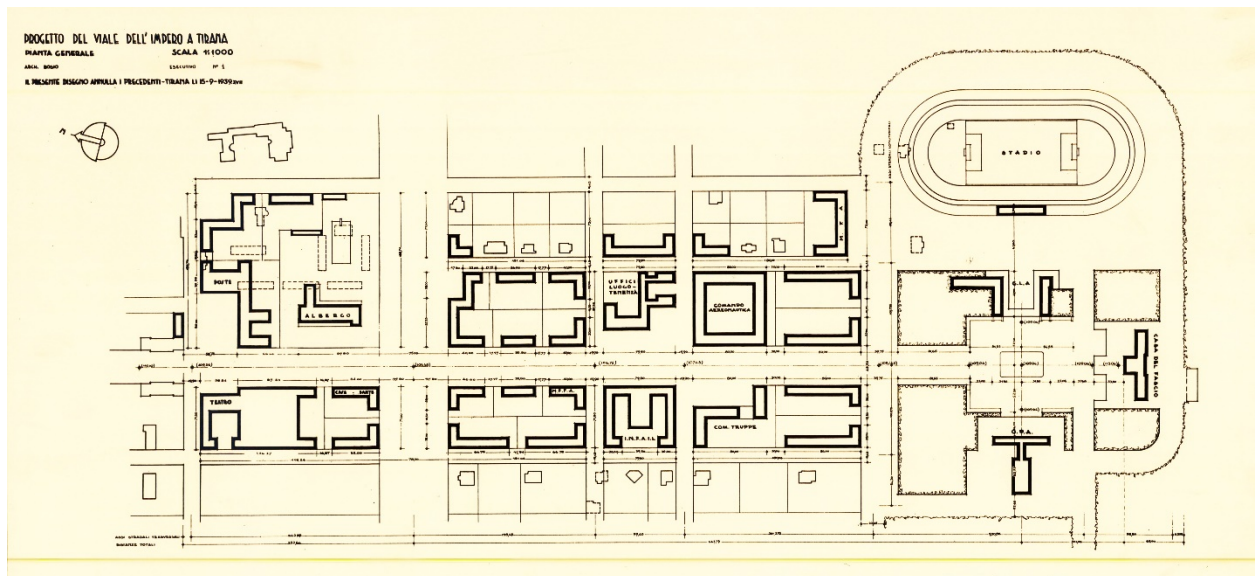


Figure 101. The beginning of the boulevard of the Empire. [Above] A photo made after WWII, probably in the late 50s where is visible the oblique perspective, created by the natural depression of the former mender of the Lana, channeled in the middle of the boulevard. [Below] The final version for the boulevard of the Empire by Ivo Lmabertini. Source. Albanian national Construction Archives.



Figure 102. The Few Times the Boulevard of the Empire was used by the Empire. [Above] The first time the Boulevard of the empire was included in an official ceremonial, was on the occasion of the first anniversary of the Albanian annexation. Ciano hold a speech in the construction site of Littoral Square [Above/Middle] the first time the space of the boulevard was used for a public procession was on December 1940, for the funerals of the Minster Xhaferr Ypi. [Below/Middle] May 9th, 1943 the boulevard was finally used as whole, for the anniversary of the institution of the empire. [Below] the last time the venue was used by the Italian administration was few days before the capitulation of September, on 20 August, 1943. On that special occasion was founded the military unit of the Cacciatori Albanesi. Alberto Pariani the Italian General, and viceroy that replaced Francesco Jacomoni, consigned the official flag to the new unit. Photo Credits: Luce Institute.

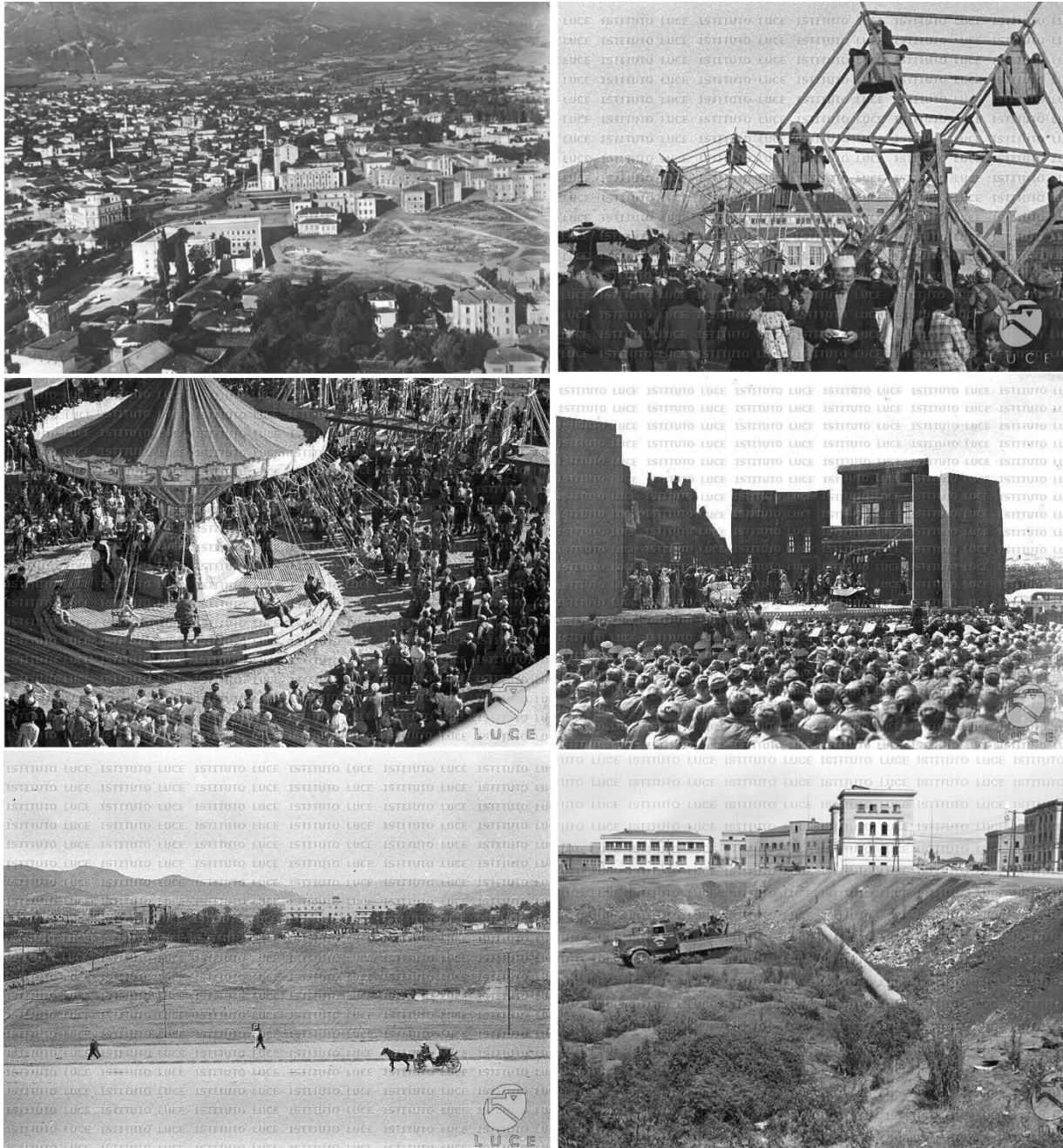


Figure 103. Other sites of the Everyday. [Above/left] The Area stretching behind the ministerial ensemble and on the side of the boulevard that was used for provisory activities. [Above/Right] An improvised amusement park behind the old parliament [Middle/left] Modern carousels at the same spot. [Middle/Right] The Provisory Stage of Italian theatrical troupe Carro Dei Tespi, placed along the boulevard. [Bottom/Left] The Rom Village, contrasting the already advanced trace of the Boulevard. [Bottom Right] The periphery of the provisory activities is realigned to the permanence of the Boulevard. Photo Credits: Luce Institute.



Figure 104. The Construction Sites of New Albania. Photo Credit: Luce Institute.

