

Place attachment in a Tirana neighborhood: The influence of the “Rebirth of the City” project

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Abstract

This paper studies the environmental behavior of Tirana dwellers in a former socialist period neighborhood which has been the subject of a project called the “Rebirth of the City”. This project was an undertaking of the municipality of Tirana, the capital city of Albania, and had as its goals to stabilize the urban chaos and clean the informal constructions by treating the neighborhoods with colorful artwork. The neighborhoods within this research are treated as a concept formed by housing blocks and public spaces. The aim of the research is to understand the relationship of the dwellers and their place attachment to the neighborhood during the socialist and post-socialist period. This study will be conducted through the method of observation and questionnaire. At the end of the study, it is expected to find out how the “Rebirth of the City” project impacted the dwellers’ relationship with their neighborhood. In particular, whether or not this renovation project influenced dwellers’ place attachment will be examined. The role of place attachment as a concept in this relation will be also brought into consideration.

Keywords

Place attachment, Tirana neighborhood, Renovation project, “Rebirth of the City”



1. Introduction

After the 90s almost all ex-socialist countries faced the process of transition from a socialist to a capitalist governmental system. Albania was the last country in Europe to experience regime change. The period after the collapse of the socialist regime brought big challenges into the lives of all Albanians. In a place where private property was minimized to the extreme, the desire of people for new buildings and the weakness of the government led to people to build informally and invade public property. The chaotic situation flourished for approximately eight years until the year 2000 when the Mayor of the Tirana Municipality, Edi Rama, undertook an initiative to cleanse the city from illegal construction. In order to minimize the unaesthetic effect of the semi-informal aspects of the buildings, he started the project dubbed “Rebirth of the City”.

The aim of this study is to measure the influence of the above-mentioned renovation project in the relationship between the dwellers’ thoughts, attitudes and their attachment to neighborhood. In this context, place attachment is used as a tool to achieve this goal. Place attachment has been defined as a concept by Low and Altman (1992), and its basic definition includes an emotional relationship to certain environmental settings. The model developed by Scannell and Gifford (2010) defined place as physical environment, and linked people to emotion, and attachment to social connection. The attachment is seen at different scales of places such as the home, neighborhood, city, region, country and even continent. This study is focused on the scale of attachment to neighborhood. Previous researchers have used place attachment to the neighborhood to measure a feeling of pride (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996), a sense of wellbeing (Harris et al., 1995), and the attitude of dwellers in revitalization projects (Brown et al., 2003). This paper will focus on the effects of this project on the environmental behavior of citizens who are inhabitants of the residential neighborhood between Asim Vokshi and Petro Marko Streets (Figure 1a and Figure 1b) and attachment

to neighborhood will be considered in order to evaluate the physical dimension of it after the implementation of a similar project. Since in a local context there is no work conducted in this field, the research and its results might contribute for further urban development projects.

After giving some brief historical information about Tirana, the construction of housing and public spaces during the socialist and post-socialist period will be considered and the “Rebirth of the City” project will be explained. In order to reveal the environmental behavior of the dwellers,



Figure 1a. Image from housing block between Asim Vokshi and Petro Marko Streets.

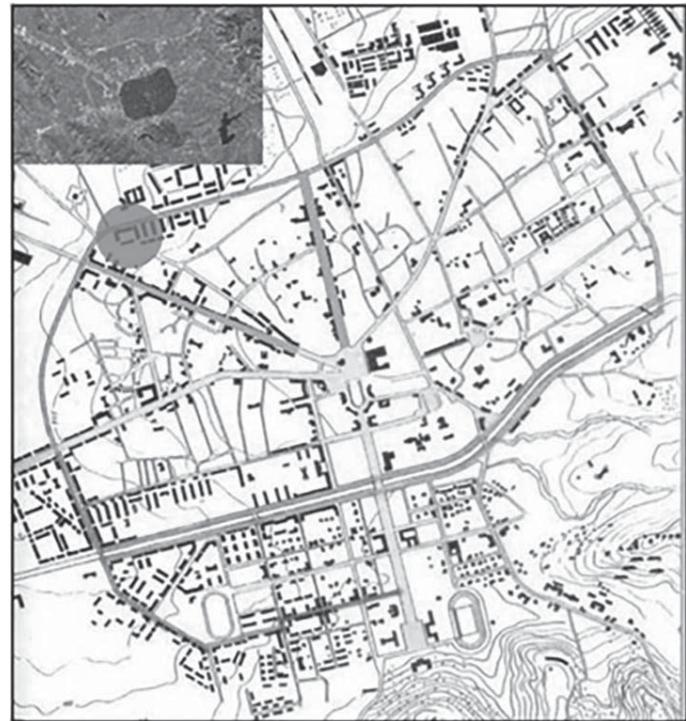


Figure 1b. Its position shown by a red dot on the city map.



