

Czech University of Life Sciences Prague
Faculty of Forestry and Wood Sciences

THE IMPACT OF URBAN ACUPUNCTURE IN THE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PERI-URBAN FRINGE

*The Case of Kashar,
Albania*



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CZECH UNIVERSITY OF LIFE SCIENCES PRAGUE

Faculty of Forestry and Wood Sciences

DIPLOMA THESIS ASSIGNMENT

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Forestry, Water and Landscape Management

Thesis title

The impact of urban acupuncture in the residential development of the peri-urban fringe

Objectives of thesis

To assess and propose solutions aimed at minimizing impacts of new development sprawl on the peri-urban fringe. Since the continuous master planning of the urban areas hasn't proved to be very effective, trying an alternative way to intervene in the massive residential building, for improving the conditions of life of the incomers. The new approach is what is called "Urban Acupuncture", the strategy of planning from the bottom-up, instead of up-bottom, from the micro scale, instead of the macro scale. Giving rapid and effective solutions to different areas, which can give an immediate change to the lifestyle of the residents, and make a better use of the newly developed residential area.

Methodology

Literature review

Identification of case study locations

Photographic documentation

Survey / interview of residents and municipal officials

Review of Spatial and Master Plans for study sites

Assessment of regulatory policy documents and ID of shortfalls

Proposal of changes to policy and regulatory guidelines

Prototype of recommended pattern of growth at study locations.

The proposed extent of the thesis

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Keywords

Sprawl, impacts of suburbanization, peri-urban fringe, residential development

Recommended information sources

- Duany, Andres, E. Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck. 2000. Suburban Nation: The rise of sprawl and decline of the American dream. New York: North Point Press. Read Pages 1-37.
- Orr, David. 2002. The Nature of Design: Ecology, Culture and Human Intention. Chapter 2: Human Ecology as a Problem of Ecological Design, pp. 13-32. Oxford University Press, Oxford
- Thayer, Robert L. Jr. 1994. Gray World, Green Heart: Technology, Nature, and the Sustainable Landscape. Wiley and Sons, New York: NY
- Waldheim, Charles. "Landscape as Urbanism", in The Landscape Urbanism Reader, Charles Waldheim, Ed. 2006, Princeton Univ. Press. NY.

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Declaration

I declare that I have worked on my diploma thesis "*The Impact of urban acupuncture in the residential development of the peri-urban fringe -The Case of Kashar, Albania*" by myself and I have used only sources mentioned at the end of the thesis.

Megi Ballgjini

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To my beloved father, mother, Anila, Lola, Grejsi and Aria !

Abstract

This thesis will focus on possible interventions on the residential development of the peri-urban fringe of Tirana, capital of Albania. The main purpose is to assess and propose solutions aimed at optimizing impacts of new development as a result of sprawl on the peri-urban fringe. Since the on going production of a master plan after another of the urban areas hasn't proved to be very effective, this thesis focus on exploring alternative approaches to intervene in the massive residential building, for improving the conditions of life of the incomers. This kind of approach is what is known as "Urban Acupuncture", bottom-up planning strategy instead of top down, from the micro scale, instead of the macro one. This methodology aims in offering rapid and effective solutions to different areas, which might result in a more immediate impact in the lifestyle of the residents, and make a better use of the newly developed residential area.

Keywords: *peri-urban, sprawl, urban acupuncture, planning, development, bottom - up strategies*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Objective

This thesis will first briefly describe the current situation of the urban development in Albania. I decided to take Albania as a study case, not only because it is a country which has been in transition for the past 27 years, but also because the effect of sprawl in the last two decades has resulted in massive and informal building, numerous master plans that have never been fully implemented, and chaotic growth as a result of ineffective and proper administrative control. I find this to be an interesting study case where apart from the high level of criticism that can be found in many articles or reviews, I believe also solutions can still be rethought and designed, in order to achieve a way of improving the current situation.

The main focus of study and analysis will be Tirana, the capital of Albania, being the city that has undergone a drastic change and has been constantly growing because of sprawl in these last two decades.

1.1.1 Urban Sprawl

“While rapid urbanization fuelled by mass migration from the countryside to cities is commonly observed in many East European countries, Albania’s post-socialist urban form has been strongly influenced by the dramatic upheaval in land ownership that has taken place in the context of an inadequately developed legal system and involved the systematic appropriation of open space by developers. The impact of this urbanization on Albanian society has been profound.” (Informally called sprawl? Morphogenetic evolution in post-socialist Tirana Blerta Dino, Sam Griffiths, Kayvan Karimi)

As a result of this sprawl, demographic changes as a result of migration from other regions of the country towards the capital, the city has widened its boundaries and as a consequence of this municipal expansion has developed in a circular way - in all directions - creating what is called the peri-urban fringe.

1.1.2 Peri-Urban Fringe

“The peri-urban (sometimes also called the urban fringe) may be the dominant urban form and spatial planning challenge of the twenty-first century. In older industrial or post-industrial countries the peri-urban is a zone of social and economic change and spatial restructuring, while in newer industrializing countries, and most of the developing world, the peri-urban is often a zone of chaotic urbanization leading to sprawl. In both cases the peri-urban can be seen as not just a fringe in-between city

and countryside, a zone of transition, rather it is a new kind of multi-functional territory. While it resists simple definitions, there are common features wherever such areas are found, such as a relatively low population density by urban standards, scattered settlements, high dependence on transport for commuting, fragmented communities and lack of spatial governance” (Joe Ravetz, Christian Fertner, and Thomas Sick Nielsen)

1.1.3 Narrowing Down : Case of Kashar

Due to the creation of these fringes, there is one area in particular, which has been studied, planned and built within approximately five years (2009-2014) and there is quite a certainty that “mistakes” can be made. This area is the Commune of Kashar, which is located in the north- western part of Tirana.

What I found interesting during my studies and my own living experience in Albania, is the fact that only in Tirana, there have been several master-plans proposed and some actually have been implemented only to vary again with the political changes every four or eight years. This leads me to think that this kind of planning may not be effective in Albania and in particular, in Tirana.

1.1.4 Methodology

That said, I would like to emphasize that this thesis will not focus on criticizing what is built and already exists; rather this thesis will focus on proposing some solutions for improving the current situation. It will do so by suggesting an alternative way to stimulate effective growth known as urban acupuncture- autonomous small interventions in the public space of cities marked by a bountiful impact and applied in a short period of time (Cazanova., & Hernandez., 2014, pp 19).

This will be the methodological part, which will be converted to an application of the project, in which I will select three different case-study locations from the selected area, and “pin-in” three different needles which will “inject” three different elements to rapidly improve the situation of these areas.

1.1.5 Urban planning Development of Tirana

As mentioned above, Tirana has been the subject of many attempts at master-planning and what has been implemented was always a “top-down” approach to planning. These attempts very often resulted in failure and unsuccessful outcomes. With the way the system has been working for a while now, and all the limitless construction and actions that have been undertaken in the city, Tirana has been the stage for numerous small-scale low cost interventions, sometimes originated from citizens and other times formalized and well organized by local authorities. The best example is that of the painting facades, an action implemented from the municipality of the city in 2004.

The initiation was taken over by Edi Rama, the mayor of that time, who started a scheme to paint in iconic colors the skin of the post-Communist city. The enterprise generated curiosity and interest from artists and architects internationally who got involved in painting the buildings of the capital. The colors were used to create a social condition of newness, a break, a discontinuity from the historical weight and candor of Soviet Socialism. (Doherty., *Urbanism of Color*, 2010, pp 59) Beside the aesthetic value that was intended to the overall image of the city, it also aimed to trigger the community life. Rama recalled: "It's important to give to people a sense of belonging to space. The colors helped to build a common ground for discussion, and then the discussion on building community arose. First people that owned shops would start to get rid of the grids (covering windows), because they felt safer. And the second effect was that they started paying taxes". (Rama, AA, London, 2014, Public Lecture)

The results of these public and private attempts at future planning have had a significant impact upon the lives of many residents living in Tirana; what has been built cannot simply be demolished or gotten rid of, Thus, it is necessary to explore new ways to intervene on what is already present in the city.

It is possible that new efforts could be taken to prepare again another master-plan that suggests ideas based on rules, laws, sustainability, budget, etc., however it is most probably to be another one in the list. In a situation where there exists an aggregate of social, economic and ecological factors, it might be more efficient to apply small-scale solutions such as urban acupuncture in order to affect the larger scale of the area of interest.

1.2 Literature Review

As part of the theoretical framework a number of books, journals, websites, interviews and articles were consulted during the research. They helped to assist the theoretical background of the raised questions. Beside that case studies analysis were used supplementary to the literature to understand better the driving questions.

1.2.1 Sprawl Phenomena - A short introduction

“The main factor which leads directly to the extension of the urban area and all the residential development and creation of the peri-urban fringe is uncontrolled market driven SPRAWL development, both residential and commercial.” Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk and Jeff Speck - Suburban Nation -The rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream

An impeccable and crude description of such a present and literally life changing characterisation of the phenomena of sprawl is given in this book, based on the real North American experience. It is with a very real, yet poetic description that you can get a full picture in your head, on how this process is done and how it impacts our living surroundings. It is mentioned as an inevitable evolution or a historical accident, but in the end it is in fact a result of policies that conspired to encourage urban dispersal. And this is a statement that applies to all the urban spaces, which undergo such development and expansion. It also mentions solutions on how to plan in order to succeed with sprawl, but I believe, that this is relevant to the country and culture, and also the way politics works in each of them. It is worth for me though mentioning the interesting five components of sprawl which are underlined in the book as follows: Housing subdivisions, shopping centers, office parks, civic institutions and roadways.

JON C. TEAFORD. Post-Suburbia:

Government and Politics in the Edge Cities. Baltimore

Starting from a description of how the cityscape has evolved and how the suburbs are developed, in this book is mentioned the creation of these “edges” which need a special attention, for it is a new very crucial structure to the whole urbanization process. It is interesting how the situation is described, it is a post world war settlement, and it takes under analysis six different counties in the US. The struggle here, I think, is more about the social impacts, and the way the concepts of suburbia and post-suburbia are accepted, on the way that they affect the lives of the inhabitants. It is also a definition of the “confines” between the city and the village.

URBAN SPRAWL AND WEAK REGIONAL TRANSPORT IN “DURANA” Dr. Dorina Pojani, M.Sc. Elona Pojani

After the fall of the communist regime, a substantial amount of residential and commercial sprawl has occurred in the Tirana metropolitan area, especially in the western and north-western side, in the direction of Durrës. The Tirana-Durrës region has become Albania’s economic powerhouse. Some urban planners are now talking about the eventual fusion of Tirana and Durrës into a new metropolis called “Durana”. Notwithstanding the importance of this region as a whole, the political power is fragmented among several municipalities, with no regional coordination. The area is served by a poor-quality regional transport system, mostly based on private cars and informal minivans. This paper provides a brief overview of regional transport issues in the Tirana metropolitan area and in the Tirana-Durrës corridors. The authors argue that strengthening the regional transport system is crucial in order to ensure a healthy future economic development and a sustainable physical growth pattern in “Durana”. It is relevant to my thesis, since the Commune of Kashar, which is my study case, is located on one side of the highway axis which connects Tirana to Durres, and is what is thought in the future to be known as “Durana”.

FROM UNIDIMENSIONAL FORWARDS MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY MEASUREMENT (MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY INDEX ALBANIA M.P.I.) Anila NANAJ

Albania has undergone deep social economic changes during its long transition, which according to different periods of time and the nature of its indicators, are considered both positive and negative. Last decade has shown that the economic progress has been considerable and it has been present even during economic crises of other European countries. Unfortunately, compared with other European countries, our country is still ranked as the poorest, which means that this progress is not reflected with the same levels in the poverty reduction, wellbeing and sustainable development. Thus, real poverty measurements and its management is the core of actual and prospective development objectives in our country.

Economy is one of the most important factors which gives all the aftereffects of sprawl, urban informalities, demographic changes and all these key elements which lead to the change of the cityscape.

1.2.3 Urban Sprawl in Albania

After the collapse of communist regime and accompanied by the social structure shifting -free movement of people, inner/outer migration trends and free market- economy as a driving force contributed in an important way to the urban sprawl anyway caused by the lack of enforceable regulations. Urban and infrastructure constructions during

the last two decades represent a rapid urbanization progress without clear hierarchy, gradually taking over the territory at the points of least resistance (mild topography) . Ecological factors are largely ignored (see misuse of the water network, river pollution, ad hoc sewage systems, poor air quality in the city). Although inside the main urban centres there are coordinated attempts to improve the living quality, in the countryside there is very little awareness of ecological value. The natural resources gradually are put behind and function as the back side of the current urban dispersion.

Although there exists room for improvement in each of these economic, ecological, social aspects separately, the real sustainability progress will start at the moment these start working as a whole. In this region as well as generally in our westernized world, the question of an integrative sustainability represents the real challenge. As general as the question may be though, the answer will have to stay specific, local, as its applicability may depend on its straightforwardness and its capacity to steer the imagination of the local population.

1.2.4 Non-hierarchical urban sprawl

The rationality of the initial settlement development in Tirana-Durres region is mainly based on the topographical and hydrological condition--settled in the plain and close to the water resource. At present, the on-going rapid urban sprawl is mainly along the urban periphery and following the existing mobility infrastructure without considering too much about the natural condition--a kind of dispersed urbanization without clear hierarchization.

1.3 Urban Acupuncture and its role



Figure 1. Urban Acupuncture Drawing by Hiroki Oya /Casagrande Laboratory 2013

1.3.1 Why Urban Acupuncture?

In between this adversarial and tense pressure, a young generation of architects denies the theoretical approach of the profession and addresses it toward practical challenges ditching the academic training. One such strategy is that of Acupuncture – autonomous small interventions in the public space of cities marked by a bountiful impact and applied in a short period of time (Cazanova., & Hernandez., 2014, pp 19). Often starting as test sites, aiming to occupy only a limited period of time, these

provisory interventions seem in a great number of cases to evolve and become long lasting, stretching the idea of permanency. With the disability of new developments to emerge due to the current financial crisis, the urgency for alternative low cost and temporary strategies has increased, making the notion of “Urban Acupuncture” an important issue for today’s cities.

In my opinion this strategy advocates that in order for cities to get recovered and renewed, small scale, low cost and localized projects are what is needed. If this kind of new planning approach is what seems to be the future urban planning, I think it is of much interest to explore its potentials and challenges.

Urban acupuncture within communities is really an energy, it is the passion that exists within a community and its members. It describes the community as a very complex organism, with areas of “infection” and “inflammation”. These areas of infection and inflammation, if not treated from within, can spread and affect a much larger area.

There are countless areas, cities, communities which, due to different reasons, have developed these kind of infections. These are the ideal cases, to start with the roots, or the bottom-up approach. This said, this solution might be considered as taking a shortcut, and sometimes in communities, taking shortcuts, it does give a lifelong crippling kind of effect.

Beside the chosen location and the quality of the acupuncture intervention, which obviously are the main factors of an efficacious action, what else makes these bottom up strategies successful? In order to answer this question, a set of sub-research questions should be investigated separately. What can be a potential spot for intervention? How to recognize them? Does the success of urban acupuncture depend on its partners? Who are the people involved? And to what extent do they engage in the design of a small scale intervention? Is it possible to compose a toolbox of features that could be implemented to make a success of urban acupuncture?

1.3.2 What is Urban Acupuncture ?

During the last century, the practice of urban planning has been ruled by large scale master plans constructions. With the focus on functionality that modern urbanism gave to cities and buildings, turning them in mere “machines for living”, often based on utopias, a number of failures have occurred in achieving their purpose. Then the value of public space was brought to attention by a number of academics and intellectuals of the field, highlighting its impact in the increasing of life quality and enhancement of the urban condition. In addition, the same scholars addressed the smaller scale planning strategies in contrast with the permanence oriented planning of the twentieth century. Permanency is not desirable anymore in this age of time, where changes take place in an accelerating pace (Ellin, 2006, pp 119).

