

MORPHOLOGY OF CITY LAYERS AS A RESOURCE FOR AN URBAN TOURISM OFFER. AN INTEGRATED RESEARCH TOURISM VISION FOR TIRANA.

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Abstract

This article presents the results of an integrated analytical survey conducted on the city of Tirana, aiming at a local feature-based meta-proposal, focused on developing an overall shared vision of the city's layers and users. The study contributes to raising the scientific background related to a place-based tourism's offer, within both the city itself and the Mediterranean basin's cities - as it is a unique multicultural macro-region - rich in social-cultural-historical heritage layers and well-known touristic places. The scope of this research is to highlight the values of the city's layered urban morphology, as it is crucial to develop a place-based urban tourism offer within its urban context. Furthermore, by stressing the importance as well of protecting and enhancing its own rich "human-scale character" and its peculiar stratification of social-cultural-historical legacies.

Keywords

Urban tourism, alternative tourism, co-planning process, integrated research tourism, cultural heritage, urban identity

1. Introduction

Urban tourism is a term that describes the complexity and various activities that can be experienced in a city, considering it as the immediate destination of interest. It was an underrated subject until the early 1980s, especially in the so-called "Cities of Art", when a few scholars (Jansen-Verbeke, 1986; Pearce, 2001; Robinson, 2012; etc.) opened the door among other urban studies' subjects; initially, on the wave of a raising up emergency on the effective carrying capacity of art cities', paradoxically named "overtourism" (UNESCO, 1994).

Especially in many Italian (Venice, Florence, Rome, Palermo, and many others.) and European (Paris, Barcelona, London, etc.) cities, the weight generated from the increasing massive tourism flows highlighted, at the same time, both merits and demerits of such a kind of massive exploitation of social's behaviours, open spaces and local resources, creating an over-use of facilities and services, of both benefits and issues released to the

city, in terms of effective urban management and endemic funds lacking.

Along tourism's evolution - often spontaneous, massive, and not entirely manageable from the place - tourism markets and flows have been split into different conventional kinds, as well as alternative typologies, definitely according to the level of interference with the territory and local reality. Furthermore, as tourism is - in its bases - an implemented system of relationships at any territorial dimension, as well as contamination among diversities; based on its "typology" it can resolve as the bleeding dry of local values and features (exploitation) or instead, in a meaningful element of sites valorisation directly connected for and from a more suitable development of regions and cities. In both cases, it directly affects, and it is affected from, urban infrastructures and resources, in the physical, social, cultural, and economic dimensions of either the hosts (dwellers) or the guests (visitors). So, both positive and negative relations sets raising on, at the same time and in the same place, in any of the

tourism experiences as into an intricate multi-layered matrix.

The challenge is to enable the management of these interconnected complex systems of relations, limiting the negative aspects by drafting local suitable alternatives, tailored case by case in benefit of the place.

Also, taking from the studies held since 1994 about the innovative concept of Integrated Relational Tourism within the Mediterranean context (Gulotta et al., 2004) and adopting its holistic framework onto the peculiar characteristics and features -still- existing within the city of Tirana (a historical Mediterranean multi-layered city), this study aims to investigate the cultural and social heritage of the city, which along with the physical aspects, may allow producing a more suitable vision - a strictly ground-based pilot shared-vision - for an integrated Research Tourism proposal for Tirana, as the upcoming city's evolution. By pushing up its actual unique reality and by correcting the ongoing evident homologation (Naselli, 2021).

The goals are to identify those unique and rich features and take off some suggestions on how to manage -protect, evaluate, enhance- the local values at their fullest potential.

A further achievement is to define a suitable sort of alternative tourism that could act from the market offerer, instead of the demander, expressing all the beneficial effects and limiting the negative aspects.

For that reason, both material and immaterial legacies have to play into the game.

2. Research aims and methodology.

This research article, which is an integrated part of an ongoing study, longs to identify how and if an alternative tourism offer (the under proposing Research Tourism) might take advantage of the various urban features and cultural layers of Tirana, by propositioning itself as a safe-type of tourism even in the current pandemic era.

The methodology used is based on both traditional urban analyses conducted onto historical and cultural values, current resources and physical components, as well as on a questionnaire with a well-defined target group aiming to capture the overall communal disposition about the vocation to a diverse tourism offer approach for Tirana. The paper is focused on

the survey as material from which to get further information to be used in subsequent participating planning and designing phases.

As part of the methodology used, rather than the traditional urban analysis, is the questionnaire focusing on urban tourism and the potential values of the city of Tirana; to develop strategies to improve the tourism sector sustainability.