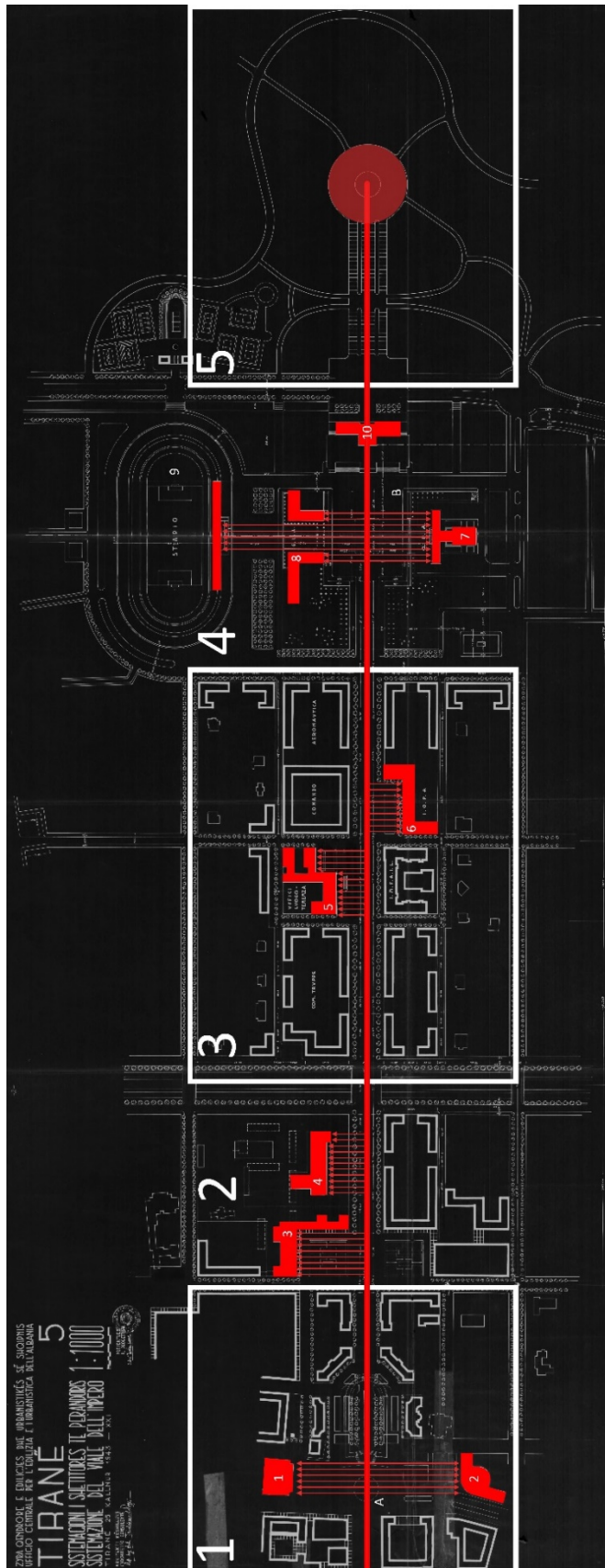


Figure 105. The areas and recessed centers of the Boulevard. [South is on the upper part of image]. Area 1: Economic Institutions and the last Autonomous Albanian Ministries. The main centers are the Bank of Naples [1] and the Bank of Albania [2]. Area 2: Services and cultural venues. The main centers are Hotel Dajti [3] and the Offices of the Postal service [4]. Area 3: Executive power and Army, centered around the Luogotenenza [5] and the Army Command [6]. Area 4: Ideological Education [13] centered on Casa Del Fascio [10] and the other buildings of the ODA [7], GLA [8] and the Stadium. Area 5: The Circular plaza on the southern hills. Scheme Credits: Endrit Marku; Original Drawing: Albanian National Construction Archives.

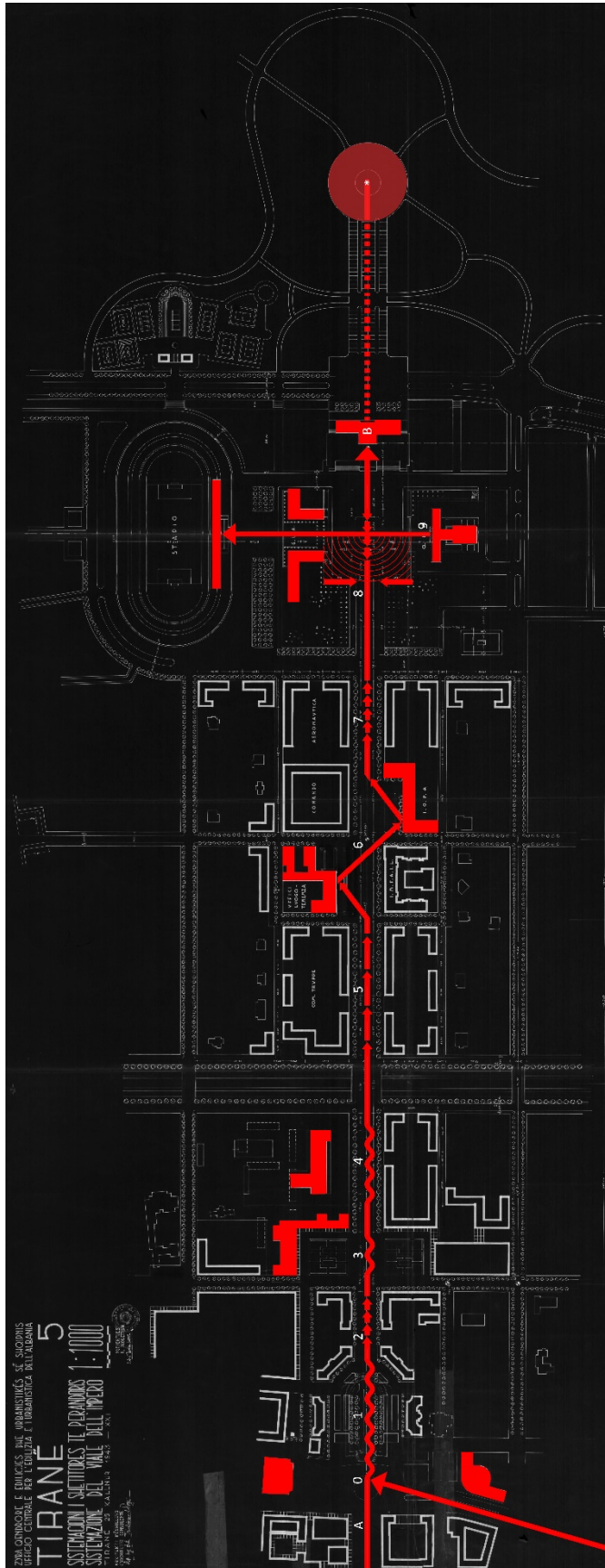


Figure 106. The carefully plane play of Vectors. [South is on the upper part of image] The vector Of Boulevard Mussolini creates the first change of the previous pace [0]. A first retardation is produced [1], followed by the first acceleration of the bottle neck. [2] Another subsequent retardation is created by the recessed Postal Offices [3] and Hotel Dajti [4]. Passed the Lana the narrowing of the built perimeter produces another, this time longer acceleration, that is further increased by the diagonal deviation [6] of the Luogotenenza and the Army headquarter. A further narrowing of the lateral buildings empowers even more the acceleration, up to the parietal wall of Littoral Square [8]. Here a counter effect is produced by the Casa de Fascio [B], the stairs on the other side of the parietal wall and the orthogonal vector of education [9]. Further away is the hidden center [*]. Scheme Credit; Endrit Marku. Original Drawing: The Albanian National Construction Archives.



Figure 107. The Entrance of the Boulevard of the Empire from Ivo Lambertini and Ferdinando Poggi.. The square of the Postal offices and Theater. [Above] The viewpoint is at the Bottleneck designed for Ahmet Zogu, looking toward the end of the new Boulevard. The balconied building on the right is probably the Theater. [Below] The Opposite view, looking toward Skanderbeg Square. The widening on the right is the square of the Postal offices, and further away is the Minaret of the Ethem Bey Mosque. Source: Albanian National Construction Archives.

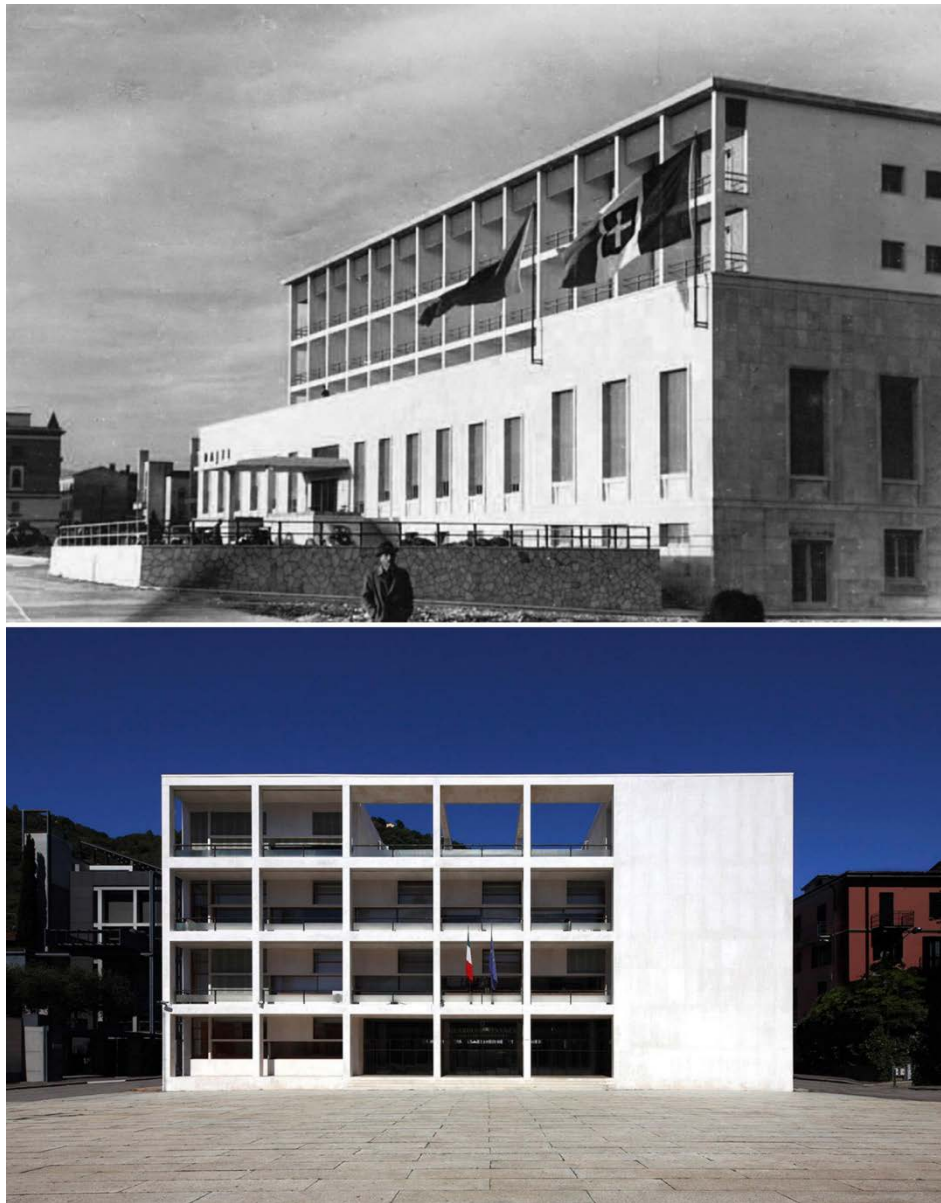


Figure 108. Hotel Dajti, a Minuscule concession to the Italian rationalist front. Fascist Italy finally choose the way of Piacentini, and the Boulevard of the Empire is an expression of the Mediterranean Monumentality, backed by him. However, other cultural front were quite prominent in the Italian scene. [Above] Hotel Dajti and the rationalist traits of its upper part. Tirana. 1943. Photo Credit: Luce Institute [Below] Casa Del Fascio from Giuseppe Terragni. Como. 1936. One of the higher expression of the rationalist front actively represented by Giuseppe Pagano. Photo Credit: Architetti.com