In his book 'S,M,L,XL' Rem Koolhaas states: "If there is to be a new urbanism it will not be based on twin fantasies of order and omnipotence; it will be the staging of uncertainty; it will no longer be concerned with the arrangement of more or less permanent objects but with the irrigation of territories with potential; it will no longer aim for stable configurations but for the creation of enabling fields that accommodate processes that refuse to be crystallized into definite form....it will no longer be obsessed with the city but with the manipulation of infrastructure for endless intensifications and diversifications, shortcuts " (Koolhaas, 1995, pp 969).

So it is since the last two decades that the notion of urban acupuncture has been often referred to. There is not a certain name that could be accredited to the origins of the term, but there are three main pioneers who advocated the urban acupuncture theory, the Brazilian architect Jaime Lerner, the Spanish architect Manuel de Solís-Morales and the Finish architect Marco Casagrande.

The etymology of the term of urban acupuncture derives from the traditional Chinese medical theory of acupuncture -A system of complementary medicine in which fine needles are inserted in the skin at specific points along what are considered to be lines of energy (meridians), used in the treatment of various physical and mental conditions. (Oxford Dictionary visited 22.11.2015)

Similarly, the urban acupuncture is a design strategy where punctual manipulations contribute to the creation of sustainable development, as Casagrande states. (Casagrande, 2006, "Urban Acupuncture". <http://casagrandetext.blogspot.se/> visited: November 2015)

It does strengthen its reference to the Chinese medical technique, when going through Lerner's vision regarding urban acupuncture. He claims that it aims to cure energy flows on sick spots, by revitalizing it and its surrounding areas, simultaneously claiming the urban skin. There is not a settled methodology on the application of this theory, but as Lerner explains, urban acupuncture is a way of planning contributing to the normal planning process. Then he continues by adding that it is crucial that the actions should be organized by a participation process, emphasizing the importance of co-responsibility.

In his book "Urban Acupuncture", Jaime Lerner, starts describing the source of the urban acupuncture, based on the original Chinese acupuncture. In this approach, instead of designing places, a positive mental interaction of the people that reside in these areas in need of intervention, is proposed. It is all the little things that come together, to make the bigger one. The interventions are meant to be delicate, and yet very powerful.

1.4 Case Studies

Since I would like to implement this “needles” in three different areas and ways in my own study case, then I will describe as follows three cases of urban acupuncture, in three different locations:

1.4.1 Test Site Rotterdam (2009-2014)



Figure 2. Test site Rotterdam, source : iabr.nl

Test site - Rotterdam- was launched as a local initiative in the Rotterdam Central District, where office buildings have long stood empty, to create through small interventions more dynamics and vitality. ZUS [Zones Urbaines Sensibles], run by Elma van Boxel and Kristian Koreman, landscape architects who are very active in the public debate about the city, came out with the Test Site Rotterdam where they question the existing set of tools for making a city with principles of temporality. The area had already an ambitious plan envisioned, but because of the economic crisis it was far from being implemented any time soon. The two architects, who as cited from the Jury of Maaskant Prize received in 2007, have as constant theme running through all their work, the design of the field of tension between the public and the private domains. (Jury Rotterdam Maaskant Prize for Young Architects 2007)

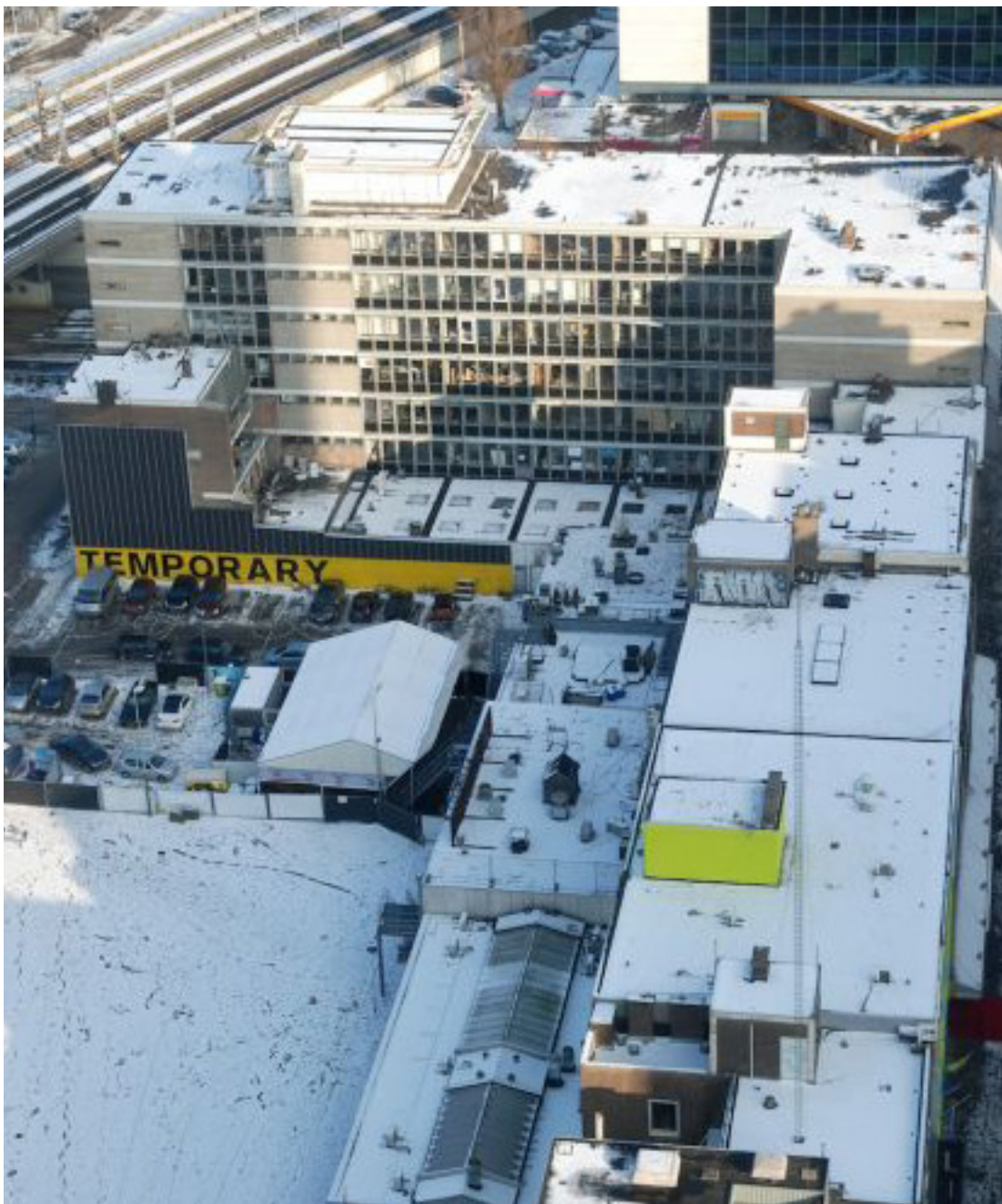


Figure 3. Test site Rotterdam, source : ZUS

In the framework of the 2012 International Biennial Rotterdam (IABR) titled Making City, with 'I We You Make Rotterdam' they were daring everyone through crowd funding, to finance the construction of the elevated promenade of the Luchtsingel in the Central District. Therefore to anyone was given the opportunity of acquisition of a piece of the bridge from ZUS for the sake of fulfilling the intervention that would largely benefit particularly the eastern section of the Central District. To sum up, ZUS, who currently have their office in the area, collaborated with IABR and other small stakeholders to save the Schieblock, a vacant building, from demolition. The block has now been rehabilitated and has introduced temporary workspace for creative enterprises, including the IABR(www.iabr.nl, visited 05.12.2015). The whole area has already a notable dynamic and has created its own image in the city. This approach of a new dynamic from the bottom up is now being tested over the entire Rotterdam Central District. (www.iabr.nl, visited 05.12.2015). The architects sketched the long-term strategies based on the ambitions of the city in concordance with the investment potentials and the envisioned users of the site. It was the outcome of this approach that made this project to be embraced and supported by the Municipality of Rotterdam.

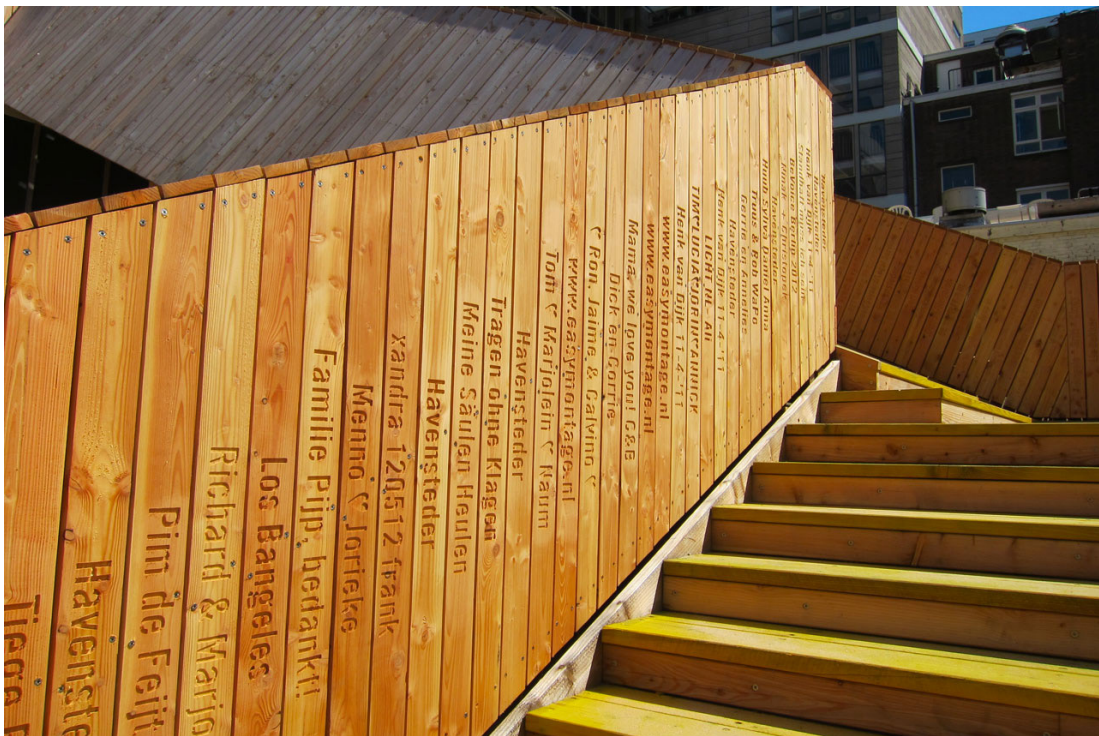


Figure 4. Luchtsingel bridge financed through crowdfunding, source : iabr.nl

ACT I:2001-2008

Rotterdam had been a charm attraction for developers since the 1980s, because of its bountiful space and the flirting attitude toward the possibilities of building large scale office and resident buildings. For this reason, the Central District around the Central Station was picked up as an inviting location, bringing to life one ambitious plan after the other.

“In 2007 we decided to make the leap from our scale position behind our drawing board and writing table to this unruly and paradoxical reality. Without knowing what the repercussions would be, we decided to walk the tightrope between our autonomous position as architects-urban designers and a heteronomous position in which we had to step outside our discipline and explore other logics [...] We opted for the ambition of genuinely taking making city in location a step further, by attempting to link the universe of planning in new ways with the urban reality.” (Boxel,& Koreman, 2012, Making City, pp 102)

It was the political, cultural and social climate of that period that triggered ZUS to make their first attempts to rethink this area of Rotterdam.

ACT II:2009-2010

When in 2008 the next phase for development of the Central District was just about to begin, a number of buildings in the area were planned to be demolished including the vacant Schieblock. At the same time with the collapse of the Lehman Brothers, the reliance in the financial world started declining. (Making city, 2012, pp 103) It was in this exact time that the vacancy issue became part of the political agenda, hence stimulating an opportunity to rethink alternatives out of demolition plans, shifting from continuously urban development toward more gradual transformations. As an urgent need for a city culture platform taking place in the heart of the city, at a time of cultural decimation, where all cultural institutions had moved to new development areas, new events took place in the period that presented new opportunities. The first one was the initiative of ZUS called De Dependance- Podium for City Culture, which came as a protest against the ongoing cultural holocaust of the inner city. It was then that for the first time the deserted base of Schieblock was opened up.

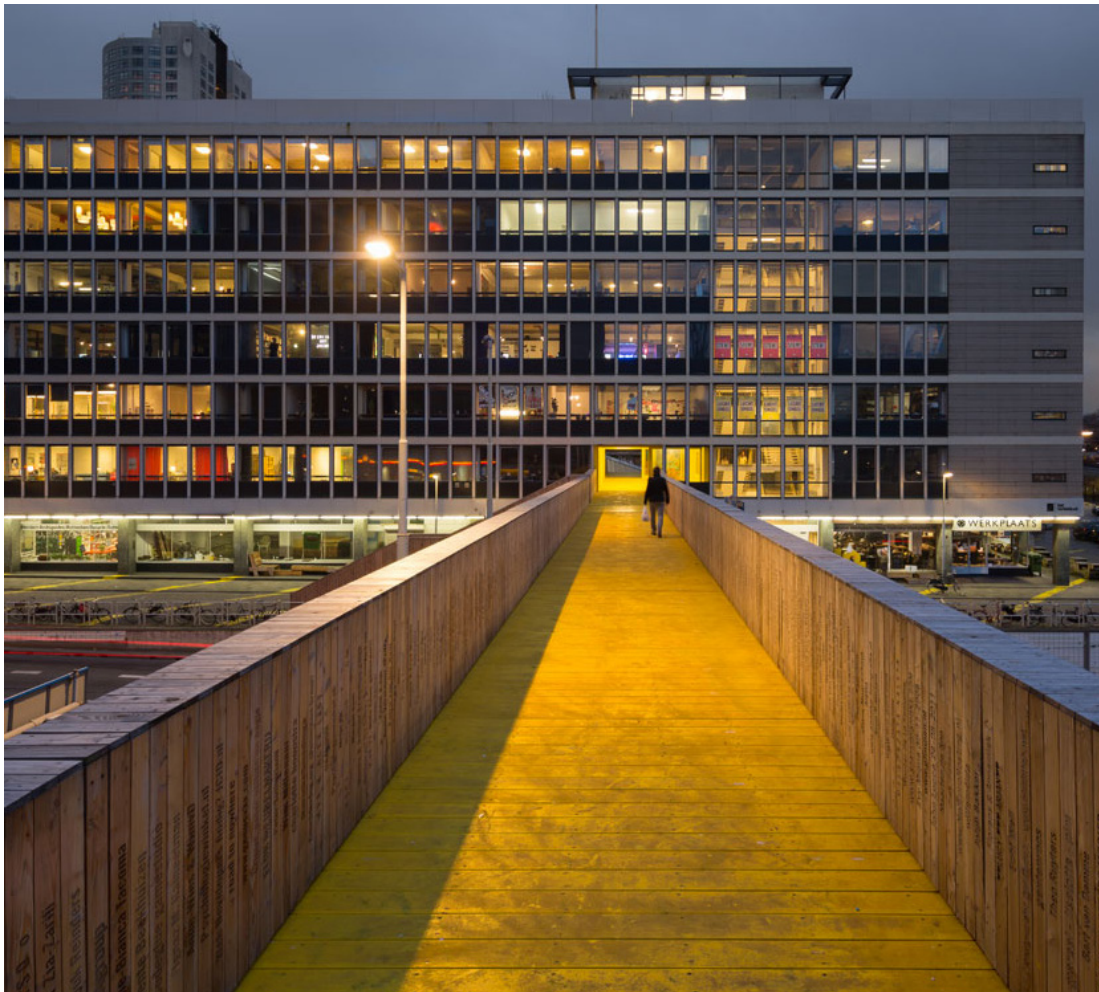


Figure 5. The Luchtsingel Brige, source : © Ossip van Duivenbode

Therefore the ground floor of a building envisioned to be demolished was declared a cultural platform, leading to the beginning of the transformation of the building. The next move to follow by ZUS, was the participation in the project curated by Crimson in the framework of the 4th IABR: Open City.(Making City, 2012, pp 104). Continuing with the focus on the Central District, they began exploring ways to upgrade and strengthen its connections with the enclosing. For this reason under the name Plan des Circuits, they used routing, circuits and programmatic studies and tried through this approach to identify possibilities to connect the area in a multilayered way with the surrounded networks. Meanwhile they started collaborating with Codum, a young developer, with whom they designed an alternative business plan for the Schieblock. They worked on a direct involvement financial plan model, and a network of entrepreneurs was gathered in a very short time, filling all the 8,000 m² with units varying from 10 to 700 m². Together with IABR, who was one of the firsts to immediately move to Schieblock, they transformed the building into an urban laboratory, in which they continued to explore the area potentials.