Figure 2. Brasinian Boulevard and traditional town (Albanian Vintage Images).



Figure 3. City center in socialist period and major landmarks from <http://www.gazetatema.net/web/2016/01/11/fotot-tirana-dje-dhe-sot-si-ka-qene-kryeqyteti-shqiptar/> accessed in 01/02/2016.



Figure 4. Dramatic urban development in post-socialist city center from <http://www.noa.al/mob/index.php?type=artikull&id=104072.html> accessed in 02/02/2016.

the observation technique and questionnaires have been used. The questionnaire was applied to 30 dwellers with the aim of finding out the relation

between them and their neighborhood. The post-socialist context of a neighborhood will be examined, and a comparison between the two periods will be elicited by inquiring about the attachment of dwellers to the socialist period and the one to the post-socialist period.

In conclusion, the effects of the implementation of the “Rebirth of the City” project in the above-mentioned neighborhood from the physical dimension of place attachment, and an evaluation of both public space and dwelling units of the neighborhood will be discussed.

2. Historical background of Tirana as the capital of Albania

The urban planning and development of Tirana started when King Zog’s government invited Italian architect Armando Brasini in 1925 to develop a plan. The project included the expansion of the city on its southern side with a wide boulevard. Although his vision was not implemented, it served as a base for Florestano de Fausto’s plan for the city center in 1926 and Gherardo Bosio’s plan “Imperial Boulevard” in the 1940s, accommodating ministry buildings on its flanking sides.

As Albania ended up largely devastated after WWII, the Communist regime following in 1948 would launch a strategy of industrialization based on the Soviet model, according to which it would also increase its influence over the working class. The Communist regime controlled Albania based on a centralized economy system and similarly the artistic and architectural life of the country were strictly controlled by the central Politburo. In this period, three urban plans were developed (in 1957, 1965 and 1976) to accommodate socialist period landmarks (Bleta, 2010).

The post-socialist period can be considered as the most dramatic from an urban development point of view. The transition from a centralized economy to a liberal one was associated with a loss of competitiveness of the many state companies that would lead to a migration of population from eastern to western Albania or to western countries. Due to a lack of capacity and the

inefficiency of urban management at the central and local level, the informal settlements “flourished” from 1992 to 2000. While the informal settlements invasion of public spaces in the city center, in the peripheral zone, agricultural fields were occupied by newcomers for housing needs. In the year 2000, the election of Edi Rama as the Mayor of Tirana would begin a new phase in the undertaking of an operation to remove the informal settlements, thus cleansing major public spaces from this invasion. His second largest intervention was entitled the “Rebirth of the City”, and it would include the painting of certain socialist period apartment blocks with colorful designs on their facades.

3. Housing and public space in Tirana’s neighborhood

The construction of housing blocks and public spaces within their historical context will be explained in two sections: the construction of neighborhoods during the socialist period, and the developments in the post-socialist period after the 90s.

3.1. Socialist period housing and public space in Tirana’s neighborhoods

Although the application of the socialist political system varied across different countries, two major features were common to all countries from a spatial production point of view. Firstly, the quick urban development after the damage left by WWII and secondly, the removal of the disparity between the rural and urban zones (Tsenkova & Nedovic-Budic, 2006).

The housing strategies in Albania during the socialist period can be divided into three periods: the 1950s, the 1960s and the 1970s (Aliaj, 2003b). The construction of housing was a part of an urban planning strategy whose aim was to form an egalitarian society. In this context, the housing stock will be studied as a part of this strategy.

As a result of World War II, Albania experienced enormous damage and approximately 62,000 houses, or one quarter of the total housing stock, was destroyed (Hall, 1994, p.359). So in the 1950s the government started to pro-



Figure 5a. Residential settlement “1Maji” representative of the 50s housing strategy (from Alketa Misja).



Figure 5b. The construction of the western residential area of Tirana in the socialist period (originally published in Ylli Review-August 1961, from <http://shqipfoto.livejournal.com/>)



Figure 5c. The construction of housing blocks through the voluntary work of a “socialist woman” in the 70s Tirana (from Julie Abitz).

vide housing by removing the old urban zones and building new apartment blocks which were 3 to 4 floors high, but their architectural quality was very

low (Aliaj, 2003b, p.57). The apartment blocks became the main form of accommodation.

During the 60s, the Stalinist and Maoist anti-urbanization strategy was idealized in order to decrease the differences between: i. the different social classes; ii. the urban and rural areas; and iii. the different regions. The so-called “Cultural Revolution”, implemented between years 1967-1969, aimed to create a new “Socialist Man”, who was one who puts the collective interest of his people over his personal interest and uses his sacrifices to build a socialist society (Prifti, 1978, p.149).