Figure 109. Luogotenenza Headquarter from Gherardo Bosio. The entrance is decentered in accordance to the diagonal forward oriented' succession of squares planned by Ivo Lambertini and never implemented. The building originally planned as the center of a densely build ensemble, at the end of the Italian occupation is still alone [the effect wanted but the Italian architects was never created]. Photo Credit; Luce Institute



Figure 110. About to Reach Littoral Square. [Above] Photo from the late 40s. In front of the Luogoteneza is the new construction site of the Albanian Labor [Communist] Party headquarters. [Below] The car-less boulevard in the 80s, the last meters before reaching Littoral Square.

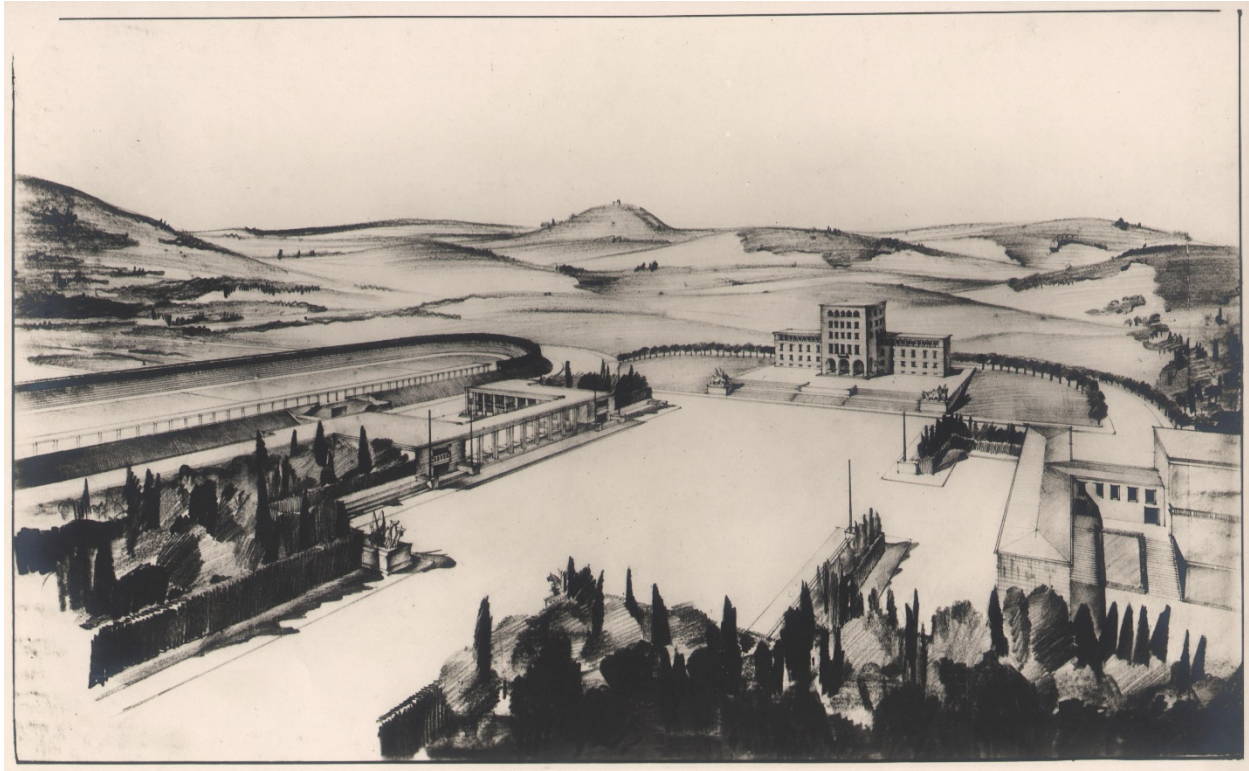


Figure 111. Bird eye view of the project for Littoral Square. From Gherardo Bosio. Source: Albanian National Construction Archives.

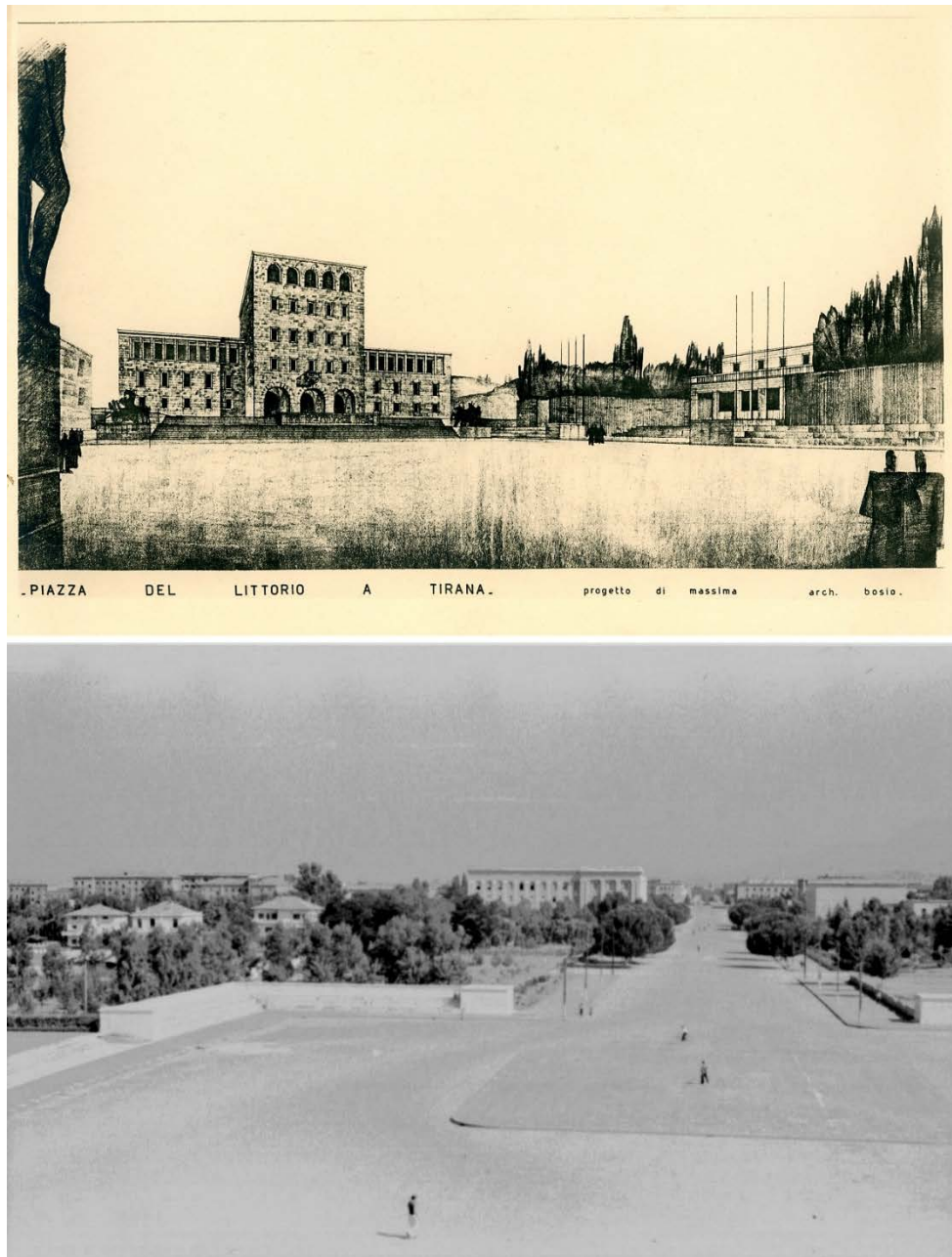


Figure 112. Littoral Square. [Above] Perspective drawing of the project. The viewpoint is at the lateral steps at the northern entrance of the Square, looking toward The [Proscenium] steps of Casa del Fascio and the monumental rusticated mass of [the Scaenae Frons] Casa Del Fascio itself. [Below] The parietal limit, both a temenos and Cavea for Littoral Square. Photo form the 50s. Source: Albanian National Construction Archives.

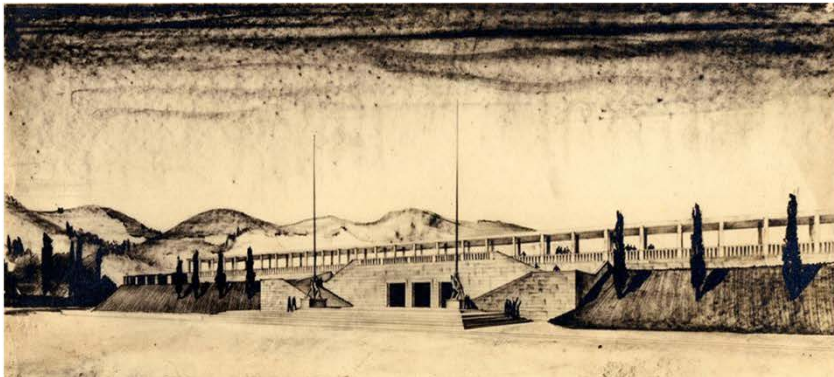


Figure 113. The Lateral Buildings of Littoral Square. [Above] Opera Dopolavoro [ODA], the final sequence of the education. The vector initiated at the stadium is impressed in its receded entryway. Source: Luce institute. [Middle] The Littoral Youth headquarters [GLA]. The intermediate stage of education. The vector initiated at the stadium is processed through its colonnaded passage. Source: Luce Institute. [Below] The Stadium, the place where the body is first trained and the martial character of fascism is instilled. Source: Albanian national Construction Archives.