ACT III: 2010-2012

Following the little empathy of existing plans for the area with the physical and economic context, ZUS saw the existing situation with a lot of opportunities to attempt with urban curatorship, to deal with the potentials created between the enormous ambitions and obstinate reality. For this reason in 2009 ZUS and IABR officially announced the IABR Test Site Rotterdam.

Apart from Schiebblock, there are also a number of other projects that ZUS initiated in the framework of IABR. A 'city factory' which can design and make street furniture that can directly be implemented in the surroundings of the Schiebblock, a wooden pedestrian bridge financed by crowd funding, and a roof garden.



Figure 6. Test site Rotterdam, source : iabr.nl

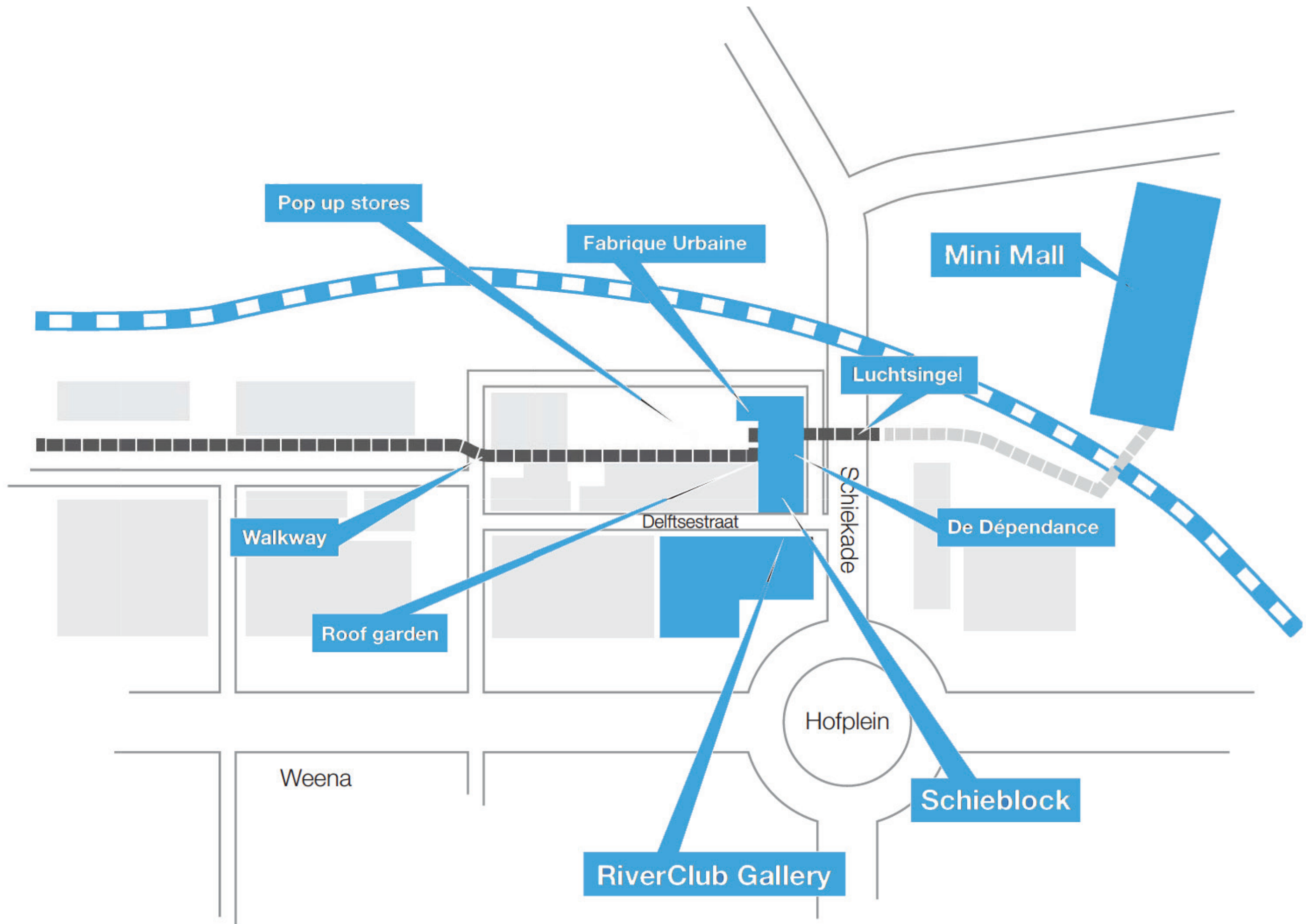


Figure 7. Test site Rotterdam, source ZUS



Figure 8. Permanent Temporality, source : © Ossip van Duivenbode



Figure 9. The Luchtsingel Brige, Top and above, source : © Ossip van Duivenbode

1.4.2 Temporary interventions in vacant lots - Madrid, Spain

Strategy/Interventions: Casanova + Hernandez

Period - 2009

Between 1997 and 2007 the Spanish economy underwent rapid growth. This growth was associated with speculation in the real estate market, which brought about the so-called “real estate bubble”. As a result, average housing prices tripled over a period of ten years. When the real estate bubble burst in 2008 in the wake of the international financial crisis, the construction industry was paralyzed. Many housing developers and construction companies went bankrupt and construction project ground to a halt. Because of this situation, a large number of cities were left with vacant lots because old buildings had been demolished to make way for new ones, but plans had been put on hold due to the economic crisis. (Public Space Acupuncture, New York. United States. 2014)



Figure 10. Site plan intervention spots, source: casanova-hernandez.com

The program “Urbanacción” put forward a reflection on the temporary use of urban vacant lots in the city of Madrid. The existence of vacant lots is a natural phenomenon associated with urban renovation, where old buildings are demolished so that new ones can be built. Given that the ultimate goal of urban renovation is economic profit, the process tends to be very dynamic and vacant lots tend to remain empty for only a short period of time, since the construction of new buildings usually takes place immediately after demolition is finished. However, this dynamic rhythm slowed down after the real estate bubble burst and an increase in the length of time during which lots remain inactive opens the door to an interesting field of experimentation in public space acupuncture.

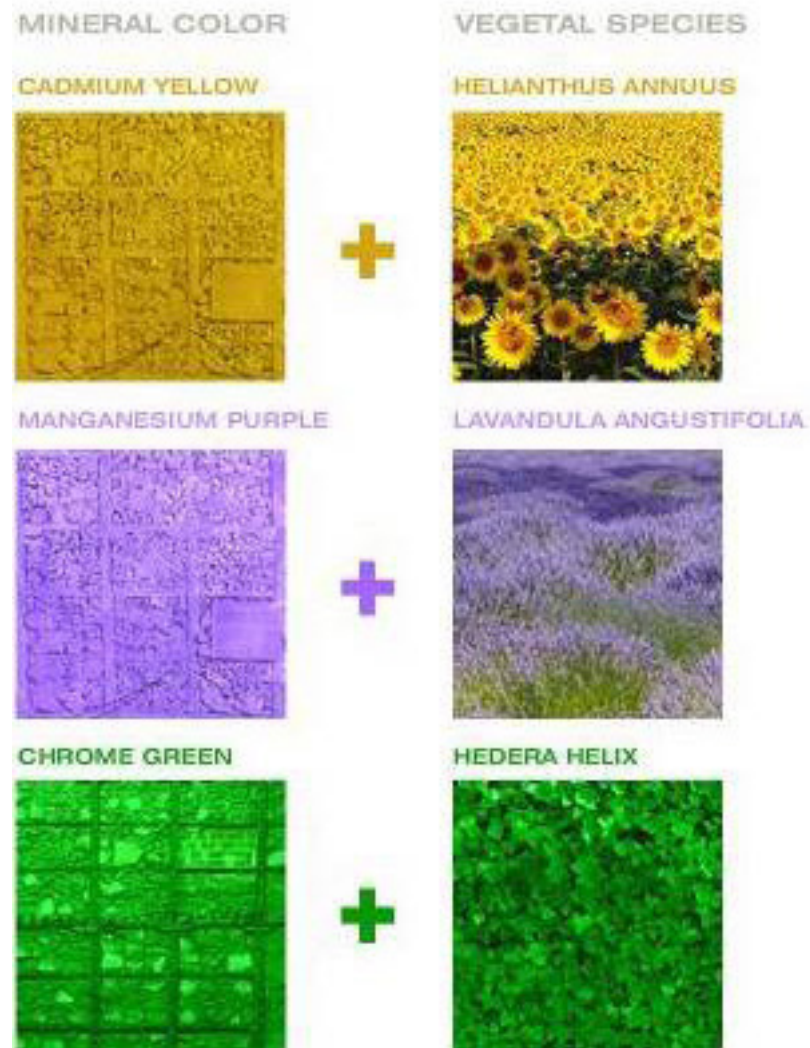


Figure 11. Color code relation, source: casanova-hernandez.com

Strategy: The high density of construction concentrated in Madrid's city center and the shortage of public meeting places in certain areas led to the idea of creating temporary public use on the many unused vacant lots. The strategy's duration depends on the availability of enough vacant lots, since construction is likely to coincide with the reactivation of the economy. The project is outlined as a medium-term or long-term strategy made up of the independent temporary interventions. As construction takes place on the lots, the interventions will gradually be taken down and new ones will be created in order to maintain the intensity of action. This control of the time factor characterizes the proposal as a long-term public space acupuncture strategy based on temporary interventions.

Interventions: The temporary interventions are developed following two main steps:

1. Transforming private lots into public space, while codifying them as belonging to a coordinated strategy.
2. Programming the lots with activities related to residents' needs in nearby areas.



Figure 12. Intervention spot, resting place, source: casanova-hernandez.com

Because the historic center of Madrid is dense and compact, the demolition of existing buildings generates interesting urban voids. Depending on their location, on a corner lot or between party walls, they are limited spatially by the horizontal plane of the ground along with one, two or three vertical planes. Each urban void is associated with the color that is used to dye the polyurethane foam, which acts as thermal isolation when it is sprayed onto the party walls, and that also characterizes the vegetation planted on the lot.

Therefore, each intervention is defined by the binomial formed by the mineral pigment used to dye the vertical planes that limit the lot and the species of vegetation planted on the horizontal planes. Some examples of these binomials include: chrome green - *Hedera helix*; cadmium yellow - *Helianthus agnus*; and manganese violet - *Lavandula angustifolia*.

The strategy is based on low-cost interventions in terms of realization and maintenance, since in any case the coloring on the party walls is functionally necessary in order to protect the spray foam from ultra-violet light. Besides that, in certain types of interventions, costs can be minimized by encouraging collaboration from residents in the development and management of the interventions.

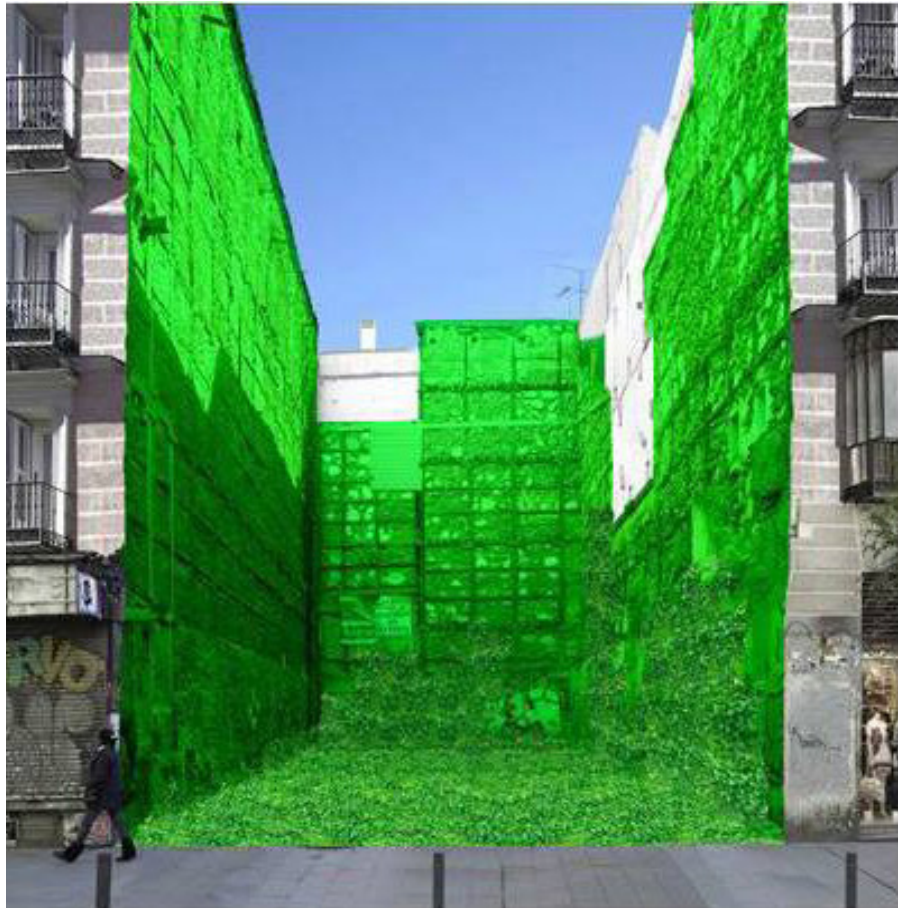


Figure 13. Site plan intervention spot, recreation, source: casanova-hernandez.com

The intense coloring of the lot's interior space contrasts with the neutrality of the urban facade. From dead and abandoned urban space, each lot becomes a living place with a certain artistic value. The color code provides each intervention with a distinct particular identity, which distinguishes it from the urban surroundings and from other interventions. On an urban scale, the set of interventions emphasizes an ever-changing network of urban voids, creating vibrant, dynamic public space recognizable by its intense chromatic variety.

The color code also relates each lot to a specific type of activity. Green is associated with a small urban garden including a lounge area, where the activity level is low. Yellow designates a children's playground and an exercise area for senior citizens. Lastly, violet represents cultural activity, where the lot is equipped with an open-air library provided with free Wi-Fi and classrooms or workshops where residents can exchange knowledge.

There are varying levels of complexity involved in the implementation, maintenance and management of the programs according to the three types of interventions, from low complexity in the green interventions to the highest level in the violet or cultural interventions.

Each type of intervention is characterized by a different level of citizen participation in its programming and function. It can range from no participation at all in the green interventions to active implication in programming, organization and participation in workshops in the case of the violet interventions. This differentiation for each strategy to its acceptance among residents, while helping to control the costs of the initial investment and maintenance, thus guaranteeing the strategy's sustainability. The program and level of citizen participation are distributed throughout the urban fabric depending on residents' needs and the potential of each lot. This generates a coordinated strategy where color, in addition to playing an artistic role, creates a code that helps to structure and differentiate spaces and programs.



Figure 14. Site plan intervention spot, socializing, source: casanova-hernandez.com

1.4.3 City Acupuncture in Macedonia, Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia

Period - 2012-2014

Undoubtedly, Balkan cities have a lot in common. Besides the fact that they share a rich cultural and architectural heritage, over the past 20 years, they experienced profound societal changes. The trauma of wars, a rapid population growth, the deficit of spatial strategy and planning policies, the lack of public spaces, poorly maintained buildings, massive real estate projects designed for wealthy investors, it all come across as a chaotic urban patchwork. In this context, how can we improve the living conditions and promote the dialogue within different communities, practitioners and public authorities?