Although between the years 1945-79, approximately 300,000 urban apartments were built throughout Albania, there was still a need for more housing due to the increasing population. Aliaj (2003), an Albanian scholar, mentions that beyond the voluntary work constructions, new apartment blocks were constructed by prefabrication for up to 5-6 floors in the main cities like Tirana and Durres. According to him, these buildings were constructed of brick and the foundations by local stone. The facades of the buildings were made of similar materials.

The public space in the socialist period in Tirana can be divided into two typologies: the first one which includes entities at the city level like major squares, major streets and sidewalks and major parks (“lulishte” in Albanian); and the second one which includes green areas and playgrounds in between the apartment blocks that can be defined more at the level of the neighborhood.

3.2. The post socialist period urban development and neighborhoods in Tirana

The post-socialist period housing in Tirana was seriously influenced by the socio-economic-political context that Albania passed through. The need for housing was fulfilled at the expense of public space (Abitz, 2006). Data including the post-socialist period after the 90s show a continuous reduction of public space. The process of the reduction of urban public space was guided on by the framework of “partial urban plans” (example of Albania) or ad hoc

plans, which awarded privileges to developers through unforeseen amendments to the existing regulatory plans (Hirt, 2014).

Socialist-planned Tirana was ready prey to illegal invasion of public land for housing, especially on the periphery of Tirana, and for commercial interests in the city center. The selection of the new Mayor Edi Rama was a significant political event in “cleansing” the city from informal construction, while on the other side it was in this period that high-rise buildings would become the new representation of the post-socialist period.

The inconsistencies between buildings and the urban irregularity in general, led the Municipality of Tirana in the year 2000 to undertake a project called “The Rebirth of City” which included the colorful painting of the facades of a considerable number of apartments inside the zone called the Middle Ring. Then the Mayor of the city Edi Rama, himself a painter and former professor at the Academy of Fine Arts, undertook this initiative to make the city more “attractive and playful-looking” (Pojani, 2010). The project was implemented between the years 2000 through 2008. The conceptualization of the facade designs was made by Anri Sala, an Albanian artist educated in Paris, and together with Hans Ulrich Obrist, they adopted the facade project as a curatorial endeavor by inviting artists such as Olafur Eliasson, Liam Gillick and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster to contribute and turn residential blocks “into unique works of art” (Tate Modern Seminar, 2009). This time Tirana city gained a colorful, cheerful identity, which was, however, far from the attitude of being a capital city (Figures 5, 6). In order to study the influence of these urban developments, this research was based on the theoretical framework on the concept of place attachment.

4. Place attachment and neighborhood

As was mentioned earlier, the theoretical framework of this study is based on the concept of place attachment. Place attachment is described as a concept which deals with the relation

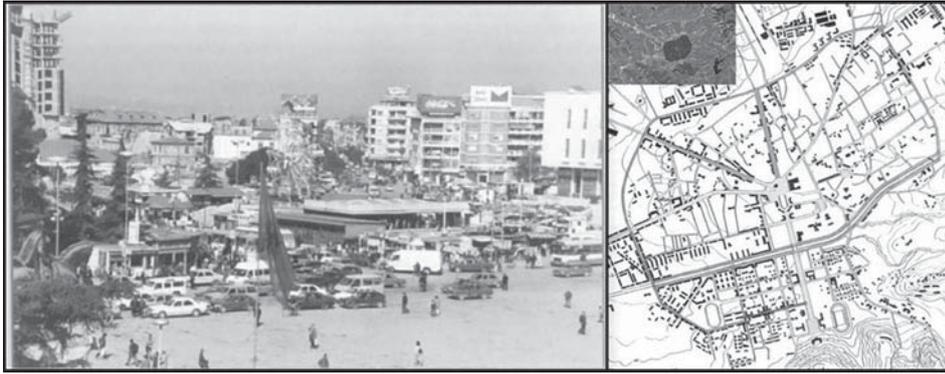


Figure 6. Illegal construction in the city center between 1993-1999 (left) and (right). The Middle Ring of Tirana (from Besnik Aliaj).



Figure 7. Colors are used to stabilize the informal additions, without requiring harmony between the apartments (from Tirana Municipality Digital Archive).



Figure 8. The situation of buildings before the “Rebirth of the City” with semi-informal additions and after the “colorful” intervention (from Tirana Municipality Digital Archive).

of people to place. According to Low and Altman (1992), the word ‘attachment’ emphasizes affect and the word ‘place’ focuses on the environmental setting to which people are emotionally attached. In this definition we find the three substantial elements that as it is understood compose place attachment: place-physical environment, people-emotion, attachment-social connection. The same three substantial elements were defined into a tripartite model by Scannell and Gifford (2010).