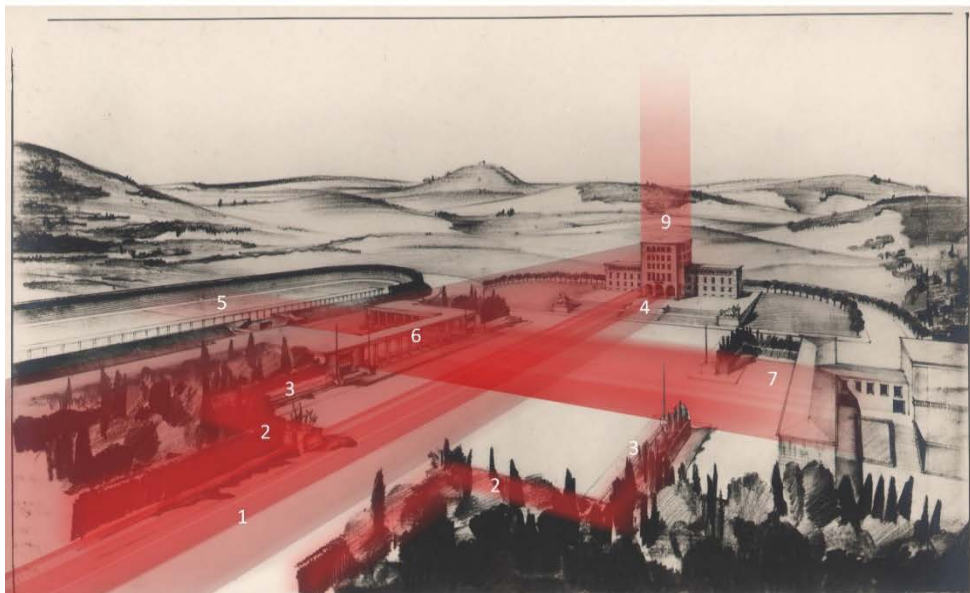


Figure 114. The Symbolic Vectors and Centers of Littoral Square. [Above] The vector of Education embodied in space. View of the sequence from the Stadium. [Below] [North is on the upper part of image]The Juxtaposition of the Vectors. The Vector of the Empire [1]; the parietal wall, Temenos [2]. The inner steps and Cavea [3]; ODA [7], GLA [6] and the Stadium [5] are the sequences of the Vector of education; The monumental steps, the Proscenium, of Casa del Fascio [4]; The Scaenae Frons, Casa Del Fascio, also the source of the vertical transcendence of the empire. Scheme Credits: Endrit Marku; The source of the reference drawing: Albanian National Construction Archives.

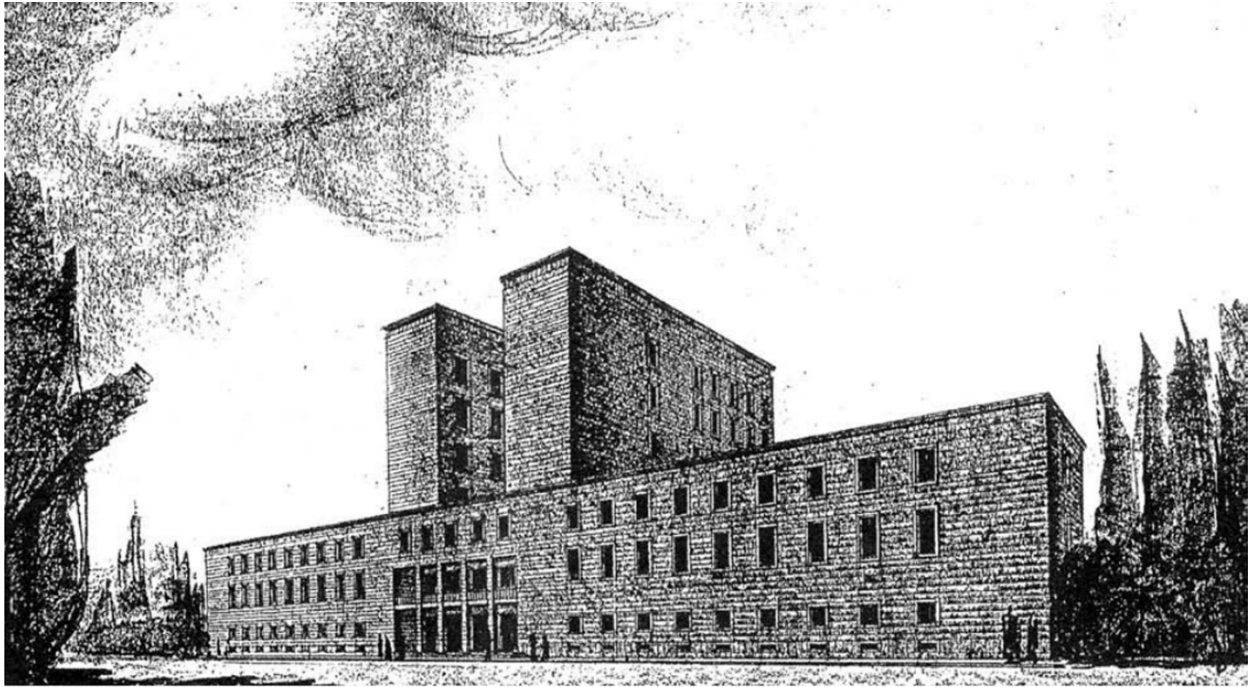


Figure 115. Rejected Duality of Centers. Intermediate proposal for Casa Del Fascio. The two towers probably were there to represent the ruling Diarchy of Italy, of Vittorio Emanuele and Mussolini. It was rejected because clearly every aspect of the Boulevard was based on idea of unity around the unique center of Fascism.

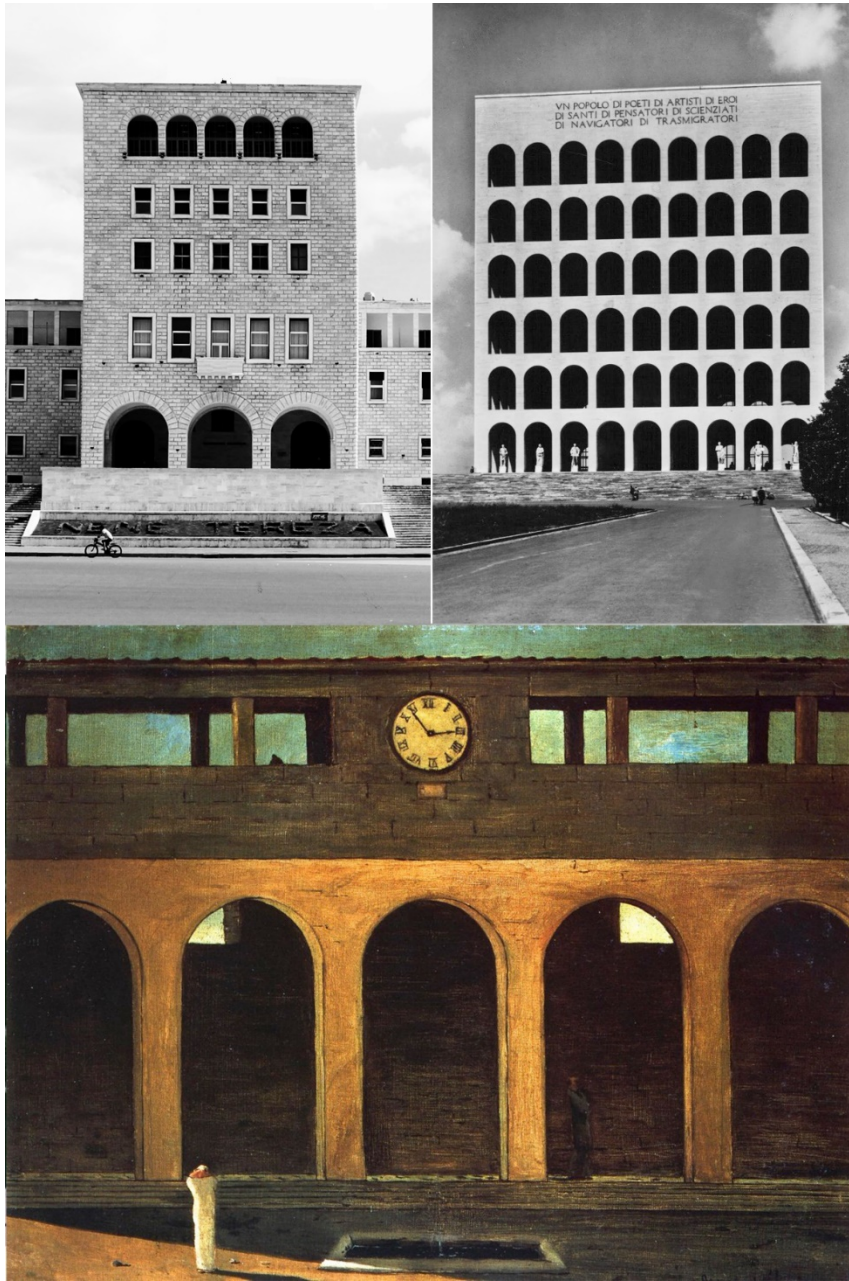


Figure 116. A Final Comparison.[Above] The Rusticated façade and the supporting wings of Casa Del Fascio of Tirana Speak of the long path still awaiting the Albanian nation [Above/Right] the smooth travertine and the self-standing cuboid of Palace of Roman Civilization in Rome speaks of a higher Italian civilization transcending history. [Below] The Enigma of the Hour. The polished surfaces of the arcades of De Chirico speak of a metaphysical domain transcending time.