City Acupuncture is a transnational project involving Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia, developed from 2011 to 2014 and supported by the European Commission. The program investigated the potential of urban acupuncture in South-eastern European cities from field studies realized in Skopje, Belgrade, Sarajevo and Zagreb.

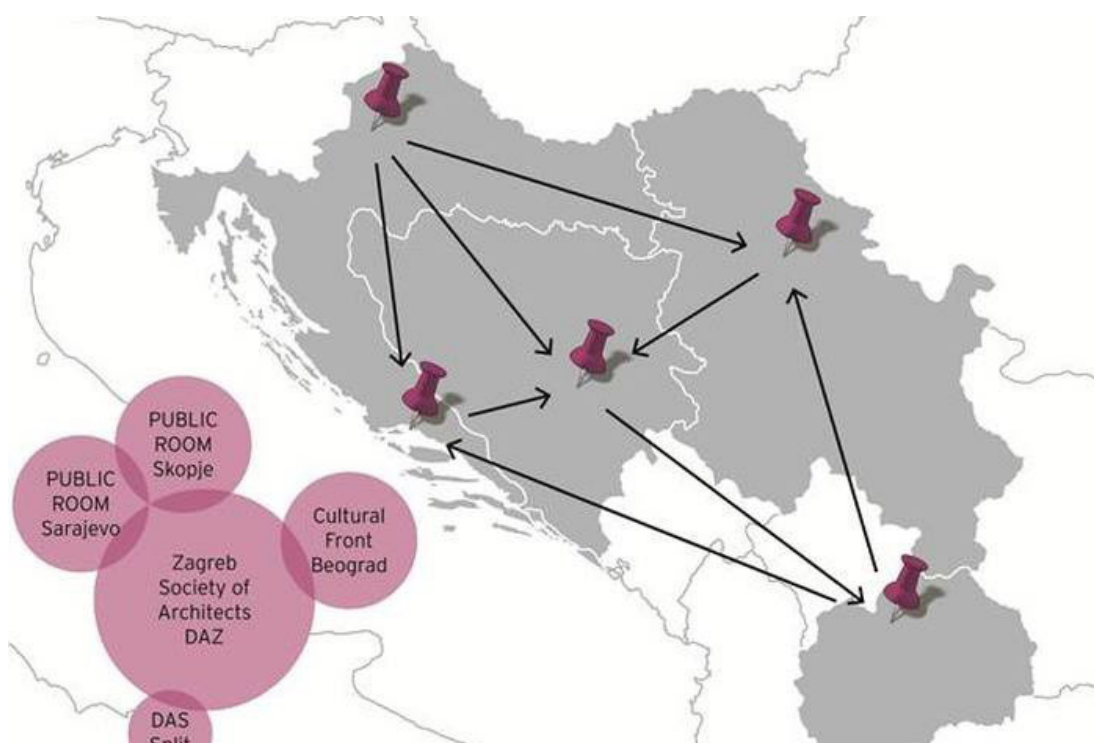


Figure 15. City acupuncture cities plan, source: cityacupuncture.org

Each city has its own applications and interventions based on the location of the site, and the interests of the current residents.

The cities have common historical and physical heritage, require similar interventions in their structure. All the cities of South–eastern Europe consist of an old historical city core, planned sections of the city dating from both the second half of the 19th century and the modernist era, and the non–planned neighborhoods.

Skopje - The vertical Garden - Period: September 2012



Figure 16. Vertical Garden Skopje, source: cityacupuncture.org

The aim of the intervention was to provide a place for resting a socializing in the very busy city centre. It was located in a dead-end street which borders with the main boulevard. It was previously used for parking of the discarded vehicles, and a lot of dirt had been accumulated over time. Effects on local community from realized interventions are numerous. Vertical garden in a short time has become the hot spot for the local citizens and pedestrians in the city center. Local population sees it as a pleasant and chick place to rest and also socialize. They claim that spot as “theirs” only two months after the implementation. The installation has been presented several times in public debates, architectural workshops and conferences of how Skopje should be in the future. When “Vertical Garden” was installed, local people started using it as a meeting point. After few weeks the authorities of the municipality installed

trash bins and metal barriers for cars, as additional equipment. These actions were necessary due to the fact that there is a high frequency of people and also cars used to park very close to the spot, not leaving space for pedestrians.

The organizer of the initiative believes that the true effect of these public interventions is yet to come. The international prominence is an additional motivation for them to continue with such projects on the local and national level.

Belgrade - Ghost People of Savamala - Period: October 2012



Figure 17. The Ghost People of Savamala, source: cityacupuncture.org

Savamala is the oldest urban part of Belgrade. It changed in the course of 150 years from a lively and scenic spot, to a neglected area which was characterized by a high traffic flow and was disconnected from the city center as well as the river.

The Ghost People of Savamala represent symbolically the personification of the problems in the area. The first Ghost points out that Savamala perimeter bordering with river Sava, should have a better cohesion. For this the ghost holds a boat in its hand. It is a humoristic way to provide a positive note and its character freshens up the gloomy and deserted walls. Another Ghost shows an old lady knitting, representing two old ladies which sell their handwork next to the port, and are constantly forced to move away. Other Ghosts represent the need of green surfaces, and even dogs, as a way to state that even dogs need to have their place in Savamala. The most interesting detail in this entire story is that after all the time that has passed after this intervention implementation and although it visually resembles a street intervention, all the ghosts remain completely untouched by potential artists.

This shows how strong the impact and the social message of these Ghosts of Savamala is. It also inspired other subjects in the street to design in a similar way, thus providing soon “company” for the ghosts, right after the intervention application.

Zagreb - StopBy - Perdioid: February 2013

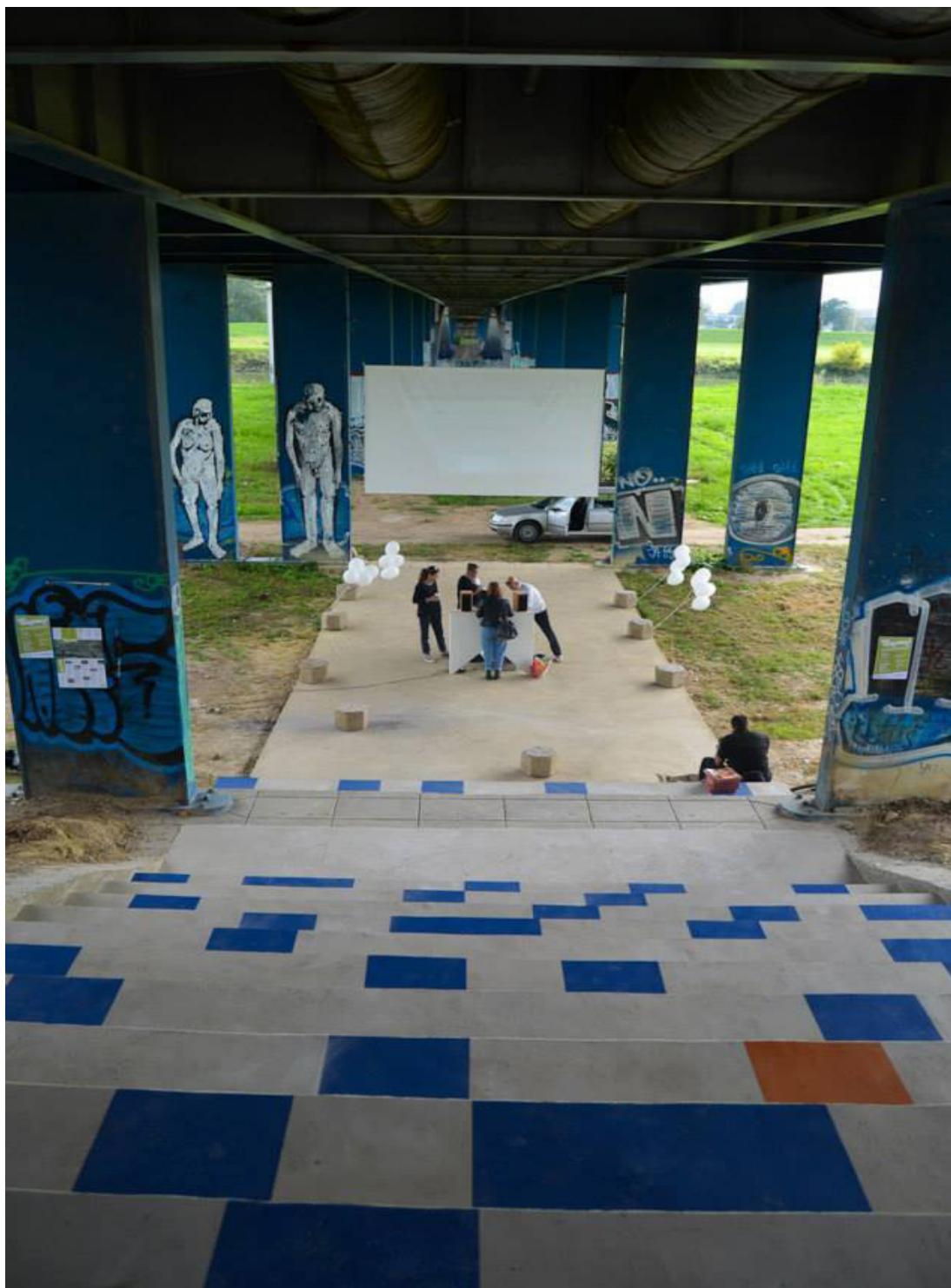


Figure 18. StopBy Zagreb, source: cityacupuncture.org

The district of Trnje is an unusual combination of infrastructural and the largest of Zagreb's infrastructural projects the 20th century. It is in the geographical centre of Zagreb. Trnje shows a dominant urban development pattern in the east-west direction and negligence in the north-south direction. The natural boundaries of the Medvenica Mountain and the Sava river, prevented the extension of Zagreb in the north and south. Trnje is an unfinished area, due to its size, and this fact makes it an extremely potent and vital area. The City Acupuncture workshop examined the area that didn't encompass the whole district of Trnje, but the district of Savica. This area is a part of the district that is defined in terms of urban planning, and contains numerous spaces which need additional articulation, usage and revitalization, and therefore is suitable for small interventions which will stimulate new modes of usage of the spaces and can suggest numerous potential interventions.

In this intervention the area below the bridge is transformed. It changed from an unused and neglected space, into a multifunctional space for recreation, sports, cultural events, and many other activities, generating in this way a new place to gather, and also a place for passers-by on the Sava embankment. To realize this project, reinforced concrete stands that follow the slope were built. The focus was set to the stage. The author intended to provide different programs on the platform, engaging neighborhood associations and clubs, and also facilitating the creation of a new identity and encouraging future interventions in this part of the area.

After the workshop there was an intensive 6 months period of implementation of the interventions. In addition to the planning and design of proposals, the cooperation with the local forces and authorities, civil sector organizations, residents, and interested individuals, was very significant for the acupuncture methodology.

In communications with all stakeholders, from initial discussions with the citizens before the workshop, during the exhibitions of the proposed interventions, the team encountered a series of prejudices as an apparent result of alienation caused by current social circumstances: the resignation, disbelief that the small interventions could change anything, fear from vandalizing, even the doubt that the case was politically motivated or with some other interest. As soon as it was clarified that the sole aim of the initiative was to improve the quality of urban life, the only results were approval, support, cooperation and a range of positive emotions.

1.5 Case study reflection

1.5.1 What makes a potential location?

The first step to be undertaken for the application of urban acupuncture is the selection of the location, which according to Solà-Morales, comes as a result of a careful identification of the sensitive point :“As in therapeutic acupuncture, the location of the sensitive point is the first step in the strategic treatment of the urban skin” (De Solà-Morales., 2008, pp 24). Hence we can say that a potential location is found where there is a lack of energy or little one, or the energy now faces blockage. In the Test Site Rotterdam case study, the initiators themselves came up with a bottom up strategy taking reference from their observation of the area which was also their working space. The issue of vacancy not being resolved by the ambitious plans already envisaged, but instead repeating itself again and again, played the main role in their research to think of an alternative out of it.

1.5.2 Scenario/ Platform

A scenario is needed mainly to trigger participation. Acupuncture interventions in the identified sensitive point aimed to strengthen the flow of energy in it, to bustle the targeted spot and the surrounding area. Primarily the users are the one benefitting from the intervention so their engagement is of high importance. Moreover a platform is used as a strategy to create alliances and gather stakeholders in the process. Above, ZUS, clearly show that they took as starting point the specific strengths of the area, in contrary of having a fixed outcome, and therefore this leads to the creation of a platform, such as the “I We You Make Rotterdam”. The platform, through the organized workshops, made it possible for the initiatives from the market to pair with other stakeholders and achieve a reflection on policy frameworks.

1.5.3 Act quickly, Start Tomorrow

It seems that a quick act for acupuncture intervention is mandatory. The decision of crowd- funding, as a financial model from ZUS, was done in order to have immediate results from their intervention. In an interview regarding their approach in the Test Site Rotterdam they cite:

“What all these projects share is a sense of pragmatism. In our view ‘Making City’ implies looking at reality. We have to stop building utopia.” (“The city is not the problem but the solution”, Interview by Roel Grifoen and Lisa Goudsmit, pp 6)

This bottom-up methodology mainly comes out as a necessity out of the disappointing outcomes or worse- the never happening outcomes of top-down planning which has as a main factor the time implementation. Hence urban acupuncture is based on a quick action.

1.5.4 Who are the people involved?

“Yet one building does not a city make, nor can only three stakeholders.” To genuinely demonstrate what the gradual transformation of the Rotterdam Central District, and the adjacent Pompenburg and Hofbogen could be, it was necessary to develop an integral strategy. To achieve this, a broad alliance first had to be forged with the city, property owners, businesses, cultural institutions, and universities.” (Boxel, & Koreman, Making City, 2012, pp 103)

As important as the previous principles, is also the participants, who in these interventions are not limited to a few categories, and in my opinion is mainly because of the interactive nature of the approach in itself. As George Brugmans states in his open call for the 5th IABR : “Making City is therefore issuing a call to all parties involved – administrators, policymakers, politicians, entrepreneurs, designers, and citizens.[...] The city must no longer be primarily a territory for the accommodation of the market, with the government at a distance and the citizen as consumer, but much more a catalyst, supported by all parties, for social and economic emancipation.” (Brugmans, 2012, IABR, pp 5)

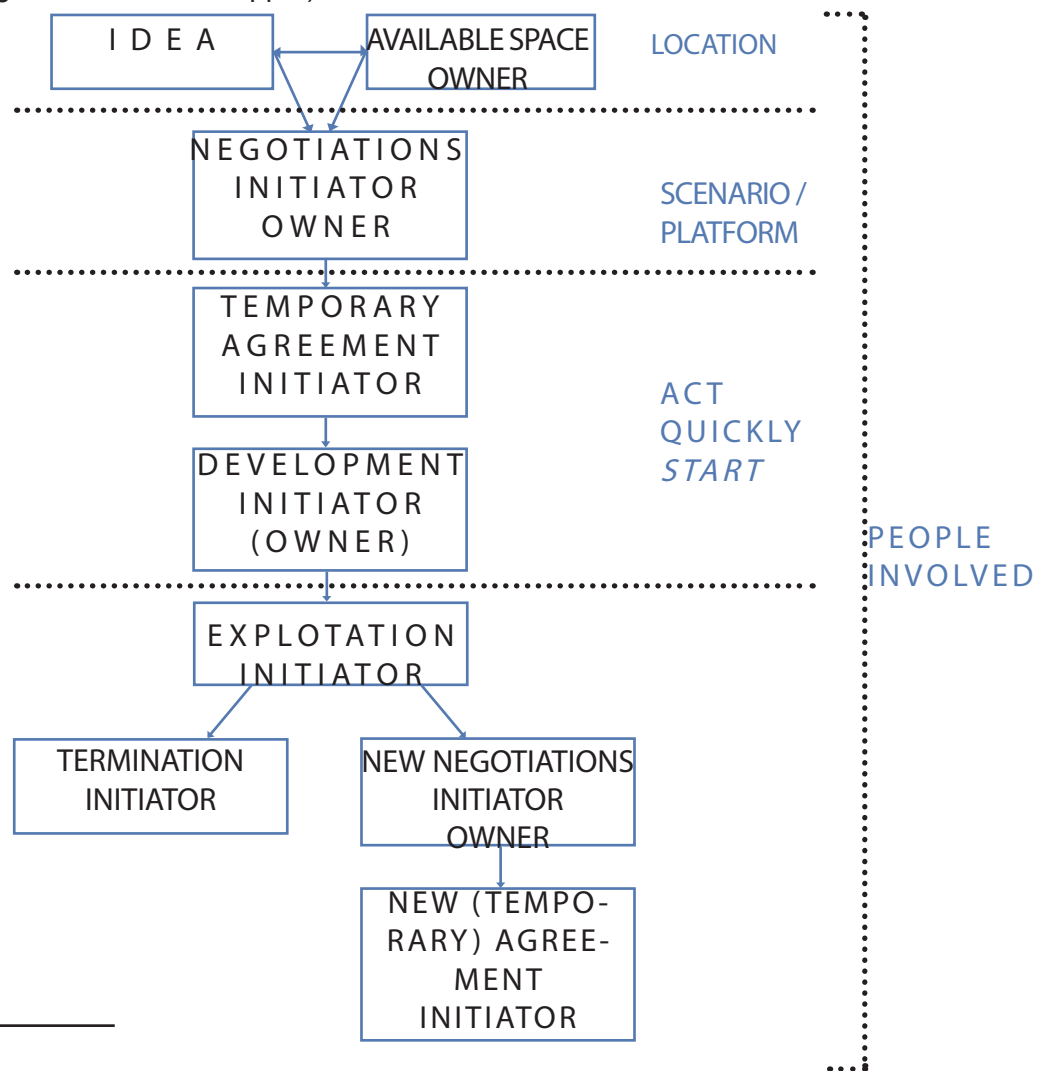


Figure 19. Process and actors of Permanent Temporality / Possible toolbox, source : own creation

1.6 THE CASE OF KASHAR



Figure 20. Geographical location of the Commune of Kashar in relation with Tirana and Durres, source : google earth, own editing.