Levicka (2011) examined the findings on place attachment by re-evaluating the concept based on Scannell and Gifford’s tripartite model. She revealed that the use of place within the tripar-

tite model could be grouped by taking in consideration two aspects: i. its typology, and ii. its scale. Furthermore according to typology places could be grouped into closed and open. While “closed” place reflects the vista of conservative society, “open” place refers to and is related to the effects of globalization on space. The other influential aspect in attachment is the scale of place. As matter of fact, attachment can occur at different scales including home, neighborhood, city, country and even continent.

Since the scope of this study covers the neighborhood scale, attachment on this level is treated in a more specific way. Neighborhoods are places

bigger than home and smaller than cities and do not feature (Levicka, 2011) clearly defined borders. Scholars have used different definitions regarding them. Brown & Perkins (1992) state that neighborhoods are featured by dynamic and intense social communication, while Galster (2011) talks about homogenous features of neighborhoods that may contain varying elements such as: uniformity related to building typology, demographic composition, environmental aspects, social and emotional dimensions in relation to the quarter. Although there are no clear borders to neighborhoods, they are the place scale which has been used for research more than any other with more than 75% of the working residential place attachment (Lewicka, 2011). The similarity between the concept of community and the concept of neighborhood attachment and it being an intermediate level between home and city are seen as major reasons for the neighborhood being the most-investigated scale of place.

According to Hidalgo & Hernandez (2001), one of the main reasons could be residential satisfaction, which would include both the physical and the social dimensions of a neighborhood. Similarly, Riger and Lavrakas (1982) found that there exist two forms of neighborhood attachment: “rootedness” which would express the physical attachment and “bonding” which would express the social attachment. Taylor et al. (1985) used the terms “rootedness and involvement” for the physical dimension and “local bonds” for the social dimension. A study conducted by Hidalgo & Hernandez (2001) has shown that place attachment to the neighborhood is weaker in comparison to house or city regarding both physical and social attachment.

Attachment to neighborhood has been treated by a very wide range of studies. It has been used to measure the feeling of pride of living in a certain settlement (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996) or sense of well-being (Harris et al., 1995). It is also used as a tool for understanding the attitudes of dwellers in revitalization projects. Brown et al. (2003) found in a study conducted in Harlem that it was the housing owners

(especially old women) who showed high attachment to their neighborhood even though their physical situation was not good. In fact, ownership is also related to the idea that owners usually have a longer duration and consider the dwelling as an expenditure. This also implies place attachment. Mesch & Manor (1998) found that good relations with neighbors influence place attachment to a neighborhood. Brown et al. (2003) suggested that elements that are related to the physical environment like parks or sidewalks that are used in neighborhood activities and social interaction increase place attachment. Perkins & Long (2002) found that collective efficacy was a key element in attachment to neighborhood. The connection to fear of crime in certain neighborhoods has been reflected in lower attachment to the neighborhood (Mesch & Manor, 1998). In certain ethnic or low-income neighborhoods, even though the rate of crime was high, the fact that they were isolated from other parts of society had resulted in a high level of attachment (Fried, 2000).

In the present study of a neighborhood in the city of Tirana that was part of a large renovation project, attachment is treated to explore the sense of community in relation to the physical dimension of the settlement. Issues of feeling and well-being in connection to physical and aesthetic aspects are studied to find out the influence of the above-mentioned project on their attachment.

5. Case study

The neighborhood selected for the case study, located between Asim Vokshi and Petro Marko Streets, was a socialist period settlement and was included within the “Rebirth of the City”. The neighborhood was built during the 1960s and 1970s for the employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs within the so-called Middle Ring north-western corner very close to Zogu i Zi Square (until the end of socialist period it was the north-western border of the city).

The neighborhood consists of four apartment blocks, which generate a U-shape and contain a considerable park, and three perpendicular apart-

ment blocks, which have two green areas in between. While the green space of the U-shaped portion is preserved completely and is allocated for the public with functions such as a playground, a football/basketball field, or other recreational space. During the post-socialist period, a coffee shop has been constructed in one of the green areas between the perpendicular blocks in the post-socialist period. Coffee shops in Albania are ubiquitous, and can be considered an important part of public space.

The methodology used in this study included techniques of observation and questionnaire surveys which were conducted with the dwellers of this neighborhood. The observation was made in the public green areas, common social spaces and cafes between the apartment blocks in the neighborhood. Furthermore it included data collection through conversation. The study was conducted in May 2014 during three different times of a day including morning, midday and afternoon, and it was spread over the space of a week. Observations of the situation and activities were documented through photographing, and the use of public space was catalogued in a list. The questionnaire was organized into three parts: the first part included general information on an inhabitant's profile; the second part included questions on the settlement's characteristics which, beyond depicting the actual post-socialist situation of the neighborhood, asked for a possible comparison between the pre- and post-socialist built environment; and the third part asked the inhabitants to evaluate the "Rebirth of the City" project and its impact on the neighborhood. Thus the questionnaire aimed to reveal not only the evaluation of neighborhood in both socialist and post-socialist periods, but also the attachment of the dwellers in respect to these periods, with special emphasis on the effects of the "Rebirth of the City" project.

