



Armand Vokshi is a lecturer and Dean of the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, at the Polytechnic University of Tirana and a professional in architecture and urban planning in Albania. He is graduated in Architecture in Florence and is the Head of the Avatelier studio. He is author of various publications in the field of architectural exhibitions as well as professional and academic conferences.

The Great Park of Tirana, between the past and the future

The Great Park of Tirana has a rather interesting historical evolution, as its existence is initially connected with the Park of the Royal Complex. This Complex would complete the works during the fascist occupation period, with partial adaptations by the architect, G. Bosio. The project adapts the geometric park, in complete harmony with the relief and with the objects of the complex and leaves a continues part in the form of a natural vegetation. This part multiplied after the Second World War, during the period of the communist dictatorship. In 1955, the construction of the artificial lake was designed and implemented, using several water flows in the area. Currently, in the urban system of metropolitan Tirana, this park plays a very important, and a disciplinary role in the daily life of citizens. Because of its large size, it can not only be called a real lung of the city, but we can say that it is part of the daily rituals of a large mass of people.

In complete harmony and continuity is the recently restored Zoo, the city's Botanical Garden, public swimming pools and inside the park the amphitheater, sports facilities, running and cycling tracks, as well as a series of university and educational institutions. The presence of the park has already balanced the urban development of the city, thanks to the continuous great demand to live near it, constantly achieving two strong conditions:

- increasing the high intensity and density of construction around this park,
- as well as the multiplication of the real estate price of residential and service buildings to compare to the rest of the city of Tirana.

This flood of surrounding constructions has turned into a continuous concrete wall in relation to the city. It has endangered a man-made ecosystem for nearly a century, as well as all other values associated with it.

Keywords:
Great Park of Tirana, public park, vegetation protection, landscape

INTRODUCTION

This study attempts to analyze and evaluate the Great Park of Tirana, as one of the most interesting and characteristic values of the Albanian capital, Tirana. Investigating it in relation to different approaches, the study is composed in three closely related parts:

- a) Historical and conceptual evolution of the design and completion of the Great Park of Tirana
- b) The existing situation and the relationship with the city of Tirana
- c) The perspective of the future developments of the Great Park of Tirana and the different approaches to the developments around it

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE GREAT PARK OF TIRANA

The Great Park of Tirana [1] has a very interesting historical evolution, as its planning and existence is closely related to the historical developments of Albania, from 1925 to the present day. This evolution of its formation goes through four historical eras closely related to the fate of the urban evolution of modern Tirana:

- Formation of the monarchy in the twenties and forties
 - Italian and German fascist occupation during the Second World War
 - The totalitarian communist period until the nineties
 - And the post-communist period after the nineties
- Although these historical phases have passed, what is most important are 3 main moments:
- Creation of the Royal Villa Park together with the related buildings in the 30s and 40s
 - Construction of the city's large artificial lake and the Great Park after the 1960s
 - Completion of the urban area around the Great Park

According to the urban plans for the city center of Tirana started in 1925 by the Italian architect Armando Brasini, then continued in the urban plans designed in the 1930s by three professional engineers and architects from Albania, Austria and Italy, namely Frashëri, Kohler and Di Fausto, the city is planned to the south, across the river of Lana, an