1.6.1 Tirana, A planning Laboratory

Albania, one of the most rural societies in Europe (20% in the late 1940's; and 35% by the late 1980's) that had enforced strict anti-urban policies, has in less than two decades actively transformed itself into an urban society with an urban population of 60%. According to the National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) the urbanisation and migration rates in the capital Tirana increased dramatically in the early 1990's by 7-9% per annum, while unprepared authorities were taken by surprise and came under enormous pressure from individual initiatives. Today, the capital of Tirana has at least doubled in surface, and the population has at least tripled. Furthermore, the capital is showing a tendency to expand and form one large metropolitan area together with the country's main port city Durres, as well as with the newly informally developed peripheries. Imagine a former strictly-planned society suddenly exploding towards a mentality in which planning has almost no place!

So, despite of the boom of formal investment, more than five hundred thousand extralegal properties and businesses have mushroomed, mostly around the capital. According to the Albanian government and the United Nations Development Programme, they are worth almost 13 billion Euro, which is 4 times more than the international aid given to Albania during transition, 9 times more than direct foreign investment, and 9 times more than the national reserve less the gold. Indeed, the Albanian metropolitan region accommodates one third of the national's population. In fact, Tirana is already struggling hard in this situation! It is not only the most vibrant city of the Albanian speaking area today, but also one of the fastest growing urban economies and it is also facing the biggest construction boom in Balkans. As a matter of fact, it is itself an extremely interesting planning "laboratory".

In my opinion successful development and planning can take place only when local authorities take part in the discussion, and especially when they have clear development visions involving concrete participation of other local stakeholders.

Also a planning process will not lead to success, if politics and political interests are not taken into consideration. It is not fair to expect planners to be "neutral" in the political game. Without necessarily getting involved in politics, planning itself could be considered to be public politics. The question is, how to match local political and economic interests with the interests of people and communities, as well as how to maintain a high professional/ intellectual and ethical level.

On the other hand, there cannot be a "happy ending" with respect to planning, if the attempt to reform traditional systems already in place is not followed by strategic action to improve the development of human capacities. Therefore, education is essential in order to establish a critical mass of expertise at a local/public administrative level which will hopefully bring about a change for the better.

When it comes to people, communities, businesses and authorities, they must choose whether they want to see each other as partners or as enemies in building sustainable physical, social and economic living centres. The first option is complex, costly and difficult at first, but sustainable in the long run, while the second option means endless conflict. In a time where most of the world today suffers from inefficiency of governance, corruption, bureaucratic hurdles and exclusion, a flourishing extralegal economy, which if taken into consideration carefully, might change the performance of authorities for better.

It is difficult to sort out the dynamics and also the informality of the development. And also I find it challenging to understand this flexibility as strength. It is interesting that for the Albanian colleagues a valid approach lies in the creation of restrictive planning regulations. Examples from Europe shows that even the most sophisticated planning system can only to a limited extent control developments. The Tirana-Durres faces innumerable challenges. One of them is to make the planning system and the regions fir for Europe in order to join the European Union and obtain funding some time in the future - a complicated task in a centrally organised state.

Rapid urbanization during the past decades has left its mark in the region. Lack of free space and urban sprawl are visible all around. In Tirana the infrastructure has to be adapted to the increased number of inhabitants and this with very limited financial means.

If I were to draw a timeline of the urban plans of Tirana from the very start up to the crucial point in time it would be like below:

1. Area 305 ha- 15000 inhabitants - First Austrian sketches for the plan
2. A real plan Focus on infrastructure, streets, roads, paths, center remains the same
3. Review of the previous plan - importance of the planning
4. King Zog plan - contouring the boulevard axis and administrative center
5. Contouring of the North - South Axis
6. A plan detailing only the part of the New Tirana, but all based on the previous plan
7. Communism- Extension of the city and creation of the first outer ring of the city - and prevision of creating the second - radial system
8. Area 1540 ha - economy impact - demographic growth

To conclude, the above situation clearly shows:

- Inability of the government to control the territory
- Uncontrolled investment
- Crisis
- A settled mentality: Greed to earn endlessly - owners of the land want to build, and expect to earn. But if they all built, they will all end in bankrupt
- Loss of the public interest

The factors to drive into problems are as follows:

- Demography and social situation
- Economic structure and development
- Spatial development and use
- Transportation
- Communal technical infrastructure
- Social infrastructure
- Natural conditions and environment
- Rural development
- Overall framework and institutions.

One of the most important factors in the above mentioned is the demographic change, the migration of the population from the rural areas, as well as the other regions of the country. The population growth has gone through two phases:

- The first one during the communist regime, which aimed to develop rural areas;
- The second one during democracy from the migration of people towards the capital.

Graphically shown, this growth would look like the following:

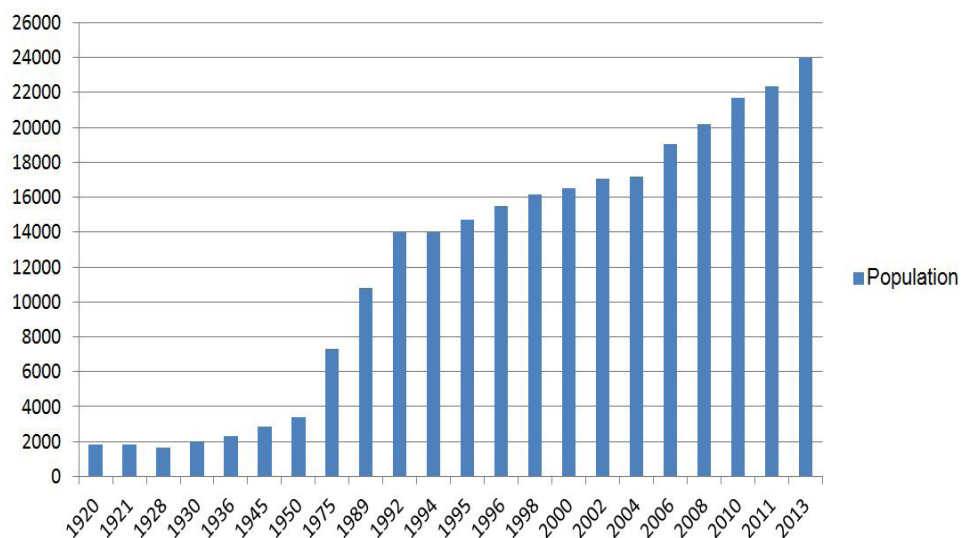


Figure 21. Demographic change in the Commune of Kashar since 1917, source : komu-nakashar.gov.al

Moreover the main problems driven from these causes are :

- Uncontrolled sprawl
- Political confrontations : main parties
- Lack of the vision from the administrative part
- Lack of a civil society which could catalyze the interest of the citizens
- General cultural level

Planning is totally dependent on politics and the government in power. While thinking about all these changes in the structure of the urban development, what triggers my mind is the question: Is a typical urban plan, realized based on all the planning rules, the solution to what is actual? What if we tried to explore some alternatives to try to adapt more to the current situation, to the reality that we are living in now?

Albania thus provides a potential canvas to test speculations and interventions to answer the above questions.

2. Methodology - Application of the Project

2.1 Analysis of the area of interest

2.1.1 Location

The commune of Kashar is one of the biggest entities of the Region of Tirana and occupies a very important part of the social-economical part of the capital. It is located in both sides of the highway Tirane-Durres and has an area of approximately 35.6 km². In the north it is confined with the Bexulle commune, in the south with the Vaqarr commune, in the west with the Municipality of Vore in the south-west with the Ndroq commune, in the east with the Municipality of Tirana, and in the north-west with the Municipality of Kamez.

The administrative center of the commune is in the county of Yrshek which is located around 6 km from the center of the capital (Tirana), 30 km from the city of Durres and 25 km from the city of Kruja.

This commune is compounded by the counties of Tzberis, Mezez, Mezez Fushe, Yrshek, Katund i Ri, Kashar Koder, Kashar, Mazrek and Kus.

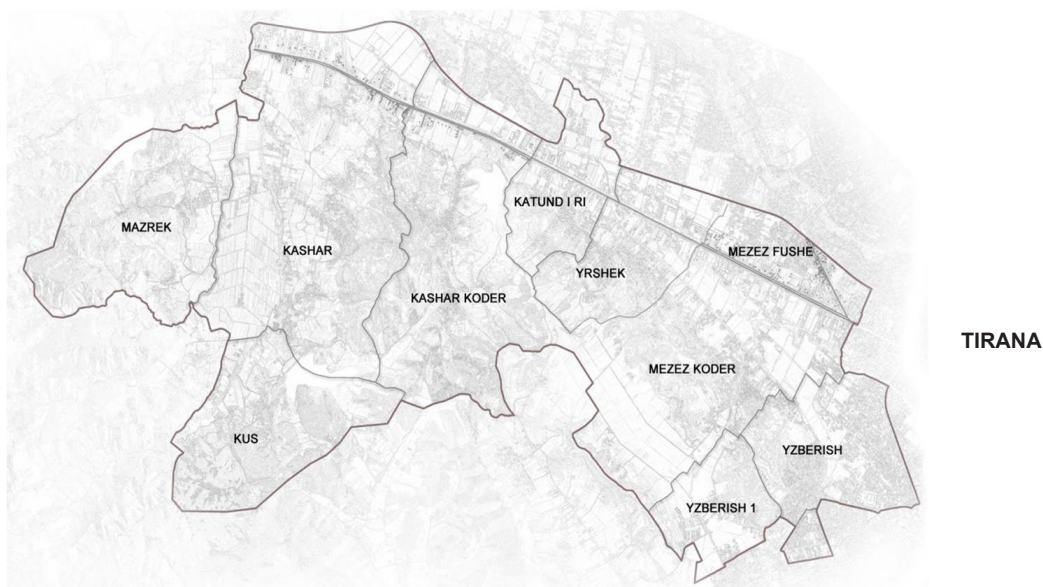


Figure 22. The administrative counties of the Commune of Kashar, source : komunakashar.gov.al

2.1.2 Road network

The commune of Kashar has a road network of about 135 km, from which 100 km are asphalted roads with contemporary parameters and a considerable amount are equipped with sidewalks and street lighting. The very important highway connecting Tirana and Durres (the two major cities in Albania) passes through its territory, with a total length of approximately 9km. This is a very important axis, for here operate the most important businesses of the Albanian economy.

In a parallel axis to the highway, lies the railway line which serves for the public and goods transportation.

Due to the strategic geographical position and the favourable infrastructure, this area is turning into an attractive residential and touristic zone. Kashar is easily accessible through the lines which connect Tirana with the other cities of the northern, southern and western part of Albania.

In the last years, there have been additions to the existing transportation lines, which were made available by the private companies which operate in the territory of the commune. This transportation lines have made it possible the fast access and movement of the community and visitors in different destinations.

For quite some time now, Kashar has turned into an important center not only for economical development, but also for architectural development. Several key elements that Kashar offers due to its favorable geographical location, have turned it into a real architectural and urban experimental laboratory. With the decay of the socialist regime and the allowance of the migration of the population, associated with the reinforcing of the infrastructure, such as the highway which connect Tirana an Durres, Kashar has gone through high speed urbanization starting with a population of 50000 inhabitants. After the very quick sprawl and expansion, it is expected for this population to reach 150 thousand inhabitants, and even further, in the upcoming 20 years, this number is expected to be doubled.

2.1.3 Infrastructure

Regarding the infrastructure, the commune of Kashar has started to work on a considerable number of projects which have been approved in the last years. The approval of the new budget has opened the way to new investments which are aiming in the reconstruction of the roads, building and extension of the sewage and water supply systems in all the neighborhoods, as well as the creation of the sidewalks, to improve the safety of the pedestrians.

The improving of the infrastructure is a very important factor, as it leads to the higher possibilities for future private local and foreign investments. This is also a crucial element to the inhabitants of the area, as it helps in the fulfilling of their needs in such services as:

- educational institutions : nursery schools, kindergartens, schools, etc.
- access to public services, providing coverage of the whole territory with basic services such as collecting of waste, which thanks to the road network, is made possible even in the rural areas

-public and road security, through the street lighting, etc.

As mentioned above, infrastructure plays a great role in the economical development, through the opening of job positions, small businesses, especially in the commercial roads.

Although it is not the strongest feature of the area, it is worth mentioning that even tourism plays a relevant role in the development. This because of the attractive landscapes which are offered nearby, in the still rural part of the commune, with the small lakes, vegetation, reservoirs, hills, attracting tourists for hiking and other recreational activities, just a few kilometers away from the busy metropolitan center of the capital.