The questionnaire, composed of 14 questions is divided into 3 sections; the first 5 questions build the background of the interviewees, a very important section that associated the target group with the topic.

Following the section related to the multi-layered nature of the city, proceed then with questions relevant to the touristic aspect of Tirana.

100 interviewees were asked to fill the questionnaire, professionals and experts who are residents in Tirana, or that have lived in the city for a short time: thus, aware of the multilayer structure of the city.

The participant group is composed of architects, urban planners, lecturers, researchers and civil engineers, with different academic backgrounds, from junior architects to senior scholars.

Another crucial feature of the target group is the variation of age, from 25 years to 65 years old professionals, which contributed with different points of view on this research study.

Relevant is also the relation of the work background of the interviewees with tourism, the input that they give into sustainably developing urban tourism, as shown in Figure 1, a relation which is direct or indirect to tourism.

- Rural development
- Academic work
- Training staff [NTPA]
- Territorial planning
- Landscape design
- Local expert at the Municipality of Tirana
- Design host facilities

Fig. 1: Input from professionals into tourism development

This type of target group has been intentionally selected considering the direct relation to the city's features and understand by all means the main phenomenon which characterizes the city's peculiarities: the mixed nature of the

overlapped layers of the city. That group was of different educational backgrounds and different relationships with the city; 85% of them were permanent residents and 15% temporary, but all of them were certainly familiar with the city's environment. In terms of works completed in or for Tirana, as illustrated in Figure 2, 65% of them have been involved in different projects regarding the city.

Their responses also suggested an implementation of the whole structure in the analysis of the different layers currently present in the city.

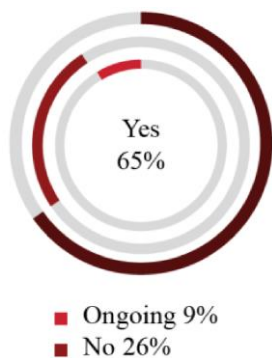


Fig. 2: Participation of interviewees in projects in/for Tirana

Professionals have been asked what types of actions could be taken to improve the tourism sector sustainably and 35% of them said that infrastructure needed more improvements having a direct impact on tourism.

Furthermore, 32% of them chose public spaces as an important feature to contribute to developing tourism.

The 21% chose transportation; followed then by 10% who chose events and by 2% suggested marketing the city as a brand. All the above-mentioned actions would have an immediate effect on tourism development.

However, 66% of the interviewees acknowledge the city as a real pluralistic urban environment; with a multi-layered nature, an overlapped urban and architectural character of different historical periods and social-cultural events, as illustrated in Figure 3.

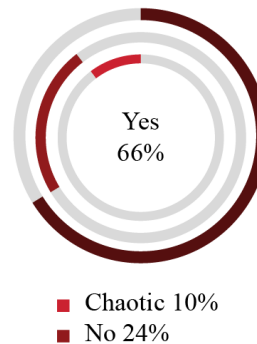


Fig. 3: The pluralistic character of the urban environment.

“The concept of pluralism implies that a city may hold a certain majesty and prominence; thus, achieving the status of an extraordinary and distinguished city, in some very important ways. This distinction can be encapsulated in attributes that can be projected across the world. The characteristics can vary from military capacity to cultural assets, to commercial prowess, to the transcendent propositions of philosophy and religion” (Braha, 2019).

Following out the professional's response, regarding the features and potentials of each layer present within the city, reinforces the main idea of the pluralistic city.

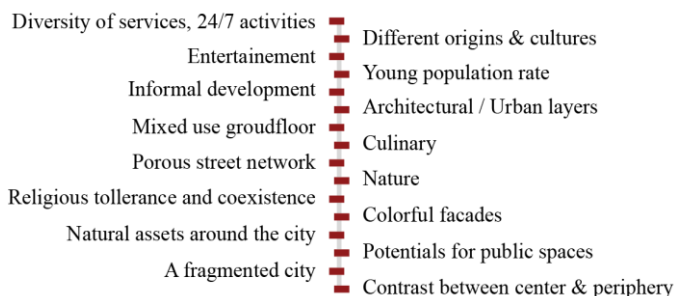


Fig. 4: Characteristics that make Tirana a pluralistic city

As shown in Figure 4, a series of city characteristics are listed as they were specified in the questionnaire by the interviewees. They give a useful view of the city's dynamic environment, with potential for qualitative public spaces and strong components to have a great tourism offer.