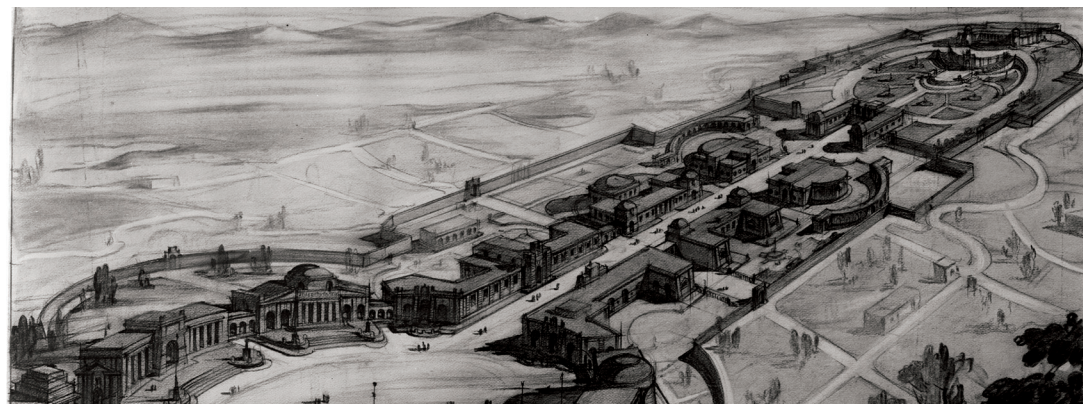
expansion with a large urban system. This system contains a boulevard with two squares, where the first square is the administrative center of Tirana and touches the old city in the Old Market area and the second square at the end of the boulevard is completely dedicated to the most important person of that time, King Ahmet Zog. A large Royal Complex consisting of the Royal Palace and two villas is designed for King Zog: the Royal Villa and the Princess Villa. In front of the complex, which was on the axis with the boulevard, a monumental green space was dedicated and the back part, like a large green park.

By the mid-thirties, after several plans laid on the king's table by that time, the king himself decided to move the entire Royal Complex nearly 1,100m away from its original position, to the southeast of the former royal square, changing all the urban plans designed for that area. It only requires the completion of the project of the Royal Villa, as part of the Royal Complex, which was designed and started to be built in the thirties, according to the project of the Italian architect Giulio Bertè. The Royal Villa was completed by the Italian architects Gherardo Bosio and Ferdinando Poggi in the years of the Italian occupation, with the departure of King Zog, which takes the name Villa Luogotenziale, changing the original architectural part with a new, more contemporary style.



Fig. 1 - The Great Park of Tirana, 2024, (Google Earth)

Fig.2-Tirana, the aerial perspective of arch. Armando Brasini's plan, 1926, (Central Technical Archive of Construction, Tirana)



A rather ambitious project was planned for the part of the Royal Park around the Royal Villa. The park presents a complex layout thanks to the work of the Sgaravatti company in the 1937 project and the contribution of Pietro Porcinai, a well-known Italian landscape architect. Later, the park was reworked and completed by Gherardo Bosio and Ferdinando Poggi.

After the Second World War, the Villa and its park were confiscated by the Communist Power and made available to the leadership of the Communist Party. The name of the villa was changed to Brigade Palace and nowadays, it is still called by this name.

The Park of the Brigade Palace occupies an area of about 37 hectares, of which 25 hectares belong to the forested area, property of the Albanian government. The park represents an obvious historical, cultural and landscape interest, not only for the Albanian garden architecture, but also for the European one, because it reflects the architectural, plant and artistic characteristics of the gardens of that period, which is presented as an emblematic and very significant example of formal gardens, which relate to parts of the natural design. The complex is structured by several different architectural systems, which have as their central axis the Villa, which falls on the semi-circular plate and is connected to the east by the two rooms bordered by rectangular bushes, the Queen's Fountain room and the Musicians' room.

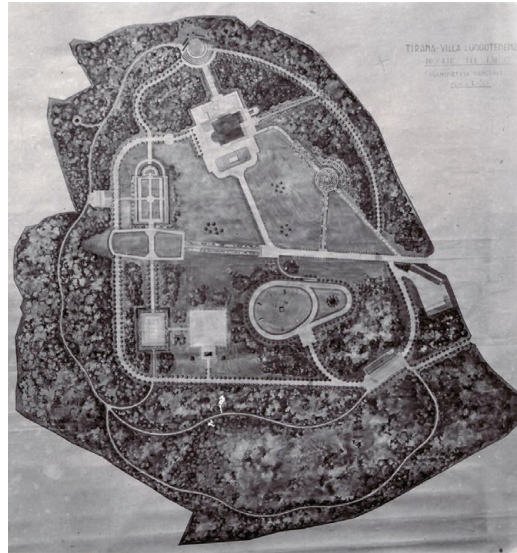


Fig.3-The master plan of the Park of the Royal Complex in Tirana designed by Pietro Porcinai dedicated to King Zog, 1930, (Central Technical Archive of Construction, Tirana)

Fig.4-Image of the Park of the Royal Complex designed by Gherardo Bosio and Pietro Porcinai, 1930, (Photo by Evisa Kasaj)



Parts of a formal layout are connected to the wide spaces of the forest and the system of paths and lanes, where plant walls consisting of regularly shaped hedges connect the different parts of the garden.