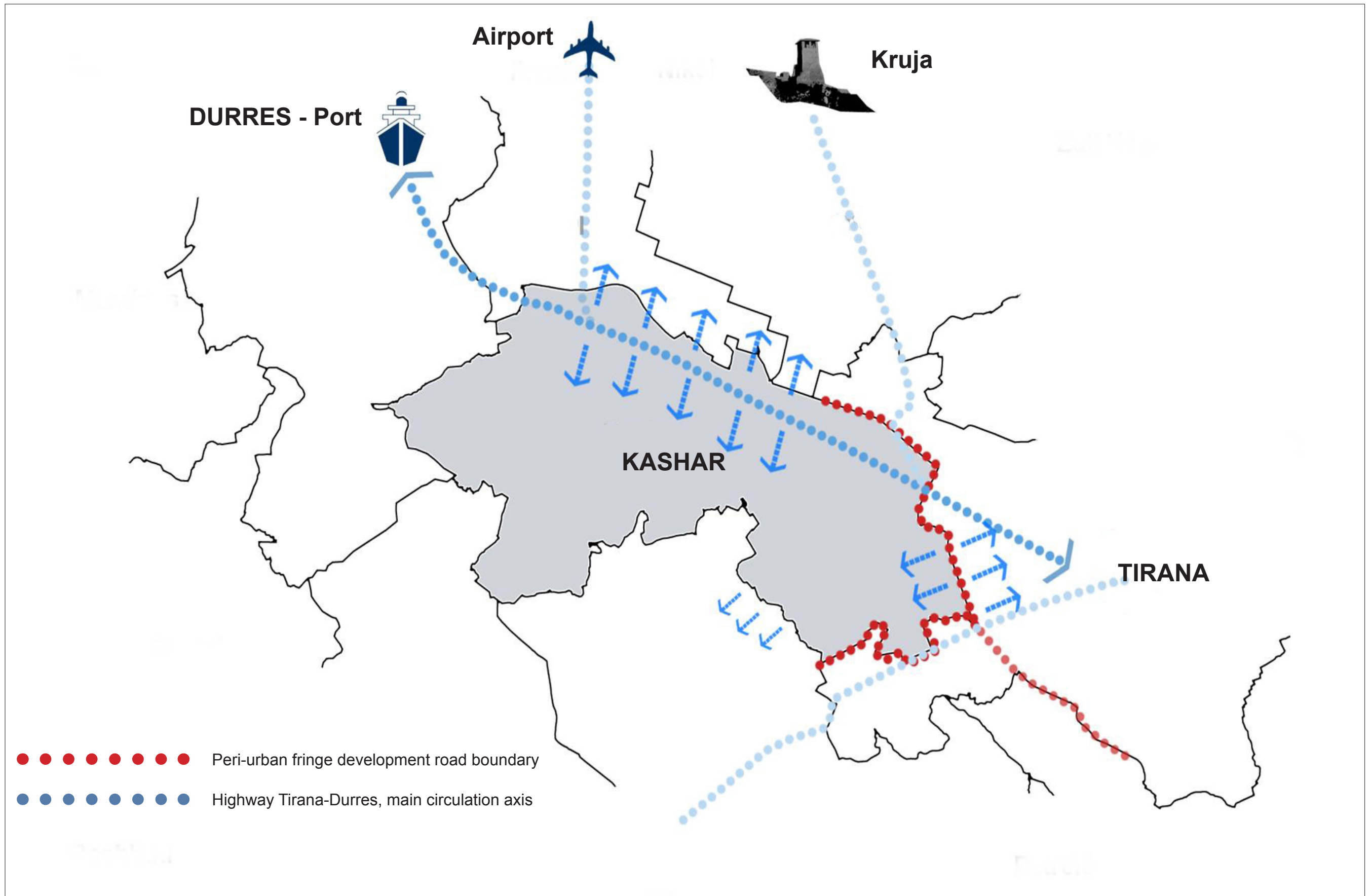


Figure 23. Road connection of the area in relation to the main destinations, source: komnakashar.gov.al, own editing

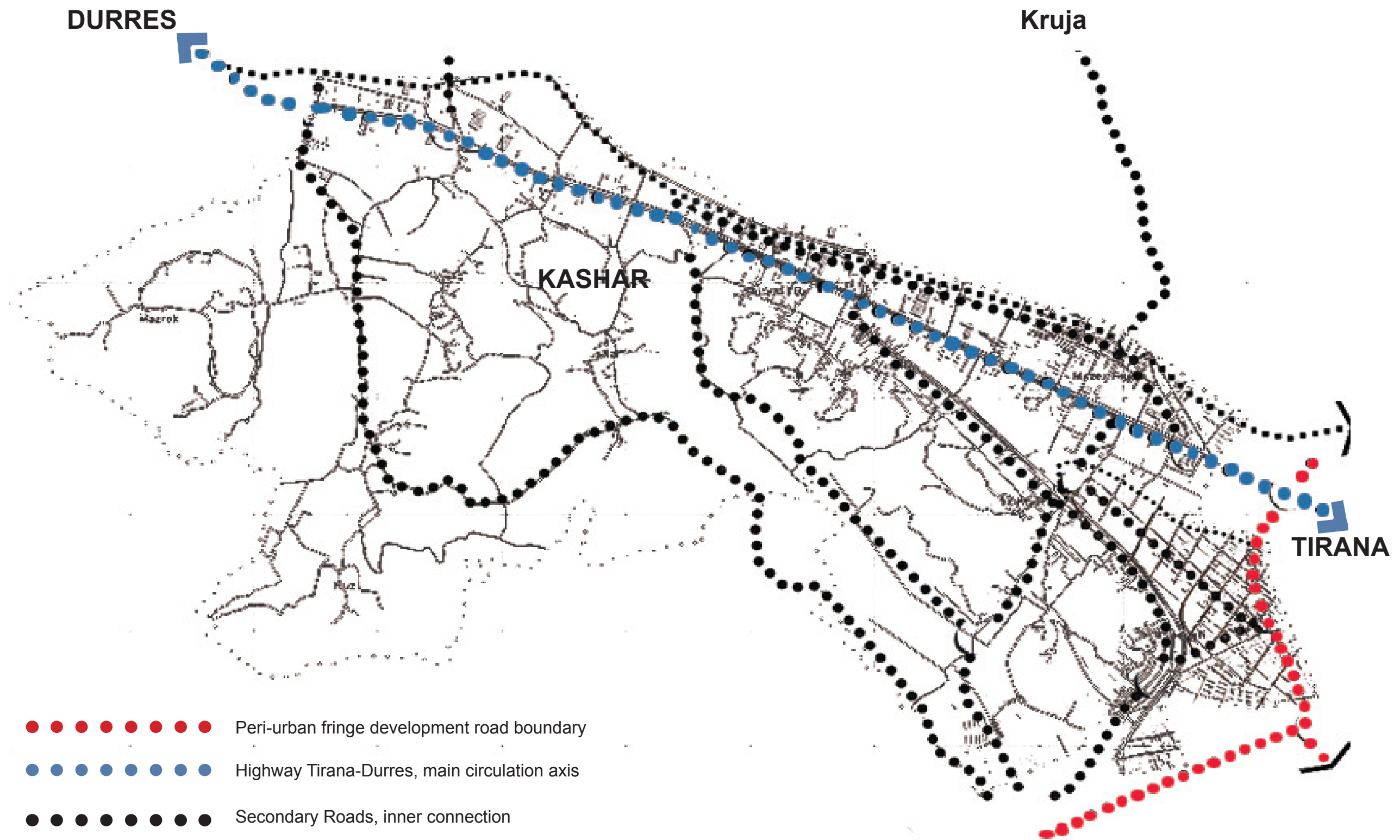


Figure 24. Road network, source: komnakashar.gov.al, own editing

2.1.4 Architectural and Urban development

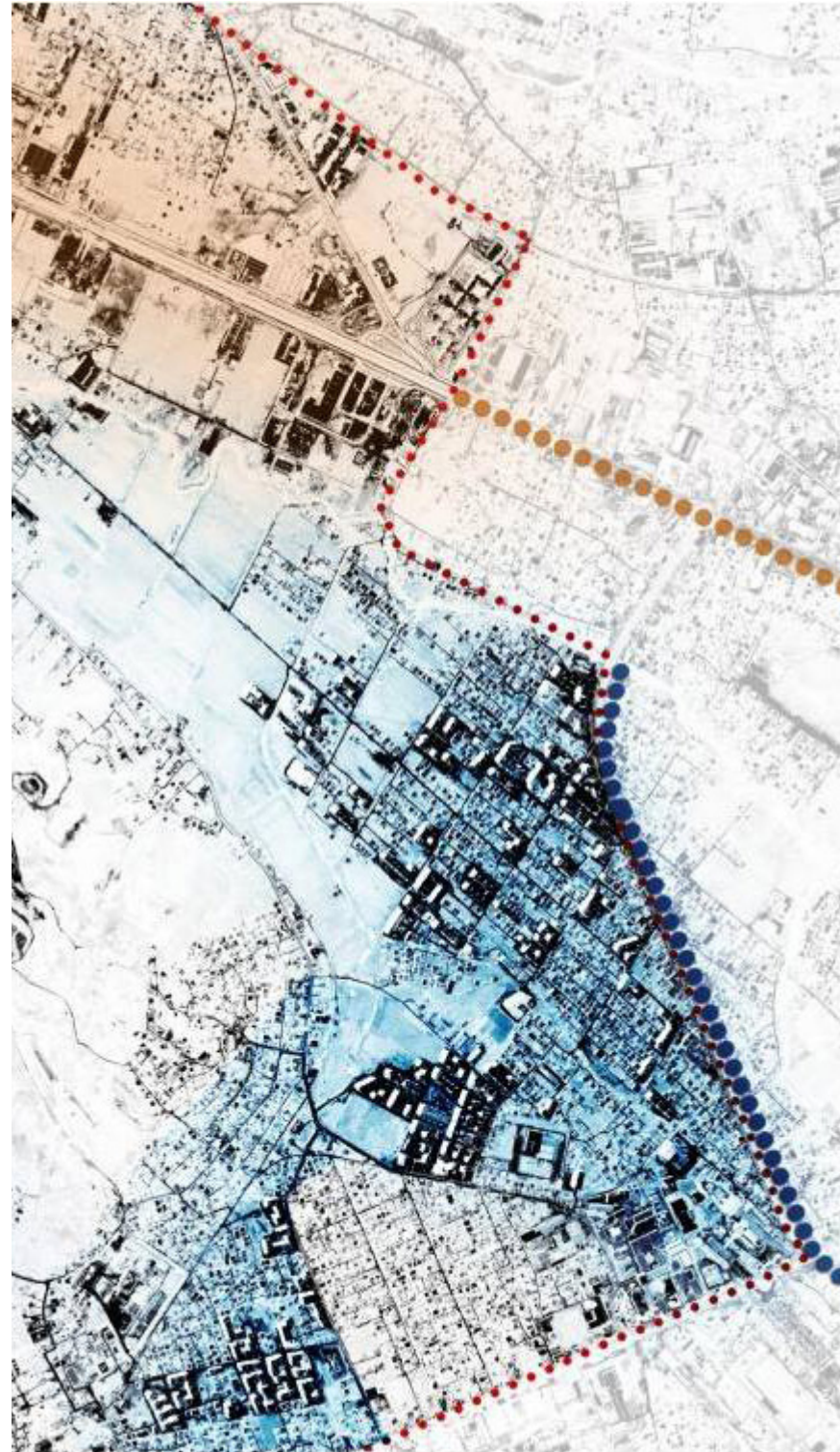
The commune of Kashar, has a proposed development plan which is approved. The western part of the capital offers the appropriate conditions for urban development. These are mainly populated areas, mostly small counties which have a demographic dynamic and a high demand for working in production, industry and education. Some of these counties are obtaining the traits of small cities and genuine urban centers, but they must be re-dimensioned. The western part of Tirana is located in between the two most important cities of the country - the big marine gate and the administrative, cultural, educational and economical center of the whole country. On the other hand, the highway generates convenience of movement and communication not only between these two main cities, but also with the other cities. With the increase of the number of cars, the mechanism of transportation and the improvement of the railway lines, this space offers possibilities that in a near future a unification in linear traits with parallel production, residential and recreational areas might be created.

The burst of the development in the main axis connecting the two main cities, in the urban aspect, now it's an undeniable reality. It is that area of Tirana which has gone through radical changes in the construction, architectural and urban aspects. A new landscape has been created with the rise of the industrial buildings, the transportation, the services, the residential development, etc. The demand for building industrial, artisanal and production infrastructure in this particular area is very high. This is a result of the new social conditions and the development of the economy and democracy. This part is a crucial area not only for the capital, but also for the whole country. For this reason, it should be treated with the main concerns and planned wisely.

Year 2000
Population 14.000 inhabitants



Year 2002-2012
Population growth 16.000 - 45.000 inhabitants



Year 2012-2020
Expected Population - 130.000 inhabitants

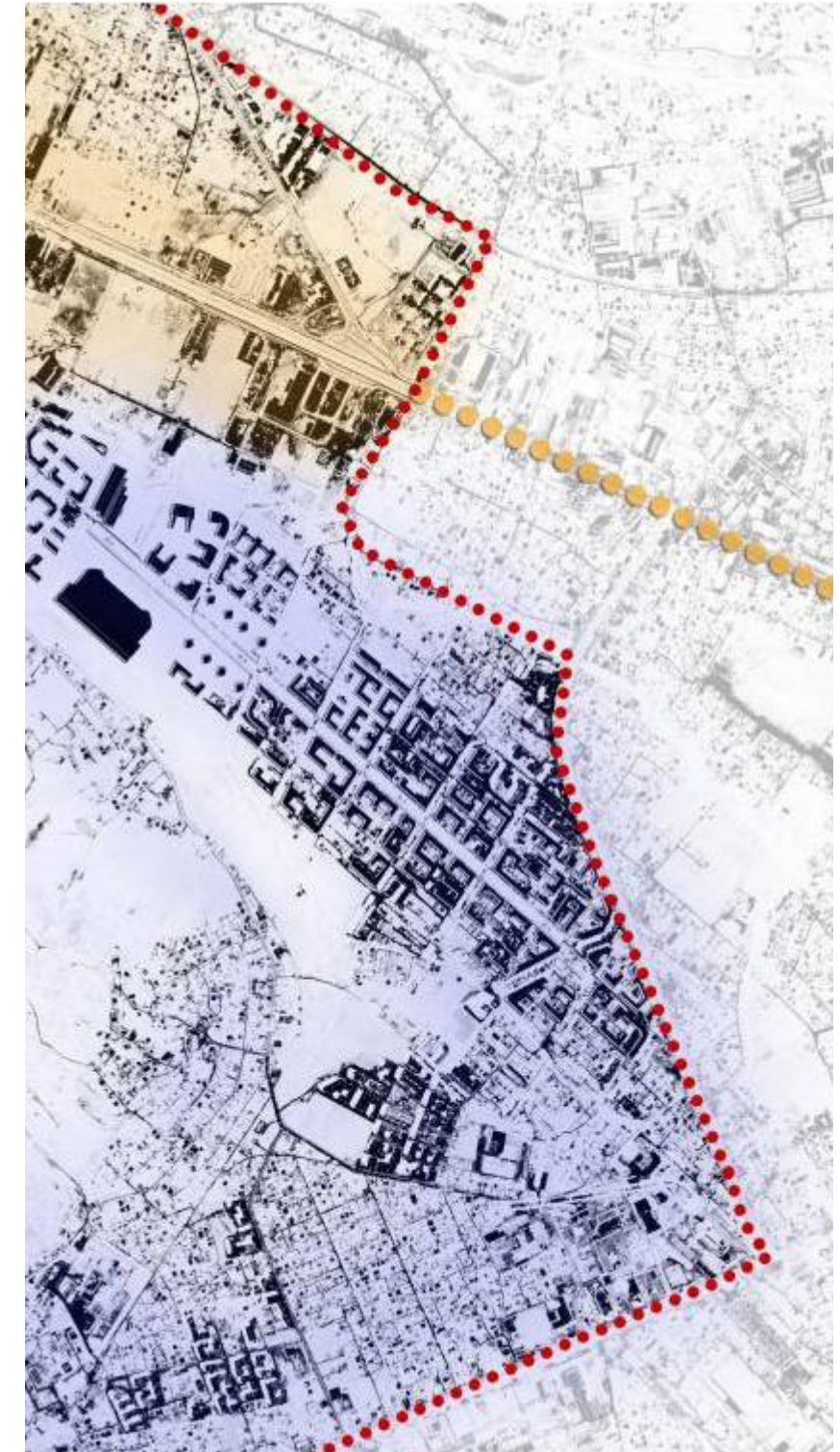


Figure 25. Demographic growth scheme in the years 2000-2020, source: komnakashar.gov.al