The development of tourism, through its living activities and enhancement of present elements of the city, affects directly the city's atmosphere and economy. When asked if the above-mentioned characteristics have the potential to improve the city's quality of life, 70% of the interviewees agreed on the fact, as illustrated in Figure 5.

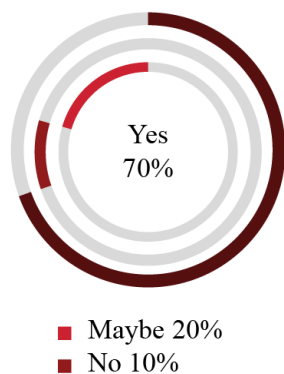


Fig. 5: Tourism affecting the urban environment

Taking into account the mixed and rich nature of the urban structure of Tirana, as well as considering its urban characteristics, architectural features, social and cultural dimension as well as services and activities that could take place in each different layer of the city; it is inevitable to consider the great potential of the city in terms of the tourism offer.

According to the Technical Assessment Report by TR030 Plan (2016), there are seven categories of tourism recognized for the city of Tirana; cultural, adventure, agro, conference, culinary, religious and dental tourism. When the interviewed were asked which of the above-mentioned categories had greater potential to affect the city’s development, 29% of them chose cultural tourism as the first resource of development, followed by 20% who chose culinary tourism and 14% with agro-tourism. The classification is shown in Figure 6.

Furthermore, over the last years, it has been denoted a significant interest in the mixed nature of the city from the academics, researchers and students. Many scholars have chosen Tirana as a suitable area to study the phenomenon of the urban sprawl and the overlapped city layers; considering the whole of Tirana as a laboratory on a 1:1 scale. Previous studies confirm that this concept of city-laboratory of architecture is not entirely new, as A.B. Menghini alleges “the city of Tirana today confirms the nature of a “laboratory” assumed since the second half of the 1920s, constituting a field of experimentation for contemporary urban design” (Menghini, et al., 2012).

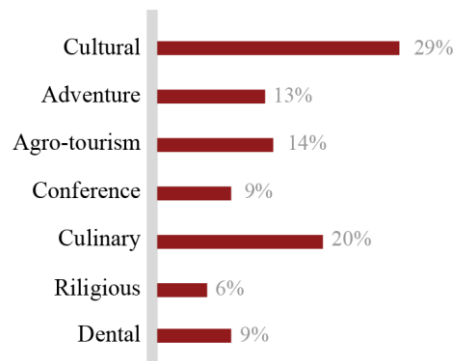


Fig. 6: Influence of tourism categories in the city

Different research groups have shown interest in Tirana, groups of students or academics have put on activities aimed to discover and draft real answers to that subject; such as SpaRe.Life, an international summer school with the main objective to study the super-blocks in Tirana within the city centre; Urban Carpet, researchers from Wien who studied the relation between young people and public spaces of the city; TAW, international workshop of Tirana architecture week; Architecture in context, researchers from Netherland who studied architecture and identity of the capital city; SCS, social-cultural centre, volunteers from Belgium who studied the context and implemented a project with focus the social dimension, etc.

Given the numbers of such kinds of interests, it was asked also if the phenomenon of the city as an open laboratory could be considered a characteristic of the city, 64% of them agreed whereas 22% of them was in doubt, as illustrated in Figure 7.

As a result of the survey generated by this study and taking into consideration also the feedback of the professionals that are familiar with the phenomenon of the city, it was suggested to add another category of tourism –Research Tourism. A niche market of the academic tourism sector, which is itself a separate type of tourism. Even though directly connected with other categories of tourism, which includes scholars of different backgrounds to undertake research trips in cities where they are not residents, according to the guidance of the World Tourism Organization (Rodriguez, et al., 2013).

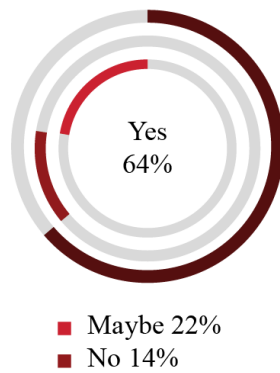


Fig. 7: Could Tirana be considered a 'laboratory city' for research?

3. *Tourism and Urban tourism*

To talk about tourism evolution, it is crucial to consider the origins of the human environment, the development of the (physical) communication infrastructures, and the fostering of advanced commercial opportunities.

While proto tourism, which followed out the natural migrations of the first human groups, is recognized as linked to the increase of new human relationships lead by the ability in cultivating and saving agricultural products; since its progressive evolution, the city became typically the main both destinations and reasons of the early journeys and expeditions, giving birth to the third phase, the named pre-tourism.