A double row of cypresses (*Cupressus sempervirens*) from the main entrance to the villa, creating a semi-circular plant space bordered by bushes in front of the villa.

To the east of the Villa, a hill in the form of a terrace can be seen, from which two plates of the formal system are well perceived: Platea e Vashës, which is limited by a high plant wall (*Ilex aquifolium*) and laurel (*Laurus nobilis*), which are distributed on the basis of regular segments that are defined by hedges of bush (*Buxus* sp.) and laurel (*Laurus nobilis*) that spread around the bronze statue dedicated to a young woman. In the center of these segments there are spaces of alternating lawns with seasonal flowers.

To the south of the large plate, two more well-structured spaces are presented and limited by regular hedges with plants placed in a row: one intended for a playground (in the place where the original projects envisaged the realization of a swimming pool), which presents a semi-circle with a bathtub and the other once intended for a tennis court, but today it is used as an aerodrome.

Further south, the park takes on a more complete natural significance, with a wide area characterized by three small lakes surrounded by plant specimens, some of which are of special value in terms of type, size, shape, isolated or in small groups. The area intended for greenhouses and nurseries occupies a considerable part to the south of the road with Leandra (*Nerium oleander*); bounded by a regularly pruned plant hedge with a wavy appearance. The greenhouse is used for the cultivation of various types of seasonal flowers that are planted in the park.

Two other rooms complete the layout of the extensive park: the Chapel (church) space, located on top of a hill in the eastern part of the villa and decorated with regular vegetal and floral forms, an extraordinary chestnut specimen to the left of The Chapel and the circular vegetable space which is

connected to the Chapel through a double row of beech, bounded by hedges of regular shapes. It is a circular space defined by beech located in a row, characterized in the center by a monumental decorative citrus tree (*Citrus paradisi*).

Forest spaces in most of the park territory contain spontaneous vegetation of sometimes considerable size, with various flowers and ivy. However, the wooded area in the east contains some specimens of plants of interest in terms of their size and shape, in particular limon (*Citrus paradisi*) and sturgeon (*Tilia platyphyllos*), while the south-eastern area is characterized by a very beautiful oak (*Quercus petraea*).

The main architectural features and components can be summarized as follows:

The palace and the terraces in its vicinity (project of the architects Giulio Bertè, Gherardo Bosio, Ferdinando Poggi 1935-1942) which are connected to the large park with a formal system and are characterized by several rooms, often limited by regular shaped hedges, or from tall plants placed in rows.

The formal parts are surrounded by wooded areas with connecting paths. In the park, there are several specimens of plants with special values for their type, size and shape, such as: palm (*Phoenix canariensis*) to the right of the Villa, laurel (*Laurus nobilis*) on the northern terrace of the Villa, elk (*Quercus ilex*) on to the left of the villa, plane trees (*Platanus acerifolia*) and soft pine (*Pinus pinea*) near the power station, a wild chestnut (*Aesculus hypocastanum*) to the left of the Chapel connected to a birch (*Betula pendula*), a row of double with ilke (*Quercus ilex*) in the center there is a citrus (*Citrus paradisi*) which form a plant rotunda besides the Chapel. Also, near the entrance there are plane trees (*Platanus acerifolia*); between the plateau of the Boy and the plateau of the new Girl and the belvedere there are two eucalyptus trees (*Eucalyptus sp.*), a vine (*Ulmus campestris*) at the foot of the stairs leading to the current aerodrome.