5.1. The observation and findings

The observation aimed to study the use of public green areas of a housing neighborhood at different times of the day. Observations of the situation and

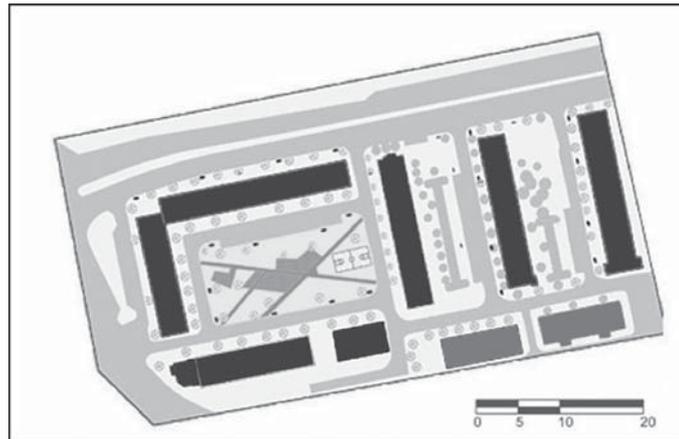


Figure 9. The apartment blocks (in black hatch) and the public space (in green hatch) included in the study (from Tirana Municipality Archive).

activities were documented by taking photographs and recording the use of public space. As a result, it was found that in the morning and before midday, the public spaces between the apartment blocks were used by retired men (102), who come together fulfilling their need to socialize and play dominoes. In this interval of time there were also grandmothers (80) with their young grandchildren or babysitters with small children. The children (115) used the public space in general in the afternoons, because in the mornings they would be at school. The children played football in the field and expressed orally that this was the most important space for them. The families in general used the public space after 17 o'clock. Their use consisted of drinking coffee in the coffee shops and taking care of their children (from 5 coffee shops observed, resulted around 350 people). In fact the ground floors of the apartments in the buildings have been transformed into coffee shops in the best cases, while in the worst case; in one space there was a coffee shop which had been built in the center of what used to be a green area. The weekends are times in which the public spaces are used to their full potential. In this case, the playground, the football field, green spaces and coffee shops are the spaces in focus.

5.2. The questionnaire and findings

The questionnaire survey was conducted with the inhabitants living in the neighborhood in their public green areas, common social spaces and cafes,



Figure 10. Images from inner courtyards of housing blocks between Asim Vokshi and Petro Marko Streets

and it was realized in the form of an interview.

5.2.1. User profile

There were 30 participants in the questionnaire survey, of whom 12 were female and 18 were male. 15 were inhabitants before the 1990s and 15 of them. Participants' professions were different. Of note is that 4 of them were drivers, 4 of them were salesmen and 4 housewives. There were also 5 retired persons, 3 workers, 3 unemployed, 2 teachers, 1 civil servant, 1 pharmacist, 1 chef, 1 cleaner and 1 electrician.

The ages of the inhabitants who were the subjects of this research: 3 were between 21 and 30 years old, 7 were between 31 and 40, 5 were between 41 and 50, 7 were between 51 and 60, 2 were between 61 and 70, and 6 were 71 and 80 years old.

As for the family size, 8 participants had families of 2 members, 4 participants with 3 members, 7 participants with 4 members, 10 participants with 5

members and 1 participant had family with 6 members.

Regarding the property aspect of inhabitants (dwelling ownership), 19 people were owners of their dwellings and 11 were renters. As for the education, 16 had a secondary education, 9 had a high school education and 5 were university graduates.

5.2.2. Settlement characteristics

The main aim of this part of the questionnaire was to get residents' evaluation on the physical aspects of their neighborhood before the 90s.

Duration in the neighborhood: At first, the dwellers were asked about the duration of their stay in the neighborhood. The results showed that 12 participants had lived there for more than 30 years, 6 participants between 21-30 years, 6 participants between 11-20 years, and 6 participants had lived there between 6-10 years.

Physical conditions of their dwellings/quarter before the 90s: When questioned about the situation their dwellings/quarter was in before the 90s, 1/3 of the interviewed (10 people) thought that the quality of the dwellings was poor before the 1990s and 3 people said they were very bad. 4 people replied they were average, 3 people replied they were satisfactory, only 2 people replied they were very good and 8 people did not answer.

Positive and negative aspects of the neighborhood: This question included articulation of both positive and negative aspects, but the dwellers tended to respond to only one aspect. Notably, 20 dwellers mentioned negative aspects including 8 people who mentioned drug use, 8 people who mentioned noise pollution and 4 people who

Table 1. User profile information.