At the end of 1600, it starts what nowadays we name tourism, with the opening to many other categories of tourism "users" (the women) and the implementation of new means and infrastructures of mobility, the start of a new era -more open and safer- of travelling.

At the end of the '900s, in particular, the cities were -literally- invaded on the wave of the rise of massive tourism (Pearce, 2001), driven from the so-called international tour operators - a renewed category of economic businesses.

As easily understandable, because of their additional urban functions, due to the existence of "the market" (together with the opportunities to exchange innovative techniques and knowledge), as well as the higher concentration of goods and occasions, the city has been the centre - and the main reason - of tourism evolution from the beginning of its progress, turning tourism into a motion that took place at all historical periods.

But what are the reasons that generated such focus on the cities? One of the main incentives of visiting cities in the development occurring

progressively and continuously, making them a central focus of innovation and opportunities, as well as an attraction for visitors and travellers.

The term that interprets the complexity and the various activities that a visitor performs in the city - considering this last one as the place of interest of the visitor - is acknowledged as urban tourism.

Urban tourism is a recent popular phenomenon, which became a topic of Urbanism and was accepted as a subject of scientific research only after the '80s -when it was approached to the term "Integrated"- creating the indissoluble link between Tourism and Territory (Naselli, 2007 & 2012). According to Robinson (2012), "A well equilibrate tourism management needs to offer diversity, accessibility, and flexibility. In the tourist-city relationship, there is always asymmetry".

Urban tourism is indeed the result of the connection of different elements such as site, district, city-wide, national, and international interrelations, as stated by Pearce (2001).

According to Jansen-Verbeke (1986), two elements constitute urban tourism: first distinguishable element of a city are the main attractions that serve as captivation elements to attract visitors, then is the transportation which serves as a linking element between the tourist and the places of interest.

Furthermore, there is an assemblage of distinguishing features of urban tourism, related primarily to the tourist resources and demand; in addition, there are some specific features such as diverse motivations of tourism, short duration of travelling, international visitors, seasonality, and necessity of urban tourists to have strict requirements - making it very difficult to satisfy all simultaneously (Naselli, 2012).

The metamorphosis of cities has made it possible for urban open spaces to become a fascinating alternative, as its vast spectrum of opportunities can respond to different changes in different tourism demands.

4. *Tirana's short historical background*

Since the foundation of the city of Tirana is noted the commercial character of it, being in a crucial position in the intersection of trading regional roads, which also served as an important axis around which the city was defined.

The development process in trading cities is easier and faster compared to other places, which was one of the main reasons why Tirana became in a short term an important city.

According to Mëhilli (2014), in 1614 in the central area of Tirana were built a mosque, one can (inn), a hamam and a few stores, which coincided with the intersection point of the trading streets becoming later the first centre of the city, called “Old Bazaar”, with no evidence nowadays Figure 10. In February 1920 Tirana was declared the capital city of Albania, not for its historical background, bold character nor monumentality as a city, but for its very interesting geographic position - the short distance of the city with the sea and the mountain; the presence of many natural elements and water resources; the fertile soil which could be used for the development of population growth and the strategic position that could be crucial for the expansion of the commercial activities and economic development.

Following in 1925, under the kingdom of Zogu I, the city centre was re-designed in a perfectly axial arrangement by Brasini, with big symmetric buildings around the square and other political institutions along the main boulevard, which was shaped as a monumental axis, and delineating a new important direction of the city emphasizing the mountain crown surrounding the eastern part of the city.

This new layout of the city centre gave the city a different monumental identity worthy of being the capital of the country.

Throughout its history, Tirana changed its identity from being a small town with a few low-rise buildings and some mosques in the Old Bazaar, into being transformed into a European city shaped with large and regular neighbourhoods, high-rise buildings, and wide streets – an influence of the post-industrialization period in Europe.

During Communism, Albania was isolated and the impact of that period had in Albania was profound and still nowadays, mostly the city of Tirana, deals with the consequences.

There was a deep differentiation between the city centre, which was used as a monumental and solemn element of the capital (Pojani, 2014) and the attention towards it and the periphery, that is why the industrial buildings were projected and constructed in the periphery near the agricultural lands; as functions that helped the city to prosper.