Around the small lakes stand out some mimosas (*Acacia dealbata*) arranged in rows, bamboos (*Phyllostachys aurea*), groups of broussonetia (*Broussonetia papyrifera*) and groups of euca-



Fig. 5 - Image of the Park of the Royal Complex designed by G. Bosio and P. Porcinai, 1930, (Photo by Evisa Kasaj)

lyptus (*Eucalyptus sp.*), in addition to some specimens such as (*Taxodium distichum*) and willow (*Salix babylonica*). Of special interest is the area in the southeast of the park, intended for spontaneous forest. There it is a thicket with an undergrowth (blaca) mainly with ashe (*Ilex aquifolium*), with outstanding naturalistic-forestry values. The Brigade Palace Park represents one of the most important gardens - park in Albania, with a treatment of a unique quality of its kind, in all Albanian-speaking territories.

After the Second World War, in the period of the communist dictatorship, this part of the city was greatly expanded with an area almost 4 times larger. In 1955, the construction of the artificial

lake was first designed and carried out, using several streams in the area to fill it with water. The height of the dam from the crown to the lowest point of the excavation is 17 m. The length of the crown of the dam is 600m, while from the other side the lake takes the form of terrain morphology, creating an interesting atmosphere and a positive microclimate in the hot days of Tirana.

In 1957, Valentina Pistoli, the first Albanian woman architect, designed the entire park complex on the hills by the new lake, as well as some of the works of art and architecture found in it. The project was perfected and then implemented by a group of Bulgarian engineers led by architect Zheko Zhikov as well as Albanian architect Maks Velo

in 1961.

After so many years, the surface of the Great Park of Tirana appears as a large hilly massif with slopes with a small slope. In the southern part, the green park merges with the water mirror of the Artificial Lake, which, with its finger-shaped extension, creates very picturesque small bays and peninsulas.

The Great Park of Tirana is a space with several historical works, works of art, social and cultural elements, memorials, etc. There we can mention the presence of the Saint Prokop Church built in 1938, the large Amphitheater, the Memorial Pantheon of the three Frashëri Brothers Memorial and the Faik Konica Memorial, the Debatik Memorial, the Monumental Stone of the Martyrs' Cemetery, the German and British Soldiers' Cemetery, etc.

Meanwhile, the Great Park of Tirana is home to about 33,000 pieces of wood and shrub vegetation, which, according to the Parks Agency, are divided into [3]:

- 90 types of decorative wood where all together are about 31,000 pieces,
- 27 types of decorative bushes where all together are about 900 pieces,
- 2 types of fruit trees where all together are about 100 pieces.

THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CITY AND THE EXISTING SITUATION

Currently, in the urban system of metropolitan Tirana, in the compact built part, quite evident is the large green footprint of the park harmonized with the blue color of the artificial lakes. This park plays a very important role and in many disciplines in the daily life of the citizens of Tirana. The park is of great importance for the city of Tirana in 4 aspects:

- Environmental
- Recreational
- Sporty
- Aesthetic

In terms of the environment, the Great Park of Tirana contributes directly to the lives of citizens. Due to its large size and its proximity to the city center, it can be called the real lung of the city