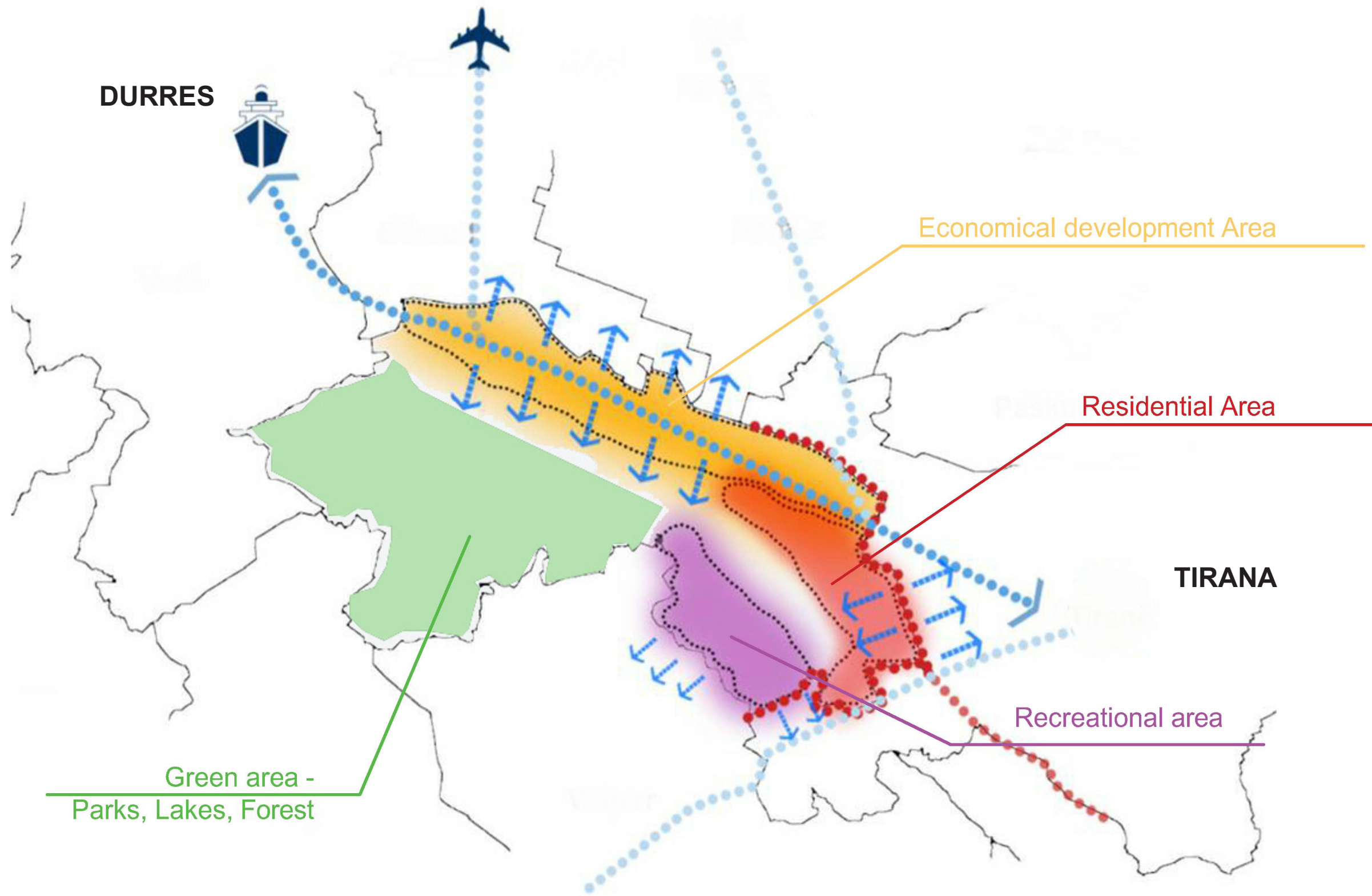


Figure 26. Functional zoning of the Commune of Kashar, source of map: komnakashar.gov.al, own editing

2.1.5 Natural resources

The relief is mainly low, dominated by fields but also partially covered in hills. The raise above the sea level is low. For this reason the slopes of the river beds are small. The climate is Mediterranean with a dry and hot summer, and soft and humid winter. Generally speaking, the climatic conditions of the area create good conditions for the agriculture, which allows the production of two to three agriculture products per year. The area of the agricultural land is 2398, 6069 ha and has the following structure:

- Agricultural land 2227.8910 ha;
- Orchard 34.8366 ha;
- Vineyard 63.5316 ha;
- Olive Grove 40.8557 ha;
- Land 31.4920 ha.

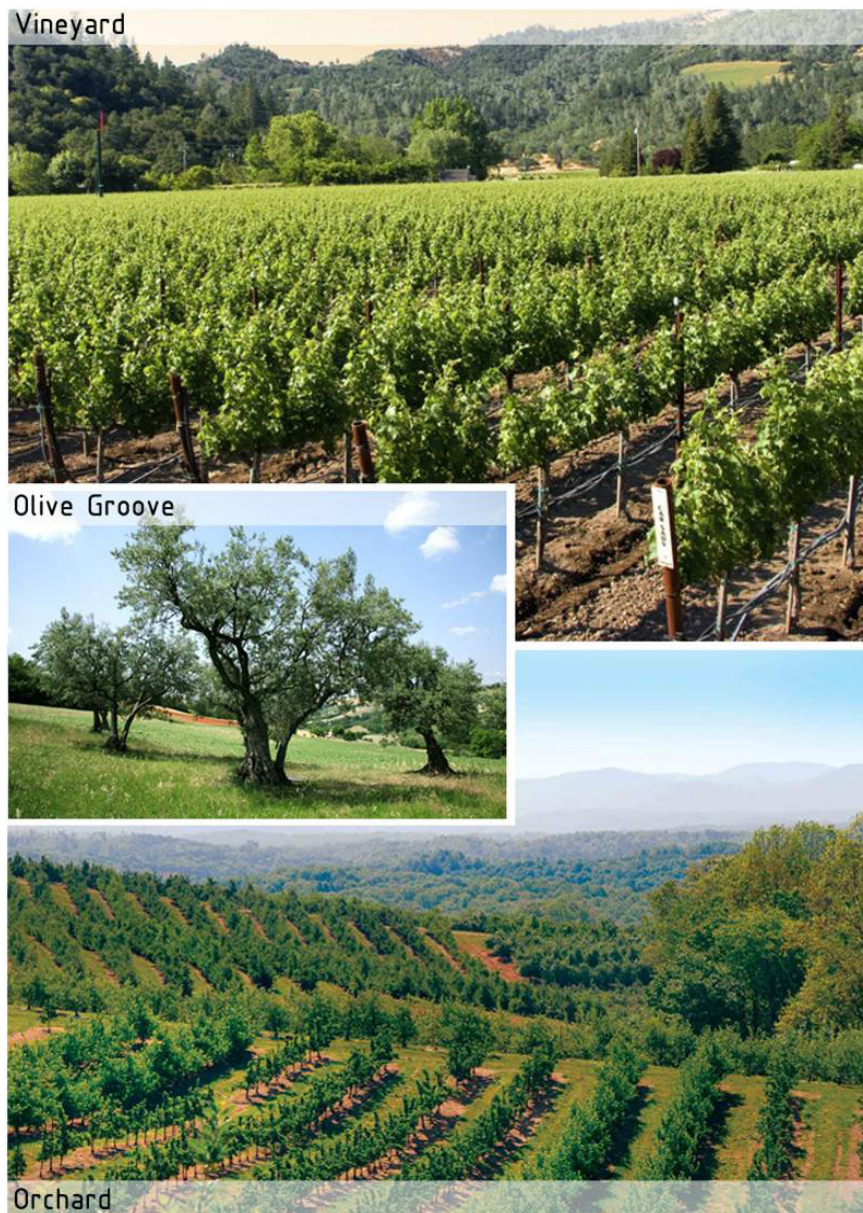


Figure 27. Agricultural land vegetation, image source: google images, own editing

The natural vegetation has a limited extension. It is located in non cultivated lands such as the slope of the hills. This vegetation is mainly represented by the mediterranean bushes (heathers).

Kashar has a wide treasure of water resources. Within it there are several artificial lakes, which apart from the main role which serves to the development of agriculture, make of an incredible asset for the recreational activities related to many sports. The river Lana also goes through the territory of the commune, which is an important natural element which connects the area to the capital of Tirana. These lakes are very important elements for the territory, regarding the future projects considering it as a source of water for the community.



Figure 28. Forest vegetation, image source: google images, own editing

2.2 The implementation of urban acupuncture in the selected area

The above analysis of the whole area of the Commune of Kashar, served as a starting point for the identification of the problematic areas which might need these type of quick, small scale interventions.

Due to the high intensity of building, and very fast growth of the population, the “high-priority” area for the implementation of the needles, would be the residential area. This area represents the newly created periurban fringe, which stands right next to the urban boundaries of Tirana.

Based on my own conversations that I have had the chance to have with several inhabitants of this area, I could see that there is a lack of social activities, public spaces, services, parks, playgrounds and other possibilities which force these people to always head towards Tirana’s center, which of course takes time and has higher expenses. They live now in an urban area, and yet they have the feeling of still being in the rural part of the capital.

For this reason, I decided to zoom to an area in this intensively built site, and find a few spaces spread in different locations, where I could insert “needles” of acupuncture, to “cure” and revitalize the surrounding.

Firstly the plan would be to collect local authorities and institutional representatives, to explain and present several study cases of the urban acupuncture implementation, in order to find ways to invest, to include the residents in the process, and to reach to agreements with private investors, as well as the Municipality of Tirana.

It would be important to present strategies of how to make use of the empty spaces, unused apartments which remain empty due to the fact that they aren’t affordable. This might be achieved by coming into terms with the investors and local authorities, to lower their taxes, by offering the spaces to the public, to individuals or groups who might only need an empty space to create and produce new possibilities for social and economical development.

Another very important side is the lack of trees and wider green spaces. For this, there can be ways to intervene very simply and quickly, by arranging deals with business owners, who make use of the ground floor spaces of the buildings, to plant trees and maintain the space in front of them, by getting a decrease of the rent they pay.

There are many young people, who live in the very urban center, and have passions and creativity to gather people, to present artistic works, to share culture, educate and entertain the public. By offering the unused spaces, not only can this generate new possibilities for the young, but it could also improve the social life of the inhabitants.

DURRES

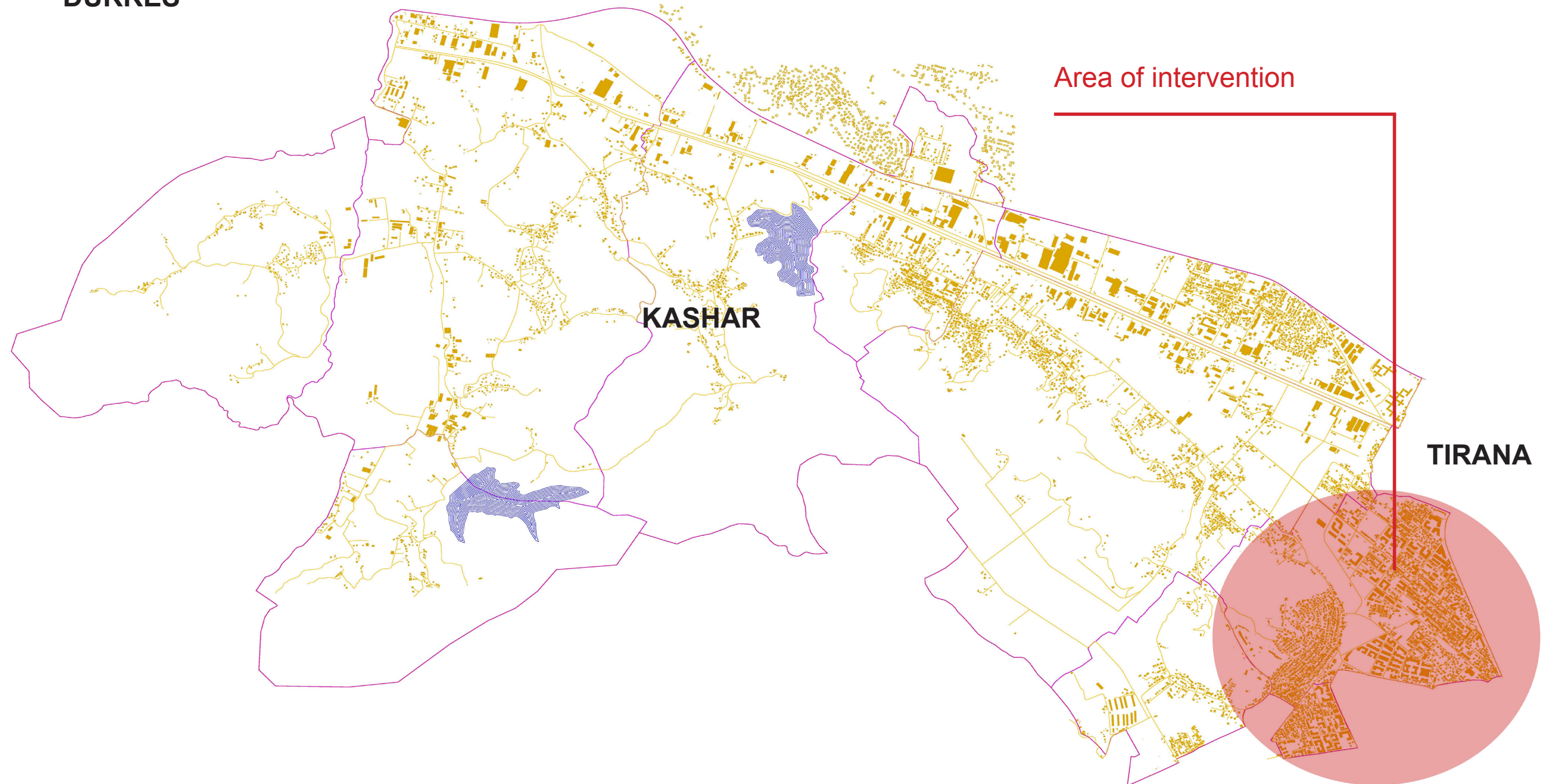
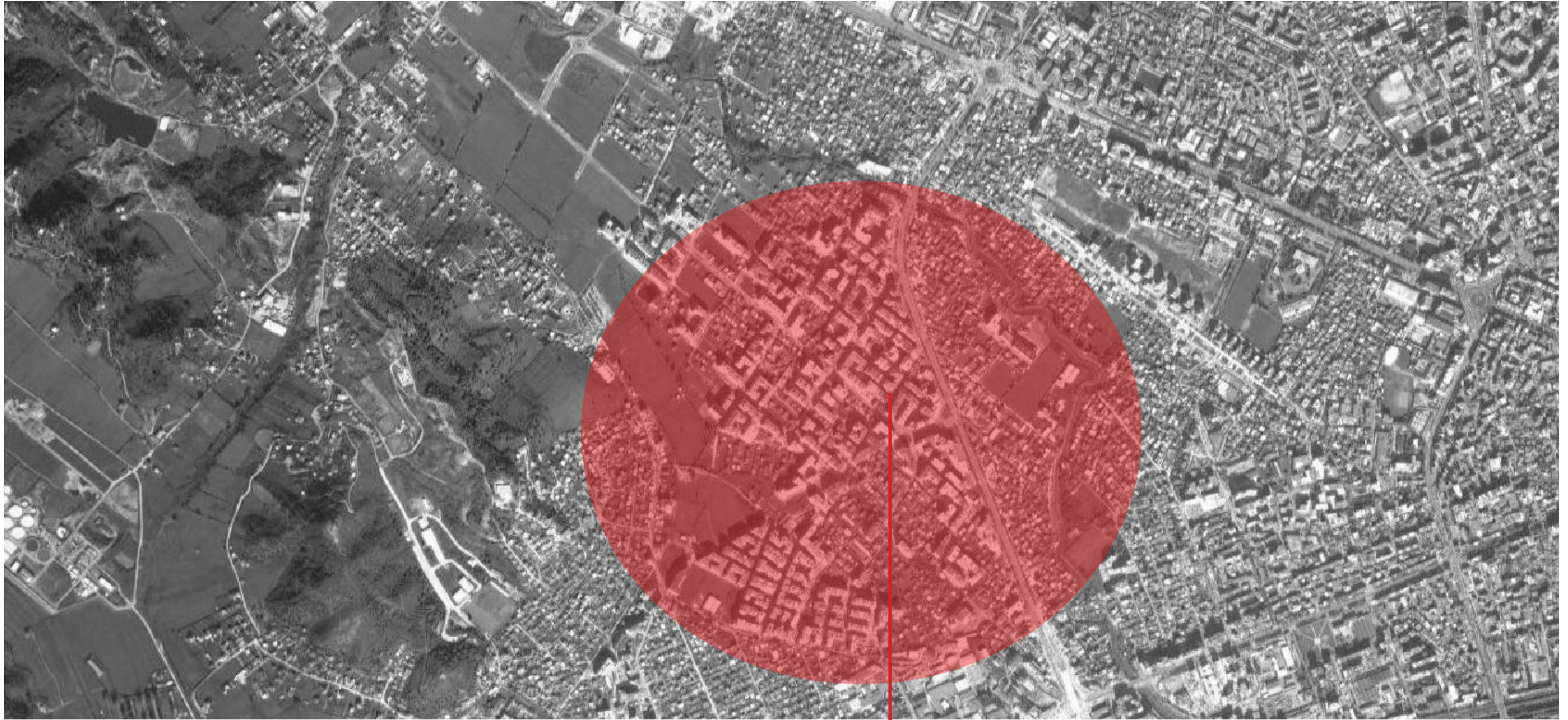


Figure 29. Highlight of the selected area of the interventions, source: own creation



Area of intervention

Figure 30. Zoomed-in image of the area of intervention, source: maps.google.com, own editing

3. Results and Discussion - The acupuncture suggestions

After the identification of the priority area of intervention, which above is highlighted in red, and represents the residential zone, three needles will be implemented in different spots.

