



STUDENT WORKSHOP / TIRANA 2009

# bringing the city together

SPATIAL INTERVENTIONS IN TIRANA  
RESIDENTIAL AREAS

The study area offers us the opportunity to highlight the complexities and the particular features of the contemporary Albanian capital. It is located in western Tirana and is, in fact, an in-between urban zone; a zone between the city center and the periphery, a zone between the socialist past and the post-socialist present, a zone between formal and informal urban development.

The study area is surrounded by four major road axes: the Durres Str, the Kavaja Str, the second and the third ring road. These axes, -in particular the Durres Str that also leads to the city's airport- attract new, mainly commercial land uses, while many high-rise buildings have been recently constructed.

The interior of the area is mainly residential mixed with a variety of other uses. The often-chaotic combination of various scales and densities, designs and plans, consists of:

- \* the former state owned apartment buildings
- \* the post-socialist high-rise housing developments
- \* the low-rise informal houses
- \* vacant land
- \* shops and markets
- \* important public buildings such as the Technical University and the Partizani Stadium
- \* the city's old, inactive airport
- \* the unformed bank of Lana River

The social structure of the area is equally diverse, hosting groups of different origin, as well as of cultural, economic and social background.

The study area offers the chance to address such urgent urban issues as: the lack of social and technical infrastructures, the low quality and fragmentation of public space and green areas, the physical and symbolic divisions of space and the lack of centralities. It also offers us an opportunity to explore different meanings and understandings of public, common and private space that, in turn, shape the spatial realities of the area.

At the same time the boundaries of the area (the Tirana-Durres axis, the Lana River and the two ring roads), as well as the new multi-functional developments promoted by public and/or private sector within or close to this area (for instance a new pedestrian boulevard along the landing zone of the old airport, a housing project between Lana River and the old airport, etc) present a challenge in terms of understanding their social, economic and spatial dynamics and their impact on the neighborhood level and the local communities.

The workshop's intention is to focus on the spatial and social connections within this area and between this area and its surroundings, as well as on the links among the various social groups and spatial patterns. Our goal is to investigate different typologies of urban fabric and production of urban space and to explore new modes of intervention. Planning, design and the strengthening of public and common spaces are crucial tools in order to deal with the fragmentation of the city.

Our concern will not lie on the major public spaces of the city, but rather on the open, common-use, public or semi-public spaces within the urban fabric of the residential areas, the sometimes-leftover spaces, where the everyday activities take place,

or the spaces in between the buildings and in their relation to the streets, the vacant land and the various urban programs. The workshop will also draw particular attention to issues of social, spatial and temporal boundaries and urban juxtapositions with a significant spatial impact, such as:

- \* Formal - Informal
- \* Public (space) - Private (space)
- \* Collective - individual
- \* Continuities - Discontinuities
- \* Past - Present - Future
- \* Center - Periphery
- \* Borders (internal and external)

Students are encouraged to organize their work through one of the following points of view:

**NATURE AND GREEN SPACES.** A variety of natural elements, namely the bank of Lana river, enclaves of trees, uncultivated agricultural land and pockets of greenery, constitute a key asset for the study area. What types of green spaces are there? What are their characteristics? How are they lived by local people? Are there any connections between them or with green spaces outside the study area? How could a system of interconnected green spaces at various scales contribute to overcome spatial and social fragmentation?

**CENTRALITY AND ARTICULATION OF SCALES:** What types of central functions are noted in the area, e.g. a big shopping center, a local commercial street, a small playground, a transport hub, etc? Under what processes have they been created and how do they fit into their surroundings? What is their meaning for different groups of people? Do these centralities link different fragments of urban space or not? If yes, how? How can we improve urban form and structure by articulating centralities through intervening in public spaces?

**LOCAL CULTURES AND PUBLIC SPACE:** How do different social groups appropriate public, common and semi-public spaces? What forms of public life and cultures appear, e.g. exchange of home visits, religion festivals, evening walk along the main street, Sunday football game, outdoor cooking, etc? How do people live and intervene on public and common space? How do they conceive "public" and "common" space? How could it be possible to maintain cultural diversity and enhance social interaction among different groups?

**PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES IN THE URBAN TISSUE:** Although the study area is mainly a residential area, several small and medium scale enterprises can be found scattered in and around it (e.g. car-services, workshops, small scale farming, wholesale activities, light industry, etc). How are these activities distributed in the urban tissue? How important are they for the socioeconomic structure of the area and how do they shape the character of public or common spaces? To what extent do they form part of wider productive networks linking the area with the rest of the city? Could you imagine any spatial intervention, particularly in open space, that would improve the integration of productive activities in the urban tissue without limiting their economic dynamism?

**FORMS OF MOBILITY:** The street network is characterized by discontinuities reflecting the conditions under which the urban fabric is being produced. How do people move inside the area? How do they travel from / to the area? How do urban itineraries shape urban structure and land uses? How

is public space affected by practices of mobility? Here we could reflect on the use of private cars, public transportation, cycling and walking, either separately or as a system as well as spatial interventions in order to improve the conditions of vehicular and pedestrian circulation. What forms of mobility could create new spatial connections inside urban fabric and how?

**SOCIAL NETWORKS, LIVELIHOODS AND EVERYDAY LIFE:** Select one particular social group, e.g. children, women, older people, etc. How does this group live and experience public and common space? How are everyday practices and social networks inscribed in public and common space? What kind of interventions in open space could open new challenges to this group? What kind of public services and amenities could be introduced in order to support existing social networks?

Forty students (thirty students studying in Tirana and ten students studying in Athens) will work on their projects in groups. The groups will be guided by and work with the tutors. The project will be organized in two stages:

Monday to Wednesday:

**Stage 1:** The students will need to understand how the complex urban environment works and re-produces itself, by identifying the existing typologies of the urban fabric. They may trace down everyday practices, collect urban experiences, analyze housing typologies and typologies of public / common-use / private spaces, record land uses, population and building densities, public infrastructures, social networks, and think over the processes and the dynamics of spatial development, as well as the intertwined relations of spaces, uses and meanings. Also they have to combine their findings in order to identify the general structure of the study area. Students will present their findings on Wednesday afternoon, along with the suitable tools and methods they choose for their interventions.

Thursday to Saturday:

**Stage 2:** In this stage students will elaborate concepts / strategies / scenarios aiming to improve the urban environment and the living standards of the inhabitants, at the neighbourhood level, or within a network of spaces. The students will propose an urban design or planning project. For instance they could work on a mini masterplan for a specific neighbourhood, or design public and semi-public spaces, within a neighbourhood or within a wider network (with facilities such as parks, playgrounds, sports & culture), or focusing on various aspects of public infrastructure (programmatic, spatial and social).

Saturday:

The projects will be presented and discussed on Saturday afternoon.