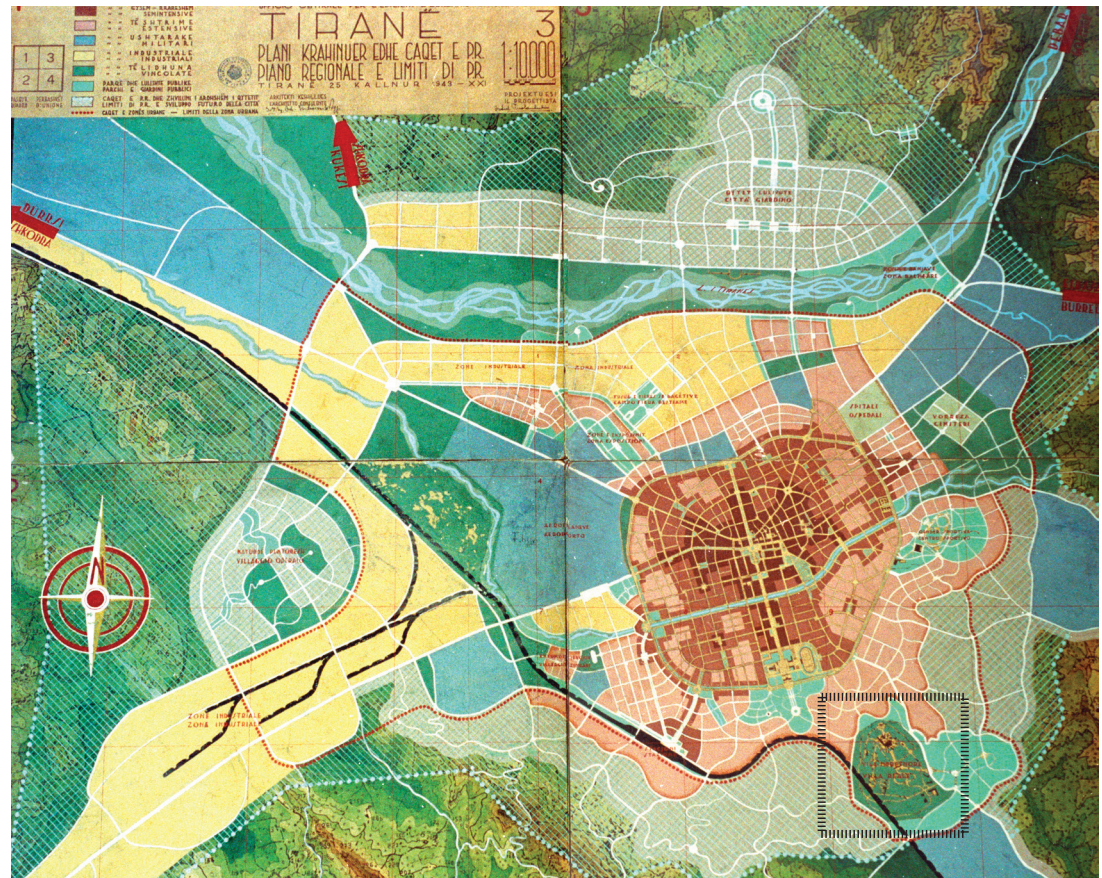


Fig. 6 - The masterplan of the Park of Tirana designed by Gherardo Bosio and Ferdinando Poggi, 1939-42, (Central Technical Archive of Construction, Tirana)

which cleans and enriches the air of the city. On the other hand, we can say that it is part of the daily rituals of many people, who find protection from the heat of the asphalt roads of the city, and the presence of the lake softens the high temperatures, creating a good microclimate.

In complete harmony and continuity is the newly restored Zoo, the city's Botanical Garden, the public swimming pools which are adjacent to the Great Park of Tirana, as well as within the park the amphitheater, sports facilities, running and