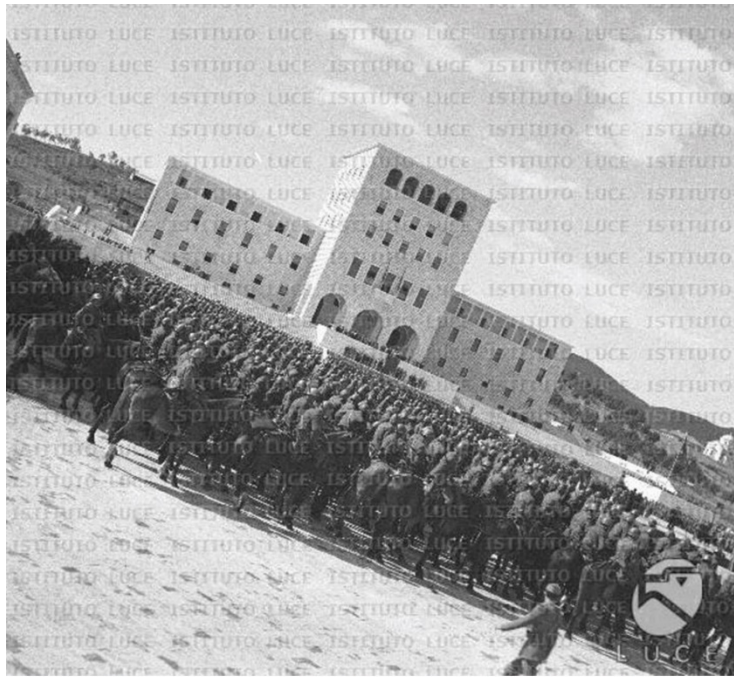


Figure 117. From one Totalitarianism to Another. [Above] The last Fascist ritual on Skanderbeg Square, few weeks before the final capitulation. Tirana. August 1943. Photo credit; Luce Institute. [Below] The Speech of the liberation. Enver Hoxha, the communist leader choose the linear boulevard for his inaugural speech before the citizens of Tirana He spoke form the same spot used by General Pariani on August 43, in front of hotel Dajti. Tirana. 28 November 1944.

6. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

My analysis over the itineraries of Tirana ended in 1944, after the final seizure of capital from the partisan guerilla. The final political gathering of Enver Hoxha at the side of the Boulevard of the Empire soon to be named "The Boulevard of the Nations Martyrs", ended a 330 years travel along the itineraries of Tirana.

On the First Itinerary:

I walked in 1912, along the south-eastern axis mundi of central Albania, from Elbasan to Tirana until I reached the ottoman core of Tirana. On this itinerary I encountered, scattered centralities, placed along the organically traced routes of the city. They were an expression of the individual aspiration of the local feudalist or other components of the ottoman society [as the guilds], nevertheless operating within the spiritual and physics domain of the Sultan's

On the Second Itinerary:

Then I walked in 1925 along the western route of Durres. On paths still undefined, that suddenly become important because of major, global causes, but that was still unprepared for the new role. As an example it didn't even have direct access to the Skanderbeg square. I encountered here the first signs of Albanian civic authorities, which were relentlessly being installed in the western side of the city. The eastern side, made of the still strong ottoman vestiges was still the actual center of the Town, however in the void field of the weekly bazar, a *sing-less space*, the first fracture and confrontation had already started, embed in the existent buildings of the Karapici Mosque and the New Parliament.

On the Third Itinerary:

I traveled along the same itinerary but on a renewed urban environment in 1939. I advanced on recently reordered rectilinear Durres Street {Named, Queen Mother}, toward a center visible from kilometers away cleared of the former uncertainties and surprises. I discovered the massive percement's on the northern ottoman fabric, which created the first ex-novo boulevard of Tirana, named after the king himself "Zog I". I reached the uncompleted Skanderbeg Square of the Albanian King, an ellipsoidal embodiment of his state designed by Florestano De Fausto

On the Fourth Itinerary:

Then I walked again on the path of Durres. Reached the interrupted Skanderbeg square I finally walked through the Boulevard envisioned by Gherardo Bosio. Only the final sequence of the boulevard was

completed, a squared void, surrounded by a carefully orchestrated ensemble of monumental buildings, shaped as the stamp that would imprint the subject of Fascism with a new conscience.

On the Short Itineraries of Authority Transition

Besides the main itinerary there were other narratives, mainly related to the transition of power, first from the republic to the monarchy and then from the Albanian monarchy to the Italian Empire. Both these short rituals, were developed along the former traces of the city. They both were started at the Parliament [sing of the Albanian independence], paraded besides the ottoman traces of Tirana's dawning an recent past, and concluded in the new centers of power, the first at the real place and the second at the Italian Embassy. Through this rituals the new authorities legitimized themselves in the eyes of the spectating subjects.

On The Itineraries that Were Never Actualized:

Lastly I analyzed other potential itineraries through spaces envisioned but never fully completed, as were the drawings of Brassini. In those designs was evident the ambition of the Albanian king to equal himself to the rulers of the Europe. The means and language chosen were those of Renaissance.

The perspectives of the monumental gardens and the Real Palace of De Fausto, represented the never actualize aspiration of sovereign to portray itself as center that was governing the structure from outside it. He was detached by the representation of his state [Skanderbeg square] through the "empty stage" of the gardens. From there he was supposed to control his capital as an almost metaphysical divinity. His control was less abstract than the control of the sultan but nevertheless detached.

The project for Skanderbeg square from Ivo Lambertini, or the Boulevard of empire itself, envisioned as monumental excavation on a densely build district of civic buildings but indeed just partially materialized as a void structured around some self-standing monumental buildings. Ideology and State were part of the same oneness as Fascism was the state.

Authority Creates Dependency over Man through the Installment of Order

Order is a prerequisite of survival. According to this thought, order would logically be what a human being unconsciously and then consciously searches. Society, apparently, is one of those "orderly arrangements, inbred by evolution" (Arnheim, Entropy and Art, An Essay on Order and Disorder, 1971) intrinsic in the human nature. Order is in us and for this in any human creation, as it is in the cycles of nature, in the

ongoing metabolism of our body and in the things, we produce. The ordered models that are supposed to make our life easier are a response to the very same individual needs in a social scale.

Ethem bey was a statement of Order. The stone walls, the ornamented porch, the beautiful carpets, the frescos, the chamber and the tall dome were reassuring for the people of Tirana, compared to the shabby outer cemetery, to the resilient argil walls of the dwellings, insecurity of the outer world made of famine diseases and wars. The same were the large boulevards and the geometric squares for the Albanian subjects used to the muddled ottoman labyrinths. In a way the travertine giants of Fascism were further adding's of an even superior order downsizing the previous provincial eclectics of the king.

Authority is expressed through Signs:

In this path, along the narrative of different Authorities I constructed my own narrative and consequently drew different conclusions. I noticed that the city is constructed around the signs of different authorities. Signs are a refined way of controlling society. They extend the control beyond the initial "physical seizure", the control through brute force or a detached Bureaucratic administering. Authorities construct their signs that are an embodiment of their will, of their ideology that are supposed to establish a communication with the consciousness of the citizen. Signs are built in gestures that might instill fear, respect, awareness on a commune goal, security or just appease the citizen needs. However their final reason is to, legitimate the authority, and make it unique in the eyes of its subjects, irreplaceable and why not permanent.

Space is Adapted to the Representational Needs of the Authority:

In the late years of the Ottoman Empire there were organized attempts to modernize its society. The impact was stronger in the center of the empire, but it influenced also the periphery. Before, the activities were held within the private residences, or the mosques or introverted alleys of the bazar. In between the XIX and the beginning of the XX century the first promenades and cafes appeared. Festivities and rituals started being celebrate outdoors. In Tirana the venues holding the seed of the new modernity where the street connecting the old Mosque to the Ethem Bey Mosque (Later renamed 28 Nentori), and the Field of the Weekly bazar [Later superseded by Skanderbeg Square].

The tendency toward the Open venues approached another level after the independence of 1912. In this year's for the first Time Tirana had a westernized square, the first Skanderbeg Square. The space was surrounded by hotels, restaurants and cafeterias, and the largest building of the city, the symmetrical Skanderbeg barracks". This was the venue where mundanity and politics mixed. The delegates of the Albanian parliaments frequented the cafeterias, and dwelled in the Hotel rooms. This venue was the

perfect representation of the chaotic but democratic Albania, it had the seed of impermanence of the bazar during ottoman times, and it is not by chance that the first Tirana's Coup D'état and the final triumphant parade of Ahmet Zogu, 1925 "Restoration of Legality" were staged here.

With the authoritarian turn of 1925, started the new process of reshaping the city. The authority designed its own stages. The former Skanderbeg was dismantled and another one was envisioned. The new extroverted venues were indeed large voids surrounded by Eclectic buildings. The new venues were perfect for the increasing ceremonials and rituals related to the state. The Birthdays of the kings, the anniversaries of the independence, or the reoccurrence of the instauration of the monarchy. The new places of the authority were designed as empty stages where the will of the king was rendered perceptible.