Fig. 8: Tirana's centre around the 1920 - the Old Bazaar (Naska & Kambo, 2016)



Fig. 9: Tirana's centre around 1980, (TR030, 2016)



Fig. 10: Tirana's centre around 2020, (photo from the web, 2020)

However, the approach of starting all over again was more ideological in the country, than in other places; the disconnection with the past, losing the same economic strategies used before the detachment with religion; and social structures were the manifestation of this ideology. The practise of religion was forbidden and that is why many religious buildings were demolished or changed their function; with only the exception of the Et'hem Beu Mosque, which was used as a museum at the time (Pojani, 2014).

This inhibitory policy related to the urbanization process was one of the main reasons why, after the fall of communism, the population moved towards the cities in an uncontrolled manner (Dhamo, Thomai, Aliaj, 2016).

After the fall of Communism and the creation of a new system with a pluralistic-democratic approach, many changes in the economic sector, physical and functional form of the cities, social aspect, and territorial reform followed on. Tirana suffered the most from this "rebellion". Some of the motives because people chose Tirana were the opportunities that the city could offer to the young people and the possibility of finding a job and having better living conditions.

Early 2000 marked the beginning of social and administrative awareness through different governmental reforms. However, the sense of chaos did not disappear, there was still an extreme migration of people towards Tirana in search of new possibilities. Till nowadays, Tirana faces the effects of the uncontrolled movement of the population causing congestion and stressing out a pluralistic atmosphere in the city.

Foreign architects have had an important impact in the city-forming processes over the years, mostly contributing to the last decade's transformations.

Different local and international architects, with different ideologies and languages towards modernity and modern urban fabric, have left an important imprint in the city's structure, contributing to having a modern city with contemporary buildings, which are becoming more and more attractive for locals as well as for foreign visitors.

5. *Morphology of Layers and features for visitors within Tirana*

In the past centuries, the city of Tirana was never characterized to be a touristic city; it had

more of a commercial identity, also given the geographical position, mainly transitory activities took place.

However, this kind of behaviour doesn't seem to be characteristic nowadays. Albanians want still to transfer to the capital city for greater opportunities and better living conditions; foreigners are curious to come and explore the city to see the rapid achievements of it, being transformed from a closed and controlled city into an open modern one, in less than three decades. Furthermore, the city branding approach helped as well in the process of transforming Tirana from an introverted city to an extroverted and dynamic one. These are all reasons -research-linked- that influenced and aroused the interest of people to visit Tirana.

The overlayer of the city transition phases contributes in a very positive way to developing different typologies of interests and activities that conscious visitors can experience once they travel to Tirana.

5.1. *Ottoman Layer*

Urban characteristics are very important especially for tourism since they are the first elements that affect the tourist experience. From buildings attached to the street to the ones that use the courtyard as a division element for more privacy.

The courtyard is a typical element for the majority of the buildings from the Ottoman period.

This contributes directly to creating quiet areas to live, to visit and to have recreational activities. Furthermore, the greenery extended from the courtyards creates a nice atmosphere with surprising effects, in the streets of these neighbourhoods, which are also enriched by the presence of old gates. Another feature of the Ottoman period in the street hierarchy, from narrow organic streets to cul-de-sacs, which are easily distinguishable in terms of width and use of local materials.

The presence of some intimate pedestrian paths, constructed with natural materials defined by surrounding walls of the private houses which are in a dimensioned human scale, makes a great feature for residents, as well as for tourists.

The most important building of the Ottoman period and at the same time one of the most visited monuments in the city is the Et'hem Bey Mosque. Constructed in 1820, it resisted different regimes

and nowadays is a great symbol of cultural heritage, as well as an important sacred building. In addition, the 18th century stone footbridge known as The Tanner's Bridge is visited every day by the visitors and it functions even nowadays as a transition element for the citizens.

No less important are the different attractive elements of the ottoman house; the well, the cellar or the bay windows and balconies.

Of great value are as well the interior elements; the ceilings full of decorations or the arrangement of typical elements such as the fireplace (oxhaku) or the sitting places in the living room (mindere).

The nature of experiences that a tourist could have in these areas of the ottoman period would be intimate and private and would attract families as well as young tourists since the costs generally would be below, and the involvement would be full of the locals.

5.2. Italian Layer

In terms of urban characteristics, the Italian architecture present in the city is one of the most particular ones since it constitutes one of the most important areas of the city. It defines one of the main axes directing the expansion of the city.

Moreover, a clear difference between public and residential buildings is noted. Although, the institutional buildings are more famous, in the Italian period were constructed also a series of private villas which nowadays some are abandoned. Each of them represents a typical Italian style in elements such as the small courtyard, façade elements or internal design solutions.