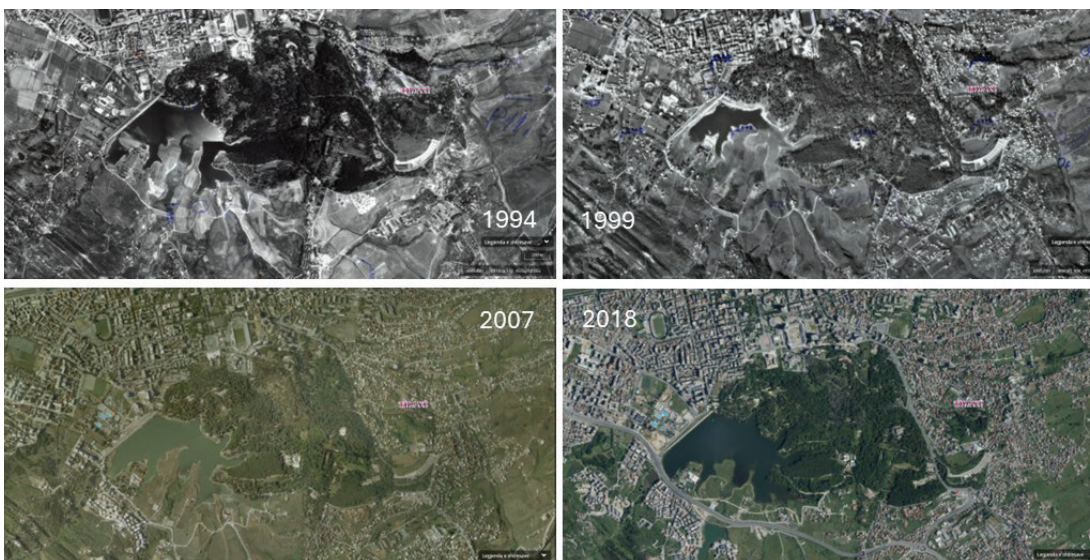
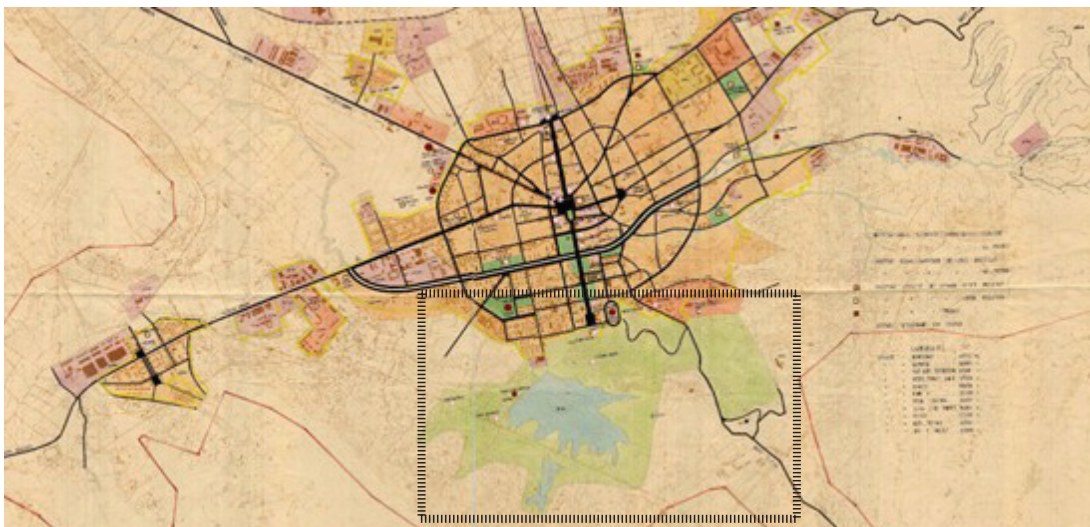


Fig. 7 - The masterplan of Tirana, 1974, (Central Technical Archive of Construction, Tirana)

Fig. 8 - Transformation of the lake park in four phases, (ASIG Tirana)

cycling tracks, as well as a number of institutions university and educational. The newly constructed amphitheater, preserving the identity of the sixties, serves as a cultural and recreational space with a lot of potential for all ages. Hidden among the trees and adapted to the slope of the terrain, the amphitheater is an organic and highly functional architecture.

The Zoo, the only public zoological park in Albania, was built in 1960-1961, according to a project drawn up by foreign specialists. It has a total area of 6.09 ha, of which 1.3 ha is occupied by water basins in the continuation of the western part of the Great Park of Tirana. About 1 ha is occupied by territories and buildings where animals are housed and treated, and then water basins were built in the Zoo (small lakes where birds such as: swans, wild ducks were exhibited and red fish and carp were cultivated). Around 1973, the Zoo was enriched with the bird pavilion, where birds such as canaries, doves, parrots, peacocks and pheasants were raised for exhibition and trade. During this period, the Zoo has about 32 species of animals and 12 species of birds, while very little has been invested in enriching it with exotic animals and birds, and above all they live in cages and not according to new contemporary concepts.