Through a similar historicist ideas, Tirana was again reconceived as another theater of the Imperial aspiration of Rome. The boulevard was the perfect venue for the large parades of the propagandized martial character and military might of Fascism. The balconies, first of all the balcony of Casa Del Fascio where the spots from where the masses were inspired, by the direct words of the leader.

Before the only balconies in town were the one of the minarets from when the call for prayer was extended to the rest of the town. Later one the central balcony was extended to all-important buildings, mainly to the ones having an important space in front. The small balcony became a podium for conveying public messages rather than a place for personal relaxation. Balconies were another element through which authority fills the void. The balconies of the minarets. The balcony on Hotel International, the balcony of the parliament, the Balcony of the town hall, the Balcony of the Italiana legacy and finally the Balcony of Casa dell Fascio are all the centers from where the Albanian theater of authority was staged in different periods.

Authority Might Even Aim At Shaping the Consciences of Men:

In describing the concept of *lordship and bondage* Hegel explains that the Lord is he whom has control on both his *self-consciousness* and of *itself conscious belonging in the other*. Therefore, he is entitled to the role of leader by controlling the others consciousness (Hegel G. W., *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1807). This concept of Hegel is embed in the Littoral Square. There the consciousness of the subjects of empire are shaped along the carefully designs architectonic sequence, starting at the large basin of the stadium field, where the raw material of unconscious youth is shaped first through martial education and then through cultural education. The inner space of the stadium is projected through the rusticated raw façade, proceeds through the porous colonnade of the Littoral Youth Headquarter and finally imprinted through

the recessed porch over the plain and solid façade of the Opera Dopolavoro. Here the platonic ideal class of warriors headed by the Philosopher King, dwelling in center of Casa Del Fascio was reconstructed through the language of space and architecture.

Smaller spaces are influenced even by the massive geo-strategic political shifts:

From east to west, to east again and again toward west, Tirana, since its foundation was a European city with an immanent oriental spirit centered on its bazar and mosques. Communication with Europe never stopped but the privileged and vital link, throughout the period stretching from the supposed foundation of the city [1614] to the 1912 [Declaration of Albanian independence], was Istanbul, the former Constantinople.

The traveler of this period mostly reached Tirana from west, from the famous Turkish traveler of the XVII century Evliya Çelebi to the XIX century English painter Edward Lear. Tirana's layout itself was structured along the eastern itinerary, coming from the nearby Elbasan and having as its final destination the bazar. The stoned bridge on the Lana River, the elementary Namazgja, the Old Mosque, were all in between underlining the importance of the path.

In the tumultuous aftermath of the declaration independence, The Albanian society, and the new state where reoriented toward the occidental Europe. A German Prince was appointed as the ruler of the former ottoman province. The social shift reflected also in space. The only visit of the Prince in Tirana [not capital yet] was done in 1914, and from the western itinerary of Durres. The entrance of the city on this direction was less treated, than the other direction from Elbasan or even compared to other parallel corridors going toward Shkoder [north] and Kavaja [west as well].

Nevertheless, the importance of the western access from Durres, also the Albanian main harbor and gate toward Europe, grew continuously. The new centralities developed during the short lapse of time from the foundation of the state [1912] to the institution of the republic first [1925] and then monarchy[1929] , as the first Skanderbeg Square, the Army Barracks and the parliament were placed on the western half of the town.

This process was then finally cemented through the planning processes first led by Ahmet Zogu, and the Austrian and Italian architects, Kohler, Brassini and De Fausto and later by the Fascist regime through other Italian architects, as Ivo Lambertini and Gherardo Bosio. After their designs and construction campaigns the western entrance of the city is still the privileged one. However Tirana still preserves important original features, despite its spatial transformations.

Signs Never Fully Disappear, They Are Eventually Transform Into Dormant Traces:

Tirana is a result of its particular natural features. Dajti's foot, at the junction of ancient itineraries linking especially the east to the east, and along the riverbed of Lana. The first urban core developed around the bazar, and in proximity of the Lana. The city expanded in all the directions but the river, probably a pragmatic solution caused by the unpredictability of its seasonal regimes. The organic layout of the town developed along the traces connecting the bazar to the outer neighborhoods, forming an elementary radial system, while the flat meanders in the immediate southern vicinages' where not urbanized. De Fausto identified this genius of the place in between the natural domain of the river and the man made domain of the ottoman town. This finding was included in his later proposal and in the first Regulatory Plan of Tirana; it was then followed in the regulatory plan of 39-40 done by the Italian regime, and is still the essence of the Tirana's urban structure. Practically the present Capital is a combination of two systems" The radial development around Skanderbeg square, and the old quarters of the city and the linear reticular layout developed along the boulevard and the quarter of the so called New Tirana. The northern part of the city has embodied an ordered version of the ottoman layout while the grid of the new city follows the expansive guidelines of the once empty meander.

What is true about the original natural features can be said also for the man-made traces. The Architectures, spaces envisioned during the Turkish rule, or the rule of the king, of Italy, or even the ephemeral traces of the short-lived Albanian democracy of the early 20s, have left their mark on the fabric of the city, and are there only to be discovered. Actually the juxtaposition of these elements creates the complex physiognomy of Tirana's memory, vital for transforming its spaces in places.

The Sign-less Places of the Eveready were feared by the Authorities of Tirana, at the beginning tolerated, later contained, at the end the removed:

The bazar was the vibrant heart of the city. Is where the large transaction happened and practically the functional center of the city. Its layout the opposite of spatial conformation of the mosques. The mosques vertical centrality surrounded by space, in the bazar becomes a longitudinal horizontal succession of individual centralities developed along space. The labyrinths of the bazar, the shops and the anterior workshops were a parallel subversive world potentially harmful to the central authority.

However the vendors of the Bazar were carefully monitored by the Kadi, the Head of the Council of the Islamic Law [Sharia]. Eve its space was also dominated. On all the accesses o the bazar where placed religious objects, mostly mosques but also the Orthodox Church. To the horizontal introverted bazar, where counterpoised the verticals of the minarets and bell towers, probably visible from its core.

Somehow the people attending its space where always reminded of the impermanence of this life, and of the importance the afterlife which truth was held within the chamber of the mosques and within the authority of the ottoman caliphate.

The user, inside the bazar was repeatedly reminded of the outside. In the contrast in between its interior, laid the conflict in between two domains, that of the everydayness suggested by the bazar, lectured by the allegedly imperishable domain of the authority. Obviously, the former needed but also feared the late. It was unacceptable for the private domain to deform the domain of the state. Unacceptable because when the personal discretion of the individuals is invested with power than it destroys the divinity of the state⁸⁹ (Hegel G. W., 1991).

Zog I and his advisers where probably aware that the private domain, private propriety was indispensable for their state to work, as for the majority of his subjects was indispensable to have at least a limited area of activity, which constituted their sphere of its freedom (Hegel G. W., 1991, p. 73). That is why they dismantled the bazar gradually.

The problem of controlling its potentially subversive promotion of everyday existences, unaware of the presence of the governing authority was resolved through the instalment of new facilities known as the *New Bazar*, The New bazar was an unique continuous sheltered space, easily controllable and finally just one of the plots of the new superimposed structure of Tirana's spaces. The center of the capital was structured around the void of "Skanderbeg Square", surrounded by the signs of the state authority, and no more within the alleys of the bazar

The regime of Rome flirted with the everyday only in its final days, scenes of otherwise unacceptable everyday activities where were tolerated and showcased probably to convey a message of normality before the imminent distress. The regime that was based on perpetual movement, on war, that filled the spaces of Tirana with daily acts of supposed extraordinary deeds, at is the final hour finally understood the reassuring value of the ordinary everydayness.

The project from Ivo Lambertini was supposed to terminate the process initiated by De Fausto. The alleys of the bazar, carefully controlled by the messianic signs of the Sultan and excluded from participating in the sign⁹⁰ of the Kings state where going to be superseded by a new district. Under the denomination *Environs*, within the project for "Skanderbeg Square", Fascism planed the destruction of the space better representing the subjective ends (Hegel G. W., 1991) of the Albanian individuals.

⁸⁹ This passage quote Hegel was part of the debate he had with Roussos. It was already mentioned in the first chapter

The everyday and the impermanence of people's normal lives, eventually reemerged, beyond the spaces of the boulevard. Parallel to the Boulevard of the empire, along the lines of the once field of the Weekly Bazar, new places emerged, new playgrounds, carousels used equally by children, young girls and army soldiers. On these venues, were erected the paper cities of the improvised theatrical events, and were located the equally ephemeral houses of the Rom Village of Tirana. These places too were soon addressed, and aligned to the character of the boulevard, however just to reemerge again years later, in the evening walk of the Socialist Tirana, or in their occupation in the early 90s by the shabby kiosks of a young capitalism.

The Sign-Less Spaces of the Everyday Places are places Used by Authorities to Imprint Their Own

Vestiges:

Suleiman Pash Bargjinolli founded his mosque, and Tirana, over a forest owned by an individual unable to question his authority. The first Albanian institution saw in the unclaimed land of the fairs and the Weekly Bazar belonging to the meander of the river and to the community the best ground for expansion. Free of pre-presences. The impermanence of the activities organized in this place where the best environment for creating the new permanent structure of the state. The Albanian parliament was erected in this void, and since the first proposals from Brassini the Main Boulevard of the city was proposed on the southern empty field of the Lana.

On the areas hosting the venues of provisory activities as the large fairs, of the weekly or the playground improvised during the Ramadan month, was envisioned the Square of Ahmet Zogu.

Similarly on the location of the Old Bazar was envisioned the economical heart of Fascist Tirana, and later was erected one of the strongest signs of communism, The Palace of Culture.