The boulevard is one of the most frequented areas of the city, not only for its monumental buildings but also because it connects the two main squares of the city. Walkable in less than 10 minutes and equipped also with bicycle paths along rows of secular trees, it creates a nice atmosphere in the middle of the urban fabric.

There is a balance between what is constructed and greenery, the use of a few green public spaces compensates in a way the urban and dynamic character of the boulevard.

The resident buildings could be transformed into some chic apartments to rent for tourists, the location, and the style that they have inherited over the years would make some great compromise for that category of tourists that do not want to spend big amounts of money on

accommodation, but still don't want to give up on style.

Another asset is the multifunctional square, a space that has a great potential to be transformed from a playground and a recreational area to a space dedicated to art and various performances, or moreover, to a flea market.

All these diverse activities would increase the opportunities to encourage social encounters and to create a more human-scaled public space in the city.

5.3. Socialist Layer

One of the first things that can be noticed from the buildings of this period is the architectural scale.

Apart from some particular buildings with public functions, generally, the buildings are suitable for human scale. Furthermore, there is a clear hierarchy of streets, between main streets, secondary streets, and pedestrian zones.

However, the buildings have a different character; even though they are treated in a very rational way in terms of facade solutions, the public buildings stand out.

These buildings were meant to demonstrate the power of the socialist ideology. One highly discussed building of this category is the pyramid of Tirana, which always has been an attraction for tourists, even though for many years has been left in an abandoned state.

Another typical element is the facades of these buildings, which at a first look may seem boring and very rational.

There are some sporadic buildings in the city, most of them built by courageous architects that rebelled against the strict rules of the regime. Other than the rational design, rhythm is one particular of the facades of the socialist period, achieved with colonnades or structural elements that at the same time have a structural function and aesthetics function as well.

The activities that could take place in this layer present vary from the tours at many bunkers distributed in the city, or at other monumental buildings within the city.

Moreover, the former industrial buildings have the more potential to be transformed into small social centres, with commercial activities, recreational spaces, sports areas and agricultural services.

These centres in the periphery would complete the urbanized character of the central square and the boulevards of Tirana, to achieve a balance between the urban and the rural character of the periphery of the city.

5.4. *Informal Layer*

Some areas that during the communist regime were not accessible for everyone after the '90s were transformed as recreational areas, such as the case of Blloku. Under total closure only for the elite, Blloku was one of the first areas that went under a transformation process; from a residential area, it became an entertainment area. Still, nowadays, the area is full of the coolest bars and always full of people. It is one of the most dynamic areas of the city and the main attraction for all categories of tourists.

The residential areas were also affected by the behaviour of people.

It is easily noticeable the change of the facades, people added entirely floors over existing buildings; closed balconies for a few meter squares more; built new private villas without any permission; or opened a new activity, mostly on the ground floor.

The grey facades were changed as well, the desire was to create a new identity of the city in a short time; thus, with the help of the colours, the facades were changed from being rational and grey into canvases full of colours.

In this period, the city's fabric and the city's silhouette was changed and not unified, transforming the city into a pluralistic one. Acknowledging the character of the pluralistic layer, what would be suitable in terms of services and activities for the area would be considering it an area for young people. Low cost of experiencing various activities.

Another category of people who is very attracted and curious about these informal areas are the students and academics. They want to study the phenomenon and to get the full experience with the locals in these areas; thus, the possibility to have various workshops done directly in the informal neighbourhoods would be a great opportunity to develop tourism as well.

5.5. *Contemporary Layer*

The mixed-use buildings, with commercial activities, accommodation services, office

buildings or conference spaces are located in the city centre.

These buildings have a typical modern architecture and have become important attractions for tourists. Moreover, the city centre is completed with a few modern public spaces, which encourage the curiosity of the tourists to go and visit.

Different from previous urban characteristics, in this layer can be noticed a more regular urban pattern, the buildings are of different typologies; the street hierarchy is very clear, where a distinguishable division between vehicular roads and pedestrian paths exists; the street pattern in the neighbourhoods is more clear and regular, and most of the areas are suitable or have dedicated paths for bicycle riding, and greenery is another positive asset of this layer, the tendency is to have a balance between the built-up and green public spaces.

A feature of the buildings of this period is modernity, expressed not only in shapes but in materials and concepts as well. Most of the buildings have a monumentality character, high-rise buildings host many commercial and social activities.

These towers give the city a fresh and modern identity. In addition, these modern buildings are suitable for luxurious accommodation, business trips or national and international conferences, since each one of them has appropriate spaces for various business activities.