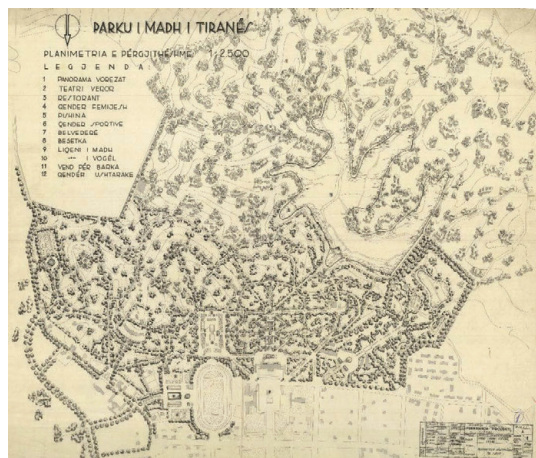
The Cemetery of Martyrs of the Nation is in the continuation of the eastern part of the Great Park of Tirana and was built in 1971 and is dedicated to honoring the fallen of the Second World War. For the monumental complex, a more prominent position was chosen to command the view of Tirana, between the hills between the Brigade Palace and the Sanatorium, separated by Elbasan street, facing the city of Tirana. In the center of the "Nation's Martyrs' Cemetery" was placed the 12-meter high "Mother Albania" monument. The statue is made of concrete and was inaugurated in the "National Martyrs' Cemetery" in 1971, placed on a three-meter-high pedestal, covered with marble slabs, where "Eternal Glory to the Martyrs of the Fatherland" is written. The authors of this monument are the sculptors Kristaq Rama, Muntaz Dhrami and Shaban Hadëri. The Martyrs' Cemetery is included in the State Protocol as a place where honors are

paid and official ceremonies are organized. Around the Great Park of Tirana, but also inside it, there are many educational and university institutions, which give life to the park at any time. Groups of young people but also of any age use the park for sports and recreational activities through the alleys and passages in the park, where people run or walk in the fresh air. Many sports facilities are located in the park, which are of different sizes. Around is the block of city swimming pools, the large stadium with 24,000 seats, tennis and football courts, etc. In the park, the construction of recreational spaces and sports grounds encourages active living not only in parks and gardens, but also in residential areas where citizens live.

PERSPECTIVE OF FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS AND DIFFERENT APPROACHES

The perspective of future developments The Great Park of Tirana must go through various challenges:

- 1) That of access to what happens from outside the perimeter around the Great Park of Tirana
- 2) And what happens inside the perimeter of the Great Park of Tirana



Regarding the first point, the presence of the Great Park and the Artificial Lake has already balanced the urban development of the city, as the demand to be near the park is extremely high, after all these positive elements that we cited above. After the nineties, informal constructions around the park and sometimes inside it was abused a lot, which remained and were consolidated until today in the form of restaurants or other services.

Meanwhile, thanks to the continuous great demand to live near the Great Park and the Artificial Lake, the urban plans of the city have been constantly modified, constantly achieving two strong conditions:

- increasing the intensity and high density of construction around this park,
- reducing the empty spaces around it and increasing the number of residential and service buildings to compare with the rest of the city of Tirana.

This flood of surrounding construction has turned into a continuous concrete wall in relation to the city. It has endangered a man-made ecosystem for nearly a century, as well as all other values associated with it. The current situation mixed with informal constructions in the eastern and southern parts, as well as the poor condition of the decorative vegetation (old, dried, fallen due to natural causes), decorative elements, streets and squares, amortized public facilities, required intervention total reconstruction and radical rehabilitation of the park.

Despite the interventions, it is estimated that the park still lacks standard service facilities. Moreover, the park is often threatened by vandalism and damage by the daily residents of the surrounding area who use it as a recreational park.

Looking at it on a large scale, the Great Park and the Artificial Lake and all other cultural and historical recreational areas which are in harmony with the park are an important part of the Orbital Forest proposed in the General Local Plan of the city of Tirana designed by the group led by architect Stefano Boeri. This project is one of the big projects undertaken by the Municipality of Tirana for the greening of the peripheral part of the city