General Information on Participants included in the research											
Gender		Age		Inhabitants B/A 90s		Ownership		Family Members No.		Education	
30 dwellers		30 dwellers		30 dwellers		30 dwellers		30 dwellers		30 dwellers	
Female	12	Bt 21 and 30	3	Before 90s	15	Yes	19	1 member	0	Secondary	16
Male	18	Bt 31 and 40	7	After 90s	15	No	11	2 members	8	High School	9
		Bt 41 and 50	5					3 members	4	University	5
		Bt 51 and 60	7					4 members	7		
		Bt 61 and 70	2					5 members	10		
		Bt 71 and 80	6					6 members	1		

pointed out the problems in hygiene. On the other side, 10 dwellers mentioned only positive aspects, including 8 who pointed out the existence of green areas and 2 who mentioned availability of car parking.

Adjectives to define the neighborhood: This was a multiple-choice question and included certain pairs of adjectives that the dwellers could select to define their neighborhood. The dwellers could select more than one adjective. The adjectives used were: interesting-ordinary, pleasant-unpleasant, attractive-unattractive, good-bad, and comfortable-uncomfortable. The evaluation of the inhabitants was predominantly positive and results showed that 14 people defined their living quarter as good, 6 people responded comfortable, 6 people found it pleasant, 5 people found it unpleasant and 4 people interesting.

Special aspects of the neighborhood: The purpose of this question was to learn from dwellers the special aspects of their living quarter. The results showed 12 participants mentioned as a special aspect the spaciousness, 6 of them referred to cafes, 4 people found vitality as special, 4 people considered the playground and the last 4 responses pointed out quietness.

Evaluation of green areas within the neighborhood: This question was related to the green areas that compose the main public space of this neighborhood. The results show that 20 dwellers view these spaces positively, 15 people evaluated green spaces as satisfactory and 5 people as very good. On the other hand, 7 people viewed the green spaces negatively, 6 people considered the green spaces “poor” and 1 dweller replied the spaces were very bad. The remaining 3 dwellers gave the green areas an average rating.

Evaluation of informal additions in housing blocks: The housing blocks contained informal additions. It is important to understand the opinions of the dwellers. The informal additions were minor constructions such as the enclosure of a balcony to transform it into a room or adding new rooms onto the terrace. Most of the dwellers (19 people) considered the informal additions to be positive, 15 people to be sat-

isfactory and 4 people considered them to be very good. The number of people considering the additions as negative was 7 and it was mentioned as poor (6 people) and very bad (1 people). A considerable number of dwellers (9 people) said the informal additions were average.

The built environment elements before the 90s neighborhood that dwellers missed: This question tended to inquire about the elements that were found in the socialist period but do not exist anymore. The results showed that 10 people missed safety, 10 people quietness, 5 people employment, 4 people parks and 1 person replied hygiene. Those dwellers that replied about the employment rather than the built environment elements had referred to social aspects of neighborhood life.

5.2.3. Evaluation of the “Rebirth of the City” project

The third and final part of the questionnaire aimed to understand the impact of the “Rebirth of the City” project which mostly treated the facade of housing blocks.

Evaluation of apartment/quarter/ environment in the actual colorful state: This question aimed to determine the influence of the colorful state overall. The dwellers predominantly (20 people) considered positively the colorful state of the neighborhood (including 16 people replying satisfactory and 4 people replying very good). The number of dwellers who considered the painted state negative was 7, and it was deemed as very bad by 4 people and poor by 3 people.

Attachment to the neighborhood previous to the 1990s or the current colorful situation: This is one of the key questions of the research because it will be used to interpret the other results. The results showed that 14 people are attached to the existing situation, 12 people to the one before the 90s and 4 people did not answer. Some of the people interviewed, and especially those that possessed informal additions, feared their demolition, and they hesitated to reply to certain questions that would include any conflict of interest.

Evaluation on the use of colors: This question intended to identify the opin-

ion of dwellers on the usage of colors. The results showed mostly negative reactions, with 18 people responding negatively (including 14 people replying poor and 4 people replying very bad). The dwellers who deemed the colors to be positive were 6, including 5 people who responded that they were satisfactory and 1 person considering the colors as very good. Meanwhile, here were 6 dwellers who considered the usage of colors to be average.

Evaluation on pictorial attitudes (designs): The dwellers were asked whether the pictorial attitudes were the right ones. This question, rather than asking about the colors used, intended to inquire about the opinion of the design of the facades. The results show that 10 people thought the pictorial attitudes were the right ones, 8 people thought otherwise. There were 6 dwellers who responded that the designs were appropriate for some of the apartment blocks and 5 people expressed they had no opinion.