This modern layer present in the city, with all these modern facilities, would promote conference tourism as well. A new typology of tourism that has become influential over the last years. Furthermore, this kind of tourism is directly connected with culinary tourism and the nightlife that the city offers, which is also a characteristic of Tirana.

The following is shown the expansion of the city, through overlapped maps, from the Ottoman period, before 1920; the Italian period, from the 1920s to 1940; the socialist period, from the 1940s to the 1990s, following then the pluralistic period. The latter is divided into two further phases, the first two decades after the fall of communism, from 1990 to 2010, proceeding with the modern period of the last decade, after 2010.

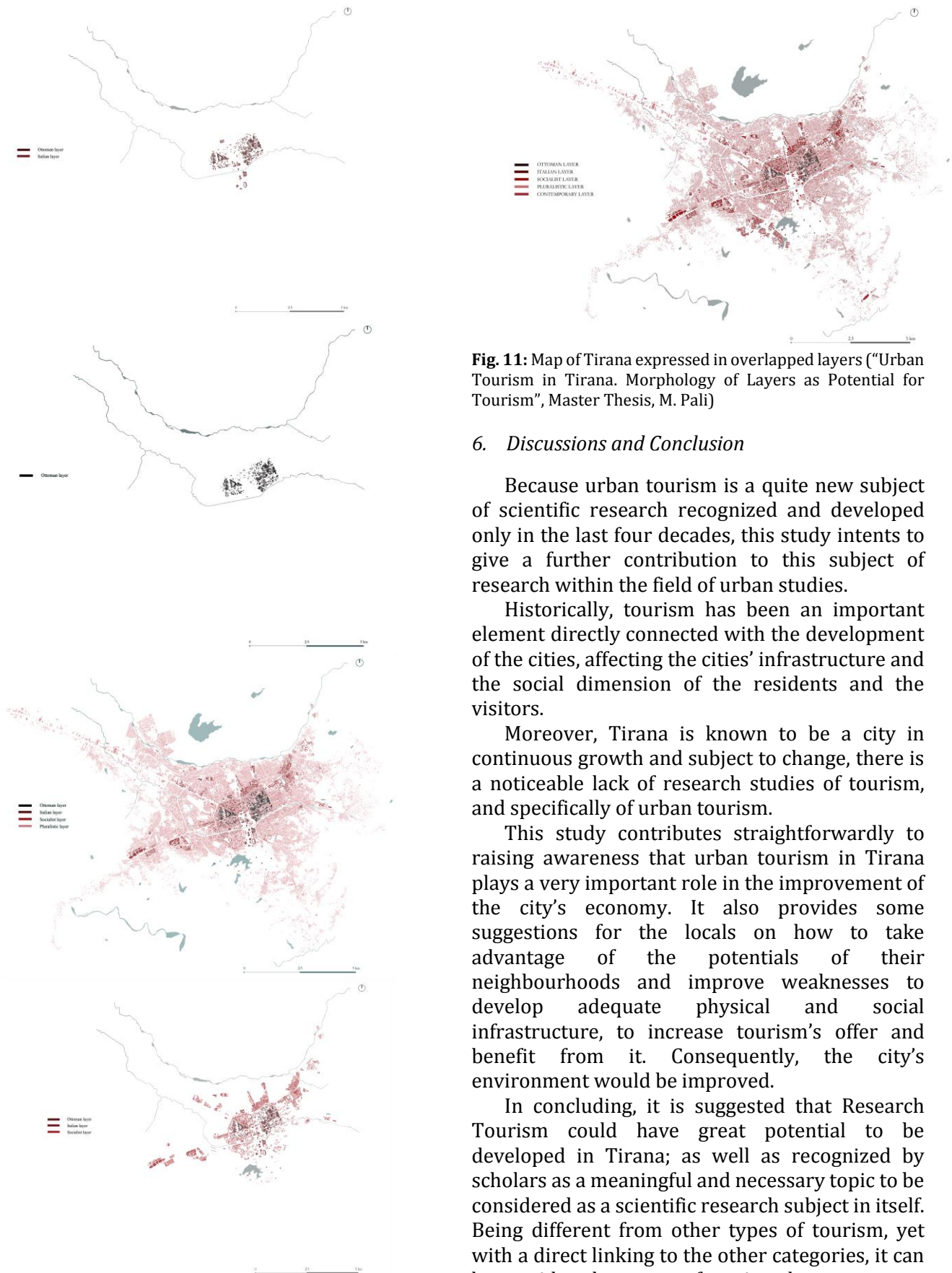


Fig. 11: Map of Tirana expressed in overlapped layers (“Urban Tourism in Tirana. Morphology of Layers as Potential for Tourism”, Master Thesis, M. Pali)

6. Discussions and Conclusion

Because urban tourism is a quite new subject of scientific research recognized and developed only in the last four decades, this study intends to give a further contribution to this subject of research within the field of urban studies.