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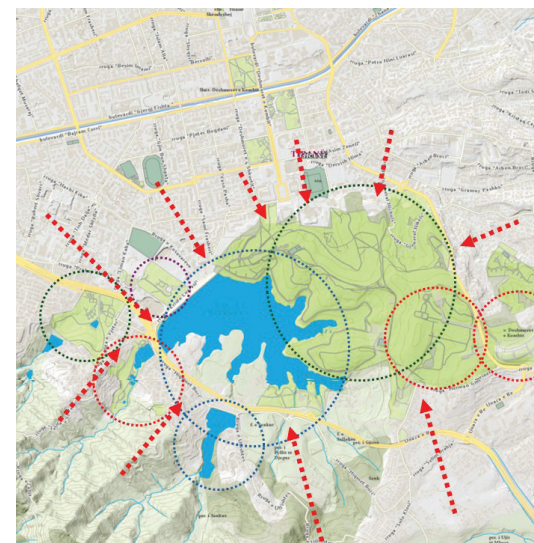


Fig. 9 - The masterplan of the Park of Tirana designed by Valentina Pistoli, 1953, (Central Technical Archive of Construction, Tirana)

Fig.10-The composition of the large park system with different functions and the buildings surrounding the park, (A.Vokshi)

Fig.11 - Scheme of the General Local Plan of Tirana 2030, (City Hall, Tirana)

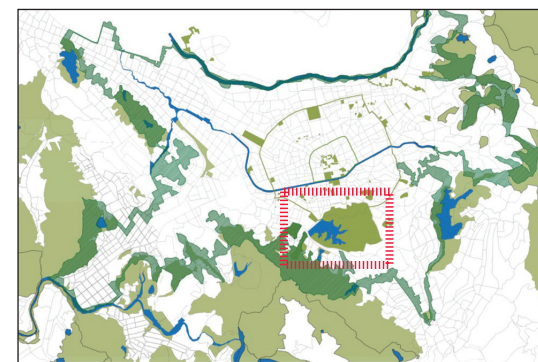




Fig. 12 - The Great Park of Tirana, 2024, (Google Earth)

that foresees planting with vegetation, which will be part of the Green Crown of Tirana, otherwise known as the Orbital Forest.

Despite the interventions, it is estimated that the park still lacks standard service facilities.

Regarding the second point laid out above, what happens within the perimeter of the Great Park of Tirana, the immediate improvement of the condition of the park should start with a new concept of a Master Plan on the Landscape of the Great Park and the Artificial Lake, which, after analyzing the positive elements and potentials it has, also offers these innovations:

- A contemporary and thematic park with different elements spread over the entire surface

- interventions with reconstruction of streets, squares, decorative elements, etc.

- the design of suitable entrances to the park from all sides and the construction of new Info-Points

- the arrangement of piers for vessels and other functions related to water.

- development of thematic areas

- rehabilitation of greenery.

- aesthetic regeneration of the Dam.

- Despite the interventions, it is estimated that the park still lacks standard service facilities that should be provided without losing the identity elements.

CONCLUSIONS

From what has been said so far about the Great Park of Tirana and the Artificial Lake, along with all the different systems located nearby, we can safely conclude how important are the evaluations that first divide what happens inside the park and secondly with what happens outside its perimeter.

Also, a study based on the comparison between situations referring to different periods allows us to highlight all the changes that have occurred during a certain period. It would be convenient to be able to extend these analyses to the entire park area, then repeating them remotely at regular intervals. We would have an always up-to-date, accurate, comprehensive and detailed view of the problems but also of the positive aspects, so that we can carefully intervene where necessary. Whatever intervention is deemed necessary, it must first clarify what aspects and what use the greenery of the park should have. What happens inside the park is closely related to the health conditions and sustainability of the park and plants, as well as all the thematic functions mentioned above.

On the other hand, the debate should focus on the consolidation or not of the part around the park with high-rise residential buildings, with construction intensity, since the choice can be difficult between:

- Fluid transition from the park part to the residential areas with empty spaces to avoid a strong separation between the two systems

- Or a strong separation between the two systems to guarantee a greater presence of residents around these high-quality public goods.

This contribution attempts to assess the evolution, as well as the historical values of the park, intertwined with its functional and environmental ones on the one hand, and analyzes a current urban development trend, without clear objectives of urban interventions in the area, on the other.

NOTE

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