International Journal of Current Science Research and Review
ISSN: 2581-8341
Volume 06 Issue 08 August 2023
DOI: 10.47191/ijcsrr/V6-i8-62, Impact Factor: 6.789
IJCSRR @ 2023

The Post-Socialist Socio-Spatial Transformation in Tirana, Albania

Klodjan Xhexhi
Applied Research Department, Polis University, Rruga Bylis 12, Tirana, Albania

ABSTRACT: The overwhelming majority of Albania's urban population is located in Tirana, a city with a very dynamic socio-spatial reality, resulting as an entry point for people from various origins, including multicultural rural societies, and has significant concentrations of finance and other economic activities. Urban areas demonstrate the dynamics that impact society from many angles, including those related to technology, economics, demographics, and culture, via a diverse and changed perspective. Since 1991, there has been a growing separation between classes, genders, and regions, as well as between individuals and vulnerable groups, due to a lack of social protection and governmental measures for these groups and individuals, and the unrestricted power of the free market. Today, there is a noticeable improvement in the real pattern of social group concentration. This paper focuses on various divisions of social groupings in Tirana, how they are reflected in the city's everyday life, and how they trend to the fragmentation of contemporary urban regions. In order to comprehend the change over time and transition patterns of Tirana from sites of production to places of consumption, the process method is modified by concentrating on the main stakeholders. The background of enhancing cities' mobility and competitiveness demonstrates the interaction between different social groups and different living patterns in Tirana. The study also shows the socio-spatial pattern of the new city. The significant level of social fragmentation in Tirana is evident from analysis that only investigated a certain percentage of the city's social groupings. The new master plans predicted in the city will help to overcome the issue.

KEYWORDS: Fragmentation, Social Groups, Socio-Spatial Pattern, Transformation, Urban Territory.

INTRODUCTION

Urban regions have a lot of complexity and dynamism. The three primary aspects of diversity are social, functional, and morphological. Since they are made up of concentrations of individuals with diverse racial and cultural backgrounds, cities have very diverse social structures. Density amplifies the influence of numbers in diversifying individuals and their activities and raising the complexity of the social order.

Urban environments are places of variety and interaction where individuals have varied specialties. But they are also centers of creativity and knowledge. Through interactions with outsiders, new values and lifestyles frequently develop. The notion that cities are the jurisdiction of freedom is a traditional one, and it is supported by the anonymity connected to urban life, which is partly a result of the large population concentration, tolerance, and sense of independence that people experience there, as well as the emergence of new values and lifestyles. They also serve as the foundation for the emerging notion of creative cities, which emphasizes the capacity for the invention of urban residents as well as the value of artistic and cultural activities to the urban economic system.

Functionally speaking, the availability of a broad variety of services, occupations, and activities that make cities' locations full of opportunities may be utilized to evaluate a city's diversity. East bloc nations, particularly Albania (Tirana), have gathered a growing amount of employment during the socialist era, and this acts as an attraction to drag people into it. The creative generation still prefers to live in urban areas considering that the inhabitants don't look for a job but for a place that offers lots of jobs. Due to the variety of their offerings, they have also evolved to be preferred locations for purchasing products, cultural events, and excitement. The physical component, particularly very visibly depicting the metropolitan setting, is the final degree of complexity. Cities provide a huge range of designs, sizes, construction materials, functionality, and other characteristics, in contrast to villages where most, at least all, buildings have a uniform appearance. The variety of the constructions contributes to the cityscape's prosperity and personality, and they create various experiences that take visitors back in time or into the future. To compete with the interest of visitors, residents, or businesses today, cities must also have a strong historical presence in their urban environments. However, it is additionally dependent on historical inheritance because, as part of their advertising strategies, many cities invest in brand-new iconic structures created by real-life modern monuments.

International Journal of Current Science Research and Review
ISSN: 2581-8341
Volume 06 Issue 08 August 2023
DOI: 10.47191/ijcsrr/V6-i8-62, Impact Factor: 6.789
IJCSRR @ 2023

Due to the significant population density in cities and investments made in areas where innovation flourishes as a result of this concentration, change is also particularly prevalent in urban areas. Cities are simultaneously susceptible to external impacts brought about by a number of networks (transport, information, manufacturing, and services), serving as their primary nodes.

CATEGORIZING SOCIAL GROUPS IN TIRANA (1991-2023)

In the city of Tirana can be distinguished several different categories of social groups.

1. Social groupings, based on ethnic social organizations
2. Social groupings based on religion
3. Social groupings with a political focus
4. Social groupings based on culture and education
5. Social groupings based on economy

A. Ethnic-based social groups

Communist ideology