These sign-less places are even today among the most endangered ones. The parks of Tirana, first envisioned as empty stages around the monumental edifices of power, were gradually claimed by the community, but are now again subtracted from them. After the withdrawal of the former Totalitarian authorities these places are slowly occupied by the new signs of Capitalism, skyscrapers mainly commercial Centers and Hotels.

They Everydayness was/is sometimes, in the present more than an ever, encouraged

The large boulevard left by the Italians was soon reactivated by the rituals of the new communist regimes. Their military parades and the colorful march held on the Workers Day are even today an indelible memory for the people that have experienced them. However this was not the only reality of the Boulevard. The

other was the Evening Walk already explained in the introductory chapter. This phenomena was certainly strange. It isn't clear if it was a minor concession to the citizens of Tirana, whose life was normally made of isolation and freedom restriction, or it was an intentional act, aiming an increased control of the subjects. After all, was safer to have all the citizens trustworthy or faithless there in the same place, open a surrounded by the operation sings of the authority in the improvised "Panopticon" of the boulevard. In the context of the market economy, time is money, and hence desirable for the many private businessmen that have emerged after the fall of Socialism. The everyday has an enormous economic potential that if controlled and framed within the Junk Spaces of the commercial centers becomes an inexhaustible source of profit. Today everydayness and the freedom of individuals have also become the new paradigms of the authority. The emphasis today is on, better services, better sport facilities, Plazas and playgrounds, on places where people can exercise fully their free time are. Often the central authority has declared itself unable of fulfilling this needs (unthinkable for the previous totalitarianisms) and in their supposed efforts has built promoted partnerships with the private sector. In the present Tirana the interests of the Governing authorities and of powerfully economic actors have joined efforts and a reshaping the center again.

Authority shapes space after its image:

The first man made signs of Tirana represent the will of the ottoman Sultan. The Mosques were founded by the Imperial decree, by the initiative of local feudalists. The ottoman Tirana had a plurality of disconnected centers, because the ottoman structure of power was similarly exercised the plurality of centers of Tirana was actually the image of the Ottoman Empire.

Arnhem writes that The Renaissance cherished the circle as the shape of cosmic perfection, whereas the Mannerist phase of the Baroque took to ellipse. The ellipsoidal Square was the image of Zogu's State, still not perfect, in a making, a dependable on the Genius of the king on its center laying outside the square in his elevated Palace.

The boulevard was an image of the Fascism, The travertine was the image of an eternal empire, The Arches were the image of Ancient Rome ever present in the new ideology, the abstract forms and the axes of the boulevard were the image of the essential ideology of the regime based on a dynamic straight forward action.

Similarly the Radio Antenna of Riga, was the image of the Scientific Socialism while the Neo Classic Skopje the desired image of a new city, and nation, which wanted to appear more long-standing than its actual age.

Authority, when more consolidated, utilizes signs to create its own narrative:

The space of the ottoman Tirana was free of juxtaposed narrative. The myth of its foundation and omnipresent authority of the sultan through the presence of the mosques, and the attached universal narrative of after life was enough for the dwellers of Tirana to simply spend their existences under the ottoman rule.

The first narrative introduced to the structure of Tirana was imprinted by zogu. Of course the sings envisioned by him were organized in the plot order in order to give meaning to the hole. The percement' over the old fabric, the re-ordering of ottoman town, the intervention on the bazar, the shape and positioning of the square, the gardens and the elevated Real Palace are all already the already described components of the Allegory of Zogu's installment of Legality, and of the formation of monarchy.

The most complex narrative was envisioned by fascism. The norther boulevard represented the recent past of the Italian Kingdom, starting with the grenadiers, founded by the first king of the Savoy's dynasty. The narrative was enriched by the advent of the Mussolini Axes into Skanderbeg Square. There the old sings of the Albanian capital, of the King and of the Sultan, of the Italian recent past where unified under the fascist Ideology. The narrative went through the bottleneck of unchanging goals, a threshold in between past and future, and proceeded along the planned retardations and acceleration of the boulevard of the empire. The whole was completed by vertical Casa Del Fascio, at the end of the oblique prospective, and Littoral Square shaped as the vise that through its grip was going to shape the new consciences.

Other examples of narratives were described in the other small capitals presented as case studies. In Riga the Victory Monument, symbolizing the victory of the Red Army in the second world war, was located as the finale of an existing itinerary, composed by the intermediate original signs of Riga's Lutheran Bell Towers, The Freedom monument symbolizing the individual impendence oft h Latvian nation, or the sign of the bridge over the Daugava named after the Socialist Revolution.

In Skopje the new narrative was place over the existing modernist layout. The new neoclassical facades, museums and squares where structure around the Myth of Alexander the Great. From the first irregular itineraries of the old town where designed a series of square symbolizing the life of Alexander since birth to its final conquest of Asia. His path was paralleled to the historical path of the small Balkan nation.

Authority might preserve a reconvert former signs inside it new narrative:

When the former signs are too sensitive and eradicated in the consciences of people the authority preserve them. This is the case of the Freedom Monument of Riga or of the different Mosques of Tirana. However their initial meaning is altered by introducing them in the new narrative of the regime.

Authority might just preserve former signs because they are congenial to their need and vision. For example the so called bottleneck of unchanging goals, the ministerial complex of Zogu, was preserved by Italians, because it's symbolic of transition was easily adaptable.

Another example of reconversion of former signs the case of Tirana's the mosques that where all preserved by the project of Ivo Lambertini but their context was reshaped. From dominating their surroundings they were dominated, pressed and sanitized in between new densely build housing blocks and arched porticoes.

The communist maintained the Architecting signs of the fascism, the boulevard, and easily adapted them to their similar ends. They first readapted the former names [Zogu and Mussolini did the same with the streets of Tirana] than they reconverted them to new functions, and they filled it later with other vestiges. The Central Comity of the Labor Party, the Pyramid of Enver Hoxha, and the statues of Lenin and Stalin at the sides of the above mentioned bottle neck where among the new signs they added.

The Demolishing of the Old Mosque, was "Fortunate" accident of the battle for the liberation of Tirana, in Between the Partisan the Germans and the Allied Bombardments. The Communist would hardly have dared to destroy an intact Old Mosque. However in sight of the created situation they erect on the same place the monument of the "Unknown Partisan". It became one of the signs of the new narrative of the new foundation of Tirana, and of the new Albanian socialist society.

In the same places other narratives are being created [Figure 118], through the reconversion of former signs. In recent years over the survived monument of "Kaplan Pasha" was erected one of Tirana's new skyscrapers, the TID Tower, recently renamed Hotel Plaza. The new sign of capitalism didn't destroy the former signs but was placed over it. Its enormous protrusion over the minuscule Tyrbe, is indeed another self-talking gesture of contemporary Albania [Figure 119].

Power belongs to whom controls the places of public display:

At the end the essential mean of the authority, for preserving itself is the control over the places of public display. These venues are relational spaces of interacting people rather than the physical space of our existence. In these relationships power is created and generated and if strongly motivated can even supersede the power of the governing authorities. For most of human history the spaces of public display were the spaces of our cities. Even nowadays, as in the recent series of revolts of the Arab Spring, the

uprisings were initiated in the social media but were later materialized on the streets and squares of those countries.

The spaces of the everyday were disliked by the authorities of Tirana because they were bearers of the potential power that could suddenly undo their projected historicist direction. In architectonic terms they “gifted” their subject with large Squares, Boulevards and Monumental architecture.

The subsequent regimes envisioned the voids were the subject could admire the architectonic signs and narratives celebrating the power of the governing authorities and desist from bringing out their own. Void, having its highest expression in the “Empty Stages” of Tirana, is a key component, Authority created it deliberately, after all, “ *the outstanding characteristic of tyranny is its, isolation, tyranny prevents the development of power in the public realm by generating impotence*”, and the void properly does this.

6.1. The Reintroduction of Nature [Prologue]

Four centuries after Tirana’s foundation, and almost one century after its elevation to capital the rhetoric of the local politics occupying its venues of power is still the same. They talk about finally making the state, about the restoration of order, and about joining the family of the European Nations. Meanwhile Tirana is changing again, with a program. The Boulevard of Nations Martyrs and Skanderbeg square are being refurbished. The essences of the projects that are transforming the center are, respectively, the monumentalized individual in Skanderbeg square and the de-monumentalized space of the boulevard.

My last thoughts on Tirana, on its boulevard and main square start with a wondering: how does a de-monumentalized place look like? It surely has to be free of the ideology of power, unvested of feelings of fatality, determinism and grandeur. Free of manmade signs, dominated by nature as the eastern itinerary of Tirana, and the city itself where before the construction of the Old Mosque. However, not much wondering is needed, because such spaces have already been [partially] materialized in the surroundings of Skanderbeg Square.

My last walk is along the new Environs of Skanderbeg Square. These spaces are being encircled by natural looking paths, mostly paved with irregular gravel reminiscent of a past that once was. The improvised itineraries are separated by uneven impenetrable bushes and irregularly planted trees of all sorts. They emanate Mediterranean aromas and atmospheres **[Figure 120]**.

Along the walk, I hear distant chatter, but I can easily choose to take another path, or hide to avoid them. On the background, there is only more trees and some blurry silhouettes of buildings. It does not really matter what those buildings look like, if they are made of masculine Doric columns, with Arches, if they are dressed with travertine or cheap aluminum sheets. The focus is on me, on my walk, on the time I am

spending away from the mandatory duties of the society. This space does not follow any historical models of the French or Italian garden design. It is so randomly shaped that I can even experience a temporal self-bewilderment.