Historically, tourism has been an important element directly connected with the development of the cities, affecting the cities’ infrastructure and the social dimension of the residents and the visitors.

Moreover, Tirana is known to be a city in continuous growth and subject to change, there is a noticeable lack of research studies of tourism, and specifically of urban tourism.

This study contributes straightforwardly to raising awareness that urban tourism in Tirana plays a very important role in the improvement of the city’s economy. It also provides some suggestions for the locals on how to take advantage of the potentials of their neighbourhoods and improve weaknesses to develop adequate physical and social infrastructure, to increase tourism’s offer and benefit from it. Consequently, the city’s environment would be improved.

In concluding, it is suggested that Research Tourism could have great potential to be developed in Tirana; as well as recognized by scholars as a meaningful and necessary topic to be considered as a scientific research subject in itself. Being different from other types of tourism, yet with a direct linking to the other categories, it can be considered as a type of tourism that encourages tourist researchers to get the full experience of

many of the aspects of the city. Tirana is building a distinctive brand and it is already well known to be a vibrant city in continuous growth and subject to change, where there is a noticeable lack of research studies of tourism, and specifically of urban tourism.

This research study contributes straightforwardly to raising awareness that urban tourism plays a very important role even in the improvement of the city's economy.

Conclusively, to the main question of this research study: "Does this city, with all these overlapped layers of time, provide appropriate structures and rich spatial diversity for visitors?" it is concluded that Tirana has all the appropriate features to use urban tourism as a tool to develop the city's economy, considering as well the results of the analysis and the response of the professionals.

The overlapped layers of the city are an added value, naming a few examples, the close co-existence of buildings representing different religious cults, traditional housing mixed with the contemporary architecture, the contrast between plain and colourful facades, give to the fabric of the city a typical dynamism.

These are all important features of the city which increase the tourists' curiosity and attract more visitors each year.

Considering, furthermore, that there is a noticeable lack of research studies on tourism in Albania, and specifically on the sub-topic of urban tourism; this study aims to contribute straightforwardly to raising awareness that urban tourism could play a very important role in the improvement of the cities' transition toward modern cities but taking care of their unique internal values. In the meantime, this study aims to give a further contribution to the general subject of Urban Tourism.

Even if several experiences have nowadays put in force in Albania to explore kinds of offers more suitable and beneficial for the local dimension - like rural tourism, or environmental tourism, or also cultural or gastronomical tourism, etc. - we must point out that most of the current offer policies are (and are going to be, in the predictions) mainly focused on that kind of massive tourism concentrated along with the coastal areas, the main cities and the seaside ones; neglecting the whole set of real "values and resources" that characterize the local originality within the "others" urban contexts and inner

agricultural and mountain areas. Through this research, in drafting an alternative Integrated Research Tourism vision for Tirana city, we want to highlight the values of Tirana layered urban morphology (both physical and human) as it is a crucial material to develop a place-based urban tourism offer within its urban context.

This also by stressing the importance of protecting and enhancing its own rich "human-scale character" and its peculiar stratification of social-cultural-historical legacies.

That is the main reason for attempting to fix the main outputs of both the early surveys and the urban analyses.

Furthermore, the topic that arose in the past year, the pandemic effects on the city-life, new arguments were introduced into this research. What we are experiencing nowadays, in terms of relationships, is to struggle into our daily urban life for a new equilibrium in between proximity and enlargement.

On one hand the urban, social and spatial contractions within the real physical dimension as derived from the new imposed "medical" limits; while on the other, the sudden and unexpected expansion of both individual relationships and virtual spaces, through the digitalization acceleration in many of the life-fields.

There is no doubt that such an uncontrollable disaster generates fear psychosis among guests and hosts, particularly international travellers who reach tourism destinations after taking a lot of risks and spending a huge amount of money just for the sake of feeling "some change", which is still the main reason behind tourism aims. All these topics and dynamics are valuable topics that need exploring.

This research study presents a first phase of analysing the effect that urban tourism has on the development of the city, in terms of physical and social infrastructures. It could be used as a base to create strategic planning of a series of actions that would upgrade the city's tourism offer.

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