Is the colorful situation of the apartment blocks considered permanent, a transitional state to be modified or destined to be destroyed in order to be reconstructed? This question aimed to elicit the opinion of dwellers on the du-

ration of the colorful state. The majority of 27 dwellers replied that the colorful facades were temporary (including 17 people who thought that apartments would not remain colorful, and 10 people who thought that they would be reconstructed altogether), while only 3 people said that they would remain colorful permanently.

Was the "Rebirth of the City" project a holistic solution to the problematic of the dwellings and quarter? This question intended to inquire as to whether the above-mentioned project solved all the problems of the neighborhood, including the common space and the housing blocks. Unanimously, all dwellers answered that it did not solve all the problems of the neighborhood.

Renovation based on architectural values before the 90s: This question asked dwellers whether the architectural values before the 90s should have been considered or not. Most of the dwellers (18 people) replied that the renovation should have been done conserving the architectural values of the 90s, and 12 people said there was no need to consider those values.

Identification of city with colorful character: Due to the fact that the "Rebirth of the City" project was im-

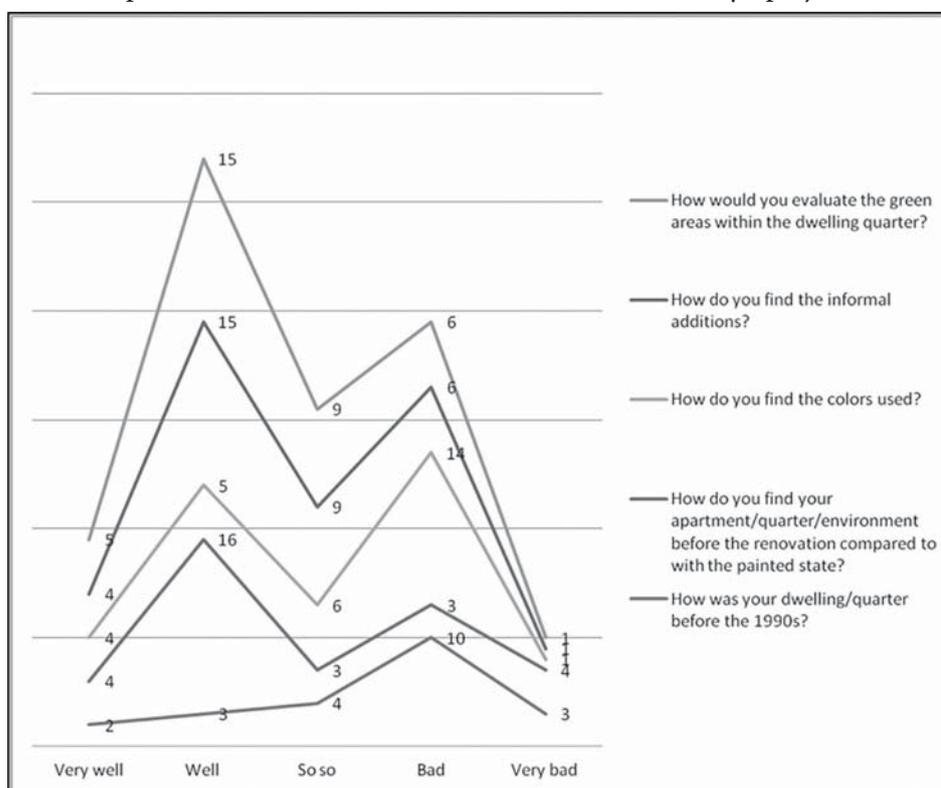


Figure 11. Miscellaneous chart of questionnaire.

plemented beyond the neighborhood scale up to the urban level, this question aimed to measure the impact of the project on the scale of the whole city and its identification with colors. On the whole, the results showed that 26 dwellers responded that the city should be identified with all its urban components, while 3 people replied that it should be identified with its colorful character and 1 person thought the city should not be thusly identified.

To live in another place after the colorful painting of the facades of apartments: The dwellers were asked this question in order to understand the negative impact of the implementation of this project in relation to their neighborhood. The results showed a balanced situation, there were 12 people who said that yes they could, 12 people say not and 6 people who gave no answer. However it is important to say that those who had the idea to live elsewhere (even though it was asked in the question after the one about colorful painting) might be related also to other reasons such as: economical, higher living standards etc.

The findings of the questionnaire show that the dwellers considered the physical conditions of their neighborhood before the 90s as poor. Although they stressed mostly negative aspects of the neighborhood, controversially they used positive adjectives to define it. Spaciousness was seen as the most special aspect of their neighborhood and people in the majority considered their green areas as positive. The dwellers evaluated their informal additions as positive and they mostly missed from before the 90s safety and quietness. The “Rebirth of the City” project was mostly considered as positive and the number of inhabitants attached to the colorful state was slightly higher to those attached to the old one, but they did not like the colors and the designs used. Furthermore, this project was considered a temporary solution and did not solve the real problems of the neighborhood. Instead people replied that the project should have considered the architectural values of before the 90s, and the city of Tirana cannot be identified with a colorful state, but with all its urban components.