Nevertheless, despite the apparent isolation and the lack of signs I soon understand that I am not in some distant forest but in a familiar spatial entity known from before, whose identity was changed **[Figure 121/Above]**. I am not walking along an abandoned industrial facility, or on the streets of the present Chernobyl or in a post-apocalyptic scenario freed from authority and reclaimed by nature **[Figure 121/Below]**. I am still in Tirana, walking along a newly built stage, along a new narrative created over the old ones. I am assisting at the present theater where the narrative of a de-monumentalized place is played, of a place surrounded by nature **[Figure 122]** and reclaimed by the very same Forrest destroyed four centuries ago by the founder of the city. The sign-less de-monumentalized space that is being shaped around Skanderbeg square is a paradox, simply another utopia, as the sign-less Amurot was. The newly planted forest itself is a sign.

I leave behind the park and finally enter Skanderbeg square. And again the Void, an ever present means of the historicist authorities of the past, reappears. This time it is not entirely flat, it has a central elevation. The entire square is actually a low pyramid large as the square itself. To me, this ordered structure encountered after the irregular park is again another statement of order made by the authors of this space. I quickly progress toward the center of the square, because I want to stand on its tip so I can feel *“at par with the authoritarian architecture of the past”* (51N4E, 2008).

From the top of the pyramid, I look around **[Figure 123]**. The Museum of Albanian History [where once was the Town Hall], the Palace of Culture [where once was the Old Bazar], The Mosque of Ethem Bey, , the Bottleneck designed by De Fausto, the Old Parliament and the Bank of Albania are slowly being hidden behind the new implanted vegetation. Even the statue of Skanderbeg lays now in a corner. The Former Boulevard of the Empire, and the northern boulevard gutted by Ahmet Zogu [recently renamed after him], the Road of Durres and the Road of Kavaja, are all concealed from me behind the thick barrier of trees. I am in an “empty stage” created for me, for the citizen, resting in the very same isolation envisioned by the tyrants of the past.

The monumental buildings, signs of the former authorities are excluded from this place, reclaimed by the same nature that they dominated. However, this seems as a belated solution; after all, those buildings represent ideologies that have been removed decades, even centuries, ago. They were already traces placed in a context they could not control anymore.

The vestige I am in is stronger than it seems, and it is more that its low pyramid. Under the body of the pyramid, there is parking and not centenary skeletons of the antecedent graveyard of the Karapici Mosque. Any future authority that might try to remove this sign in the future will probably have to put a lot of efforts into its destruction.

From my isolated observation point, at the center of the new void of Tirana, I look up to the sky. Above the newly designed foliage, I discover the new signs of the present **[Figure 124]**. A series of new skyscrapers are all around me, laying at the center of Skanderbeg square. The green belt covers only a fragment of these giants. The irregular park that I traveled through is designed to obfuscate the signs of the previous authorities and to underline the new ones. Furthermore, its fragmentary nature creates an illusory dilation of the spaces around Skanderbeg square that indeed are quite limited in size.

In parallel to the abovementioned forest-like gardens created on the asphalt surrounding Skanderbeg square, the already existing large parks on the side of Tirana's center are being systematically replaced by the high rises of capitalism **[Figure 125]**. These vertical signs are more than an expression of the free market, they don't stand equally distributed over the grid of Manhattan as their New Yorker counterparts do, not they are aligned along the historicist sign of the former boulevard of the empire. Their significance is more than economical, it is also political, and they are the materialization of the will of the current governing authority.

The new authorities of Tirana, through an old rhetoric portrayed the refurbished Skanderbeg square as their gift to the citizens; they gifted them a place that was already theirs since the beginning, as the field of the Weekly Bazar. Meanwhile the former public spaces on the edges of Tirana's center are being stripped away from the public domain. Despite the nuances, the present authorities of this place have not changed that much from their predecessors; they exercise their power through the very same means of the past, through new signs, the reconversion of former signs and through the construction of manipulative narratives. The Albanian capital is being re-shaped again by the ideas of few powerful men in symbiosis with local young capitalists.

6.2. Last Conclusion on the Present Capital

My last excursus over Tirana's recent developments ends here. The capital of today has changed so fast that has become hardly recognizable even for the people that have never left it. The metamorphosis of its spaces has occurred with disregard to the past, creating an urban environment that feels estranged even to the people that were raised in it.

The quality of the spaces of the capital have decreased, the gardens, sport fields, the apartment houses inner yards, were seized or privatized. These spaces have been built or assigned with impenetrable private functions. This phenomenon has been even more extensive in verticality. A dimension that the public sees with detachment normally considered open for private extension. The new high-rises have occluded the contact of the city with the natural *axis mundi* (Schulz C. N., 1979) of the periphery, the mountains and hills encircling the city. This Tirana is less ventilated and less illuminated; a denser and a crowded city.

Nevertheless, there's an increasing awareness of the people over the processes that the city is going through, on the excess of the private domain over the public or the value of heritage. At least partially, the buildings are not seen just as *equipment* and their relevance finally encloses more than their *serviceability* (Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, 1950).

In the new urban design projects, intervening in the already shaped spaces of Tirana's center, the signs of the past authorities are being redesigned and cleared of their ideological meaning. These places are being reframed around the rhetoric of the citizen. In parallel, the spaces that already belonged to the public are still being assigned to the private. Tirana is entering a phase when building is becoming an end in itself. The current central authority is trying to mark the city with its signs, at all costs, even by aligning their goal with the goals of private businessmen.

We ignore our past, our society and spaces. There is no integral knowledge available on the history of a single building or of large pieces of the city. This ignorance is being misused. The heritage of the Capital, and with it our memory, is disappearing replaced by the Generic city sponsored by the oligarchies. The center of Tirana is being surrounded by the junk space of modern Commercial Centers and the globalized iconic architecture selected by the current authority as its own vestigial.

6.3. Chapter 6 Figures



Figure 118. The succession of signs in the point where Tirana started. The “Unknown Partisan” Monument erected over the original location of the Demolished Old Mosque and the Tyrbe of Kaplan Pasha, designed in front of the old mosque, appear insignificant compared to the new signs of the Albanian Capitalism. Tirana. 2018. Photo credit: Endrit Marku



Figure 119. The extreme World-Decay of an ottoman trace. The Tyrbe of Kaplan Pasha dominated by the enormous mass of the contemporary, Hotel Piazza. Tirana. 2018. Photo credit: Endrit Marku



Figure 120. The Surroundings of Skanderbeg Square reclaimed by nature. Tirana. 2018. Photo credit: Endrit Marku



Figure 121. Tirana vs. Chernobyl. [Above] the staged withdrawal of the former ideology form Skanderbeg Square. Tirana. 2018. Photo credit: Endrit Marku [Below] A real caused by a major cause, withdrawal of Ideology. Chernobyl. 2016. Photo Credit; Getty images, Sean Gallup.



Figure 122.Green used as separation [sanitation] cordon, setting a new isolation in between the authority and the citizen. Tirana. 2018. Photo credit: Endrit Marku

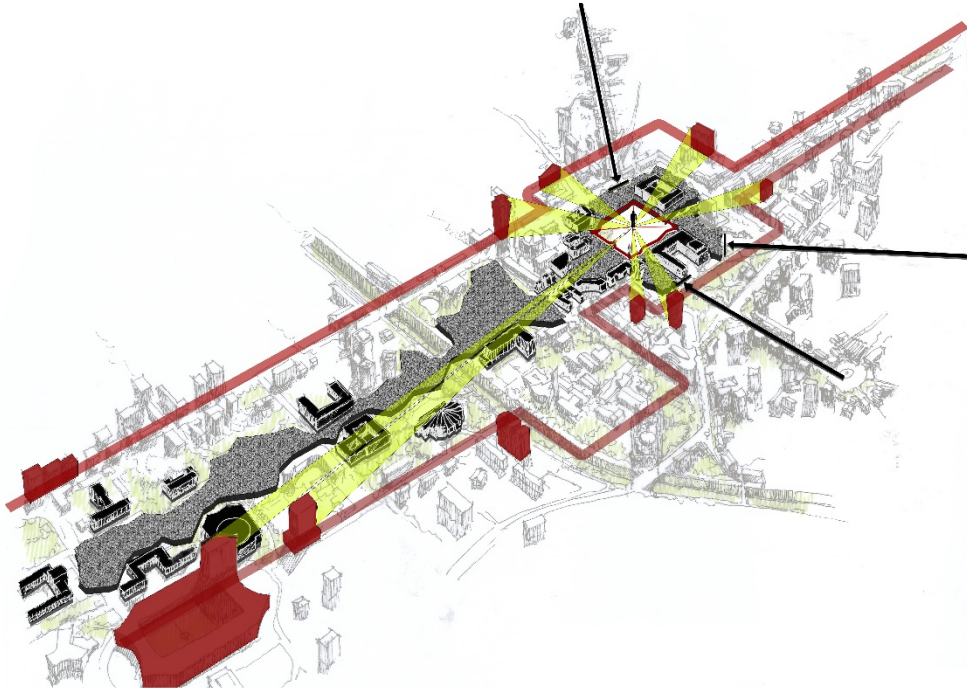


Figure 123. The of De-Monumentalization of Tirana's center. [Above] Diagram showing the new experience of Tirana from the perspective of the citizen, the designed forest-like park, hides the former signs of past ideologies. In the process, the attention goes toward contemporary new signs, the skyscrapers developed along the former public spaces at the edge of the center. Scheme credit: Endrit Marku [Below] The project for Skanderbeg Square of 51N4E, Source: 51N4E



Figure 124. Disappearing Old Traces, and emerging new Signs in the Background. The Image of Zogu's state and the Bottleneck of unchanging of goals of Mussolini, in the process of being concealed by the sings of the new authority [The artificial forest]. Meanwhile new Skyscrapers are on the Rise. The succession of centers is still going in the Modern Albanian Capital and Society. Tirana. 2018. Photo credit: Endrit Marku.



Figure 125. The New Image of Tirana. 2016. Photo credit: Endrit Marku.

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