I would like to emphasize that these three “needles” or “pins” are considered to be a starting point towards the understanding of the whole process of intervention. In fact, I would take under consideration many other spots of the residential area where the interventions can be implemented, depending on the needs and requirements of the residents, and also what might be reflected to be missing.

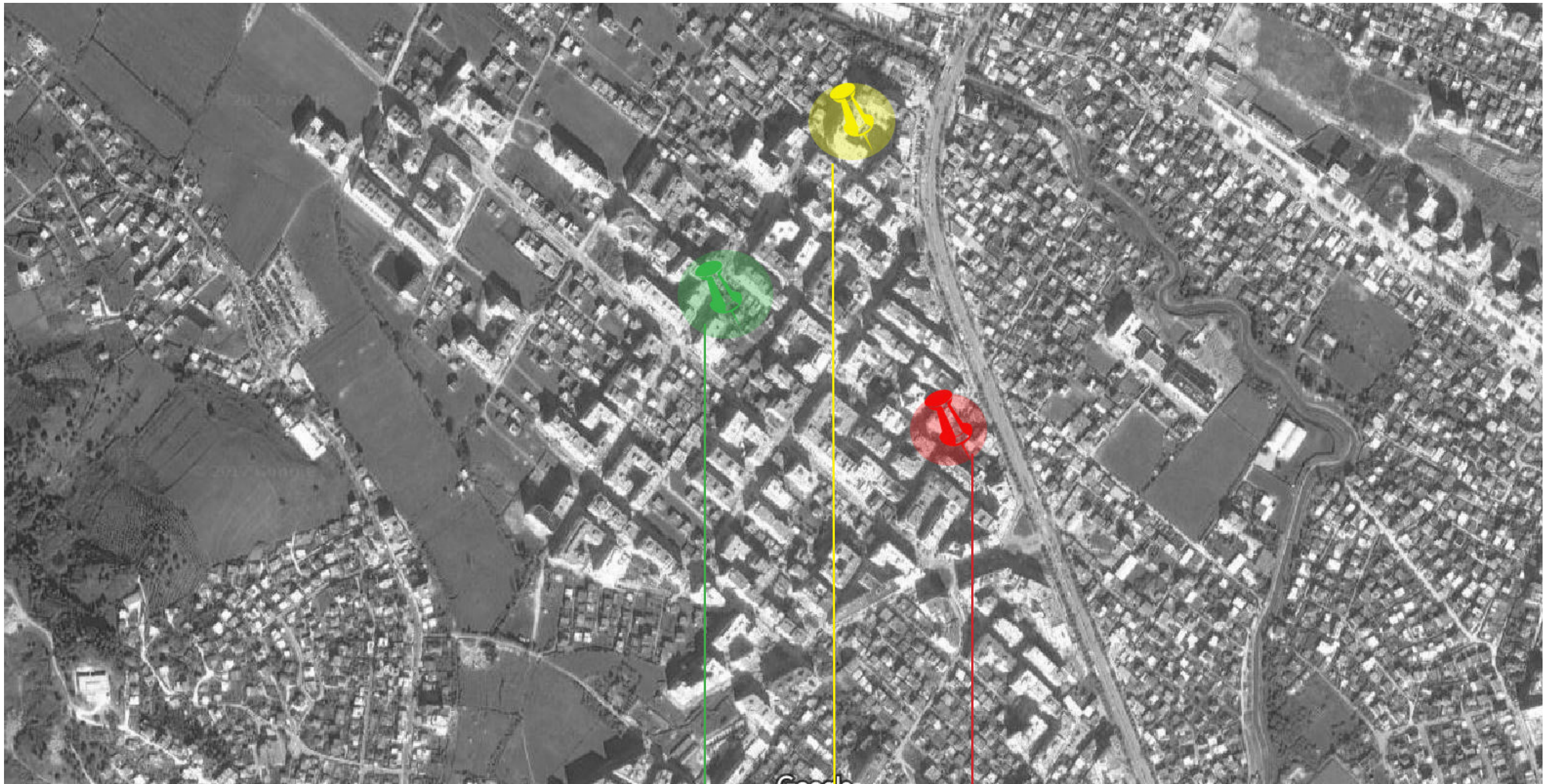
The following interventions will be shown in three different colors (red, yellow, green), and will exhibit three different types of solutions, shown in schematic axonometries, to help understand which part of what is already built can be of use.

1. The Red Needle - It will reflect the solution of the usage of the empty spaces, unused ground floors of buildings, empty apartments which are currently unaffordable to be bought, and also the “contribution” of the old on-family houses which were not demolished by the new regulatory plan, and co-exist with the new higher-rise buildings (sharing the space of their gardens and make some profit to invest slowly in their house reconstructions).

2. The Yellow Needle - This will be a space dedicated to temporary constructions, such as open markets, stands, temporary exhibition spaces which can be quickly built and transformed, from the public, by using different materials to create light structures and use them for the purpose of different activities. This space could be a food market, for the locals who want to sell what they plant and cultivate in their own gardens in the agricultural area of Kashar. Also exhibiting the works of young artisans which can only show their works during dedicated fairs.

3. The Green Needle - This intervention will be dedicated to the green spaces. It would encourage the cleaning of some small scale squares and creating the possibilities to plant different types of trees, plants, flowers, and also create some small playgrounds for the children, who so far don't have proper spaces where to play, and also for the elderly, who would like to have some green spaces and benches to sit in and enjoy a bit of fresh air.

Furthermore, since the lack of green in Tirana is a very sensitive issue, I would put an accent to plant in any space where it can be possible to do so.



3 - The Green Needle - Green Spaces

2 - The Yellow Needle - Temporary Structures

1- The Red Needle - Public, Socio-Cultural Space

Figure 31. Plan of the distribution of the interventions, source image: maps.google.com



1- The Red Needle - Public, Socio-Cultural Space
Making use of the empty spaces within the new buildings, and also the spaces of the existing old one-family houses, located in the same area as the new high-rise buildings, for creating social and cultural activities for the public use.

Figure 32. Schematic view of the red needle implementation, source image: maps.google.com



2- The Yellow Needle - Temporary Structures

Create temporary structures to exhibit various products, produced by waste, recycled materials, self-owned furniture which is no longer in use, to generate a space for exhibiting or selling food and other hand-made products, to promote the local culture of artisans and agriculture.

Figure 33. Schematic view of the yellow needle implementation, source image: maps.google.com



3- The Green Needle - Green Spaces

This space is dedicated to the green, the open spaces in nature, within the boundaries of the built area. Through this intervention it can be possible to make better use of the “empty space” in between buildings around the neighborhoods, creating green areas which imitate small parks and playgrounds where children as well as adults, can have some relaxation and playful places, within the area where they live.

Figure 34. Schematic view of the green needle implementation, source image: maps.google.com

3.1 Suggestions of Interventions for the future and other areas

The Commune of Kashar can very likely be considered as “a treasure hunt” of nature comparing it with Tirana which is already full of constructions. Being so close to the capital and other important locations in Albania, it is a focal point and it is able to offer different opportunities to the visitors as well as benefits to the residents.

Based on all the references and previous experiences with urban acupuncture, which I have mentioned in this thesis, I would like to suggest various types of these “needles”, approaches and interventions to improve the current situation of Kashar.

These interventions would not only serve to the currently overly developed residential area, but through the whole Commune of Kashar, within all the counties which are part of this area.

This said, the following points, could be starting points and interventions throughout the whole area, and once resulted successful, these functions might be implemented in other municipalities, communes, counties, to bring a new face and revitalized atmosphere to all the regions in Albania, based on the necessities of each area.

Related to the public gathering I suggest to offer some stopping spots, like observation towers, pavilions, small plazas etc.

Public Spaces and Gathering places

The aim of this intervention would be to create inviting and collecting spaces to be used by both the residents of the area and visitors from other parts of the city or other regions as well. Having such views, something that came to my mind was “transition” and “gathering” offering to the people the possibility to visit all the site by trying to unify the approach to public movement, where the existing roads and paths can be seen as a basic system for movement, also adding some new ones not just vehicular, mostly pedestrian, cycling paths, in order to be more moving on greeneries and to get rid of asphalt.

Recreational Center

Given the wide surface of vegetation and the presence of such landscape in the central and western part of the commune of Kashar, it would be crucial and very necessary to implement some spaces dedicated to sports and other activities connected to nature. The idea is to create flexible multi-purpose spaces for different events, such as indoor and outdoor sport and activities, exhibitions, performing, lecture, shopping and exercise.

Community Center Under One Roof

This is an idea for a structure which might represent an introverted Community Center to gather the residents of Kashar. This would be an initiative where the community can be involved all connected by the moto: “We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give!”

People have different requirements which can be gathered and fulfilled into a community. The challenge is to create proper architecture units that merge with nature and with ‘the people’. “Feels like Home” “space qualities create the possibilities to feel safe and sound. This community center would serve as a space for new possibilities, sharing of ideas on how to improve their lifestyle, create activities and social gathering of the community, the crucial elements to make it functional. The community center invites people to gather with one another, to gather under one roof.

Agro-architecture

The concept consists on the adaption of architecture in the agricultural landscape, to achieve the maximum use of the advantages offered by the agricultural land and water surfaces on the site. The building site would be based on rules giving priority to what exists and is naturally there. Small scale interventions spread into the side would be the major idea of this “needle”, trying to attract and obtain the attention and interest of investors who would see good opportunities to invest by benefitting from the environment. The concept of the “urban farming” might be very applicable and the way of design would give ways to provide economic and social development of the zone.

Treasured vineyards

Among the land capacity of the area, vineyards would repose a majority among other natural assets, through the hills and mediterranean climate. Winemaking tradition can set a distinctiveness which makes it possible to pursue, through architecture, the enhancement of the landscape and the surroundings as expression of the cultural and social valence of the place where wine is produced.

The building could be conceived as an amalgamation of triple sequenced process of winemaking, from the vineyards to the winery finalizing with wine tasting and selling, which put in the site that contrasts the urbanization cacophony with the purity of the village strongly sets an identity to the area of not only promoting winemaking tradition, but as well culture and local vernacular architecture.

Artists in Residency

The purpose of this intervention would be to provide a place where creative artists – writers, painters, composers, sculptors, visual artist, etc. – can concentrate on their work, free from the distractions and duties of daily life given a time and space away from their usual environment and obligations. The main purpose is to provide a time of reflection, research, presentation and/or production.

They also would allow an individual to explore his/her practice within another community; meeting new people, using new materials, experiencing life in a new location. Art residencies emphasize the importance of meaningful and multi-layered cultural exchange and immersion into another culture. The location is presumed to be a very silent and peaceful area. The relationship between the resident and the host is an important aspect of a residency program but still left flexible to the decision of the residents. Sometimes residents become quite involved in a community, giving presentations, workshops, or collaborating with local residents. At other times, they are quite secluded, with ample time to focus and investigate their own practice.

Part of the scenario proposed would be the possibility to best answer to both of these requests. The program might stand as a forum of artistic dialogue which extends beyond cultural, geographical and, certainly, beyond political borders.

Elderly Care

During 2016, when i visited the site, I had the chance to meet and talk to some locals. During this time at the site I found out that the village is mostly populated by elders so this gave me an idea to propose another intervention which can make possible for this group of residents to be involved as well, and give them chances to join activities produced by these small interventions. This case might offer different possibilities and might open new job opportunities for the residents.

Different daily activities like fishing in the lakes, hiking through the rich landscape, taking care of small gardens, reading, gaming, movie watching makes the elders escaping from their daily routines.

4. Conclusions

Peri-urbanisation is a very important notion in the fast growing cities. It is the strip where the urban starts merging with the rural. Bigger cities often offer more possibilities of employment, economical development, new opportunities which lead to the migration of the population from the rural areas to the developed urban ones.

But every city has its boundaries, which nowadays seem to become more and more flexible and interchanging.

Albania, a country which has been in transition for over two decades, offers very intriguing study cases where the impact of sprawl has remarkably changed the structure of the city. A particular case is the capital, Tirana, being the most developed city, where most of the job opportunities are established.

These opportunities are precisely the main reason for the migration of the population from all the regions of the country towards the capital. This migration lead to demographic changes, and as a result to these changes, came the need to expand the city beyond the “defined” urban boundaries, and spread towards the once considered rural surroundings of the city.

Logically, the higher need for accommodation and creation of facilities for the incomers, give rise to planning strategies, creation of the new masterplans of the city, to create the new areas which will shelter and make a home for these people.

Due to the continuous changes of these master plans, depending on the political party which represents the government, the implementation of these plans have shown to bring several problematics in the social and economical development of the peri-urban areas. Providing solutions with new planning strategies has proved not to be very effective, since all the main activities still are concentrated around the center of Tirana. On the other hand, it is difficult to create a new plan for an area which is already built and has an implemented infrastructure.

This said, leads to the need to find an alternative way of intervention, which can be applied in a shorter time, and become quickly effective in the improvement of the current existing situations. It is important to find ways for the residents not to always feel the need to head to the city center to fulfill all their needs, creating new possibilities in the place where they live, to have all the educational, social and cultural activities that they can only find in the center of the capital.

The experience in several countries around the world, including the study cases i have taken under consideration, has shown that this approach known as “urban acupuncture”, is a very effective way to embrace a quick intervention and bring an almost immediate solution to improve many aspects of life in these peri-urban areas. What is very important, is that in this approach, the people themselves can contribute and can participate in the process of applying the neccessary elements based on their own needs and requirements.

Since this is an intervention that can rely on the participation of the public itself (the current inhabitants of the area), as well as local managing institutions and private investors, of course the culture and mentality play a very important role.

For this reason, the study cases that I have taken as references in this thesis, are examples from three different countries or parts of Europe, embodying different cultures and mentalities. This said, it is clear that there is a notable difference between the Netherlands and the Balkan countries, and it is important to mention that Albania, being a country in the Balkan, has a very similar mentality and culture with the above mentioned countries of the Balkan (Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia), so their experience might show a very relevant result for how it might result to be in Albania.

I have been able to experience myself a few of the study cases such as Test Site Rotterdam, and also the Vertical Garden in Skopje. Also, I have been able to ask several people and discuss about the interventions in Belgrade, and even though the initial skepticism and not understanding these small scale “projects”, the results have appeared to have been very efficient, serving their purpose, and quickly improving the areas in which they were applied.

To conclude, I believe that the key element in the well functioning and the ability to correctly implement the “needles” for the urban acupuncture, is to understand the needs of the people, and also to make them understand every step of the way and to educate them towards this bottom-up approach.

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