Thus it can be said based on observation, the public spaces of the neighborhood were used by the retired men, grandmothers and babysitters in the morning. The children used them in the afternoon and the families used them in their time after work. The public spaces were used at the maximum in the weekend. The questionnaire found out that the dwellers evaluated the “Rebirth of the City” project as a positive initiative, being slightly more attached to the colorful situation, although they did not like the colors used, considering the man impermanent solution.

6. Concluding remarks

The change in the political regime in Albania from a socialist system to a liberal (capitalist) one, led to substantial shifts in the built environment of its capital city, Tirana. The need for more residential space and the low governmental authority prepared the way for semiformal additions and illegal construction in Tirana. The entrepreneurship initiated by the mayor of Tirana, Edi Rama, in order to stabilize the situation, the “Rebirth of the City”, was focused mostly in the Middle Ring zone housing neighborhoods. It was applied by a superficial pictorial approach considering only apartment block facades, and as a result the architectural output had very different results from the original one. The residential buildings built during the period of the socialist regime were transformed from a harmonious stock of apartments, all in a functionalist modern style, to a colorful, non-harmonious collection devoid of any relation to proper volumetric proportions.

The theory of place attachment is used as a main framework for this study in order to measure the effects of the renovation project and the environmental behavior of the dwellers after its implementation. Although places show variety based on their typology and their scale, Levicka (2011) revealed that the similarity of the concepts of neighborhood and community and its intermediate size between house and city were the main factors which made it the scale most focused

on by researchers. The attachment to the physical dimension of a neighborhood is defined as “rootedness” by Riger & Lavrakas (1982) or “rootedness and involvement” by Taylor (1985). Furthermore, place attachment was used before by Brown et al. (2003) to analyze the attitudes of inhabitants in revitalization projects. This study goes beyond the attitudes of dwellers. It aims to probe the attachment to the physical dimension of a neighborhood, which includes public spaces and housing blocks, comparing their situation before the 90s and after the implementation of a renovation project.

On the whole, the dwellers considered the situation of their neighborhood before the 90s as mostly poor. Describing the positive and negative aspects of their quarter, the majority of them answered negatively referring to problems such as drugs, noise and dirtiness, while a minority pointed out positive aspects such as green areas and the availability of parking. On the other hand, when they were asked to select defined adjectives for their neighborhood, they predominantly chose positive adjectives including good, comfortable and pleasant, and a minority used negative adjectives including unpleasant and average estimations such as interesting. Physical features related to the courtyards such as spatiality, cafes, a playground and quietness were reflected as the special features of the neighborhood. The green areas were widely valued by residents, as they have remained the primary public space of the neighborhood. The dwellers mostly considered the informal additions as positive. The dwellers missed the safety and quietness of the socialist period with the influx of newcomers and loud coffee bars in the post-socialist period.

Based on the results of the questionnaire survey, it can be said that the “Rebirth of the City” considered only the exterior facades of the neighborhood by painting them artistically and colorfully, and as a result, it can be said that it did not achieve a holistic solution. The inhabitants in the neighborhood consider public space to be the inner courtyard and the inner facades of the

neighborhood, rather than the exterior facades - spaces largely left out of the renovation project the “Rebirth of the City”. The actual situation of the neighborhood after the colorful painting of the facades was mostly considered positive by the dwellers, probably due to the poor situation that they had been in prior to this intervention; however, most of the dwellers considered the usage of the colors as inappropriate. In the same way, less than half of the interviewed dwellers considered the artistic approach used as appropriate. Predominantly, the dwellers considered the colorful situation a temporary one with which, according to them, the neighborhood/city should not be identified, but instead through all of its components. Most of the dwellers expressed the fact that the architectural values from before the 90s should have been considered in this renovation project. The most interesting result is the balance (slightly in favor of the new colorful state) between people who are attached to the new colorful situation and those who are attached to the facades as they were before the 90s.

As a result, it can be said that the “Rebirth of the City” project was a superficial project as it treated only the outer facades in the residential neighborhood between Asim Vokshi and Qemal Stafa Streets. It did not provide a holistic solution considering the whole built environment. It did not begin to touch the real problems of the neighborhood, which included the indoor spaces of housing blocks and especially the courtyards as the most important public spaces. It did, however, have a substantial impact on the attachment of the dwellers to their neighborhood. This considerable value of attachment to the colorful situation of their neighborhood can be interpreted as their support of new investments in improving their built environment’s quality, even though the project treated in this research was at best a partial intervention. Place attachment in this research can be considered as an important tool in understanding the need for more holistic renovation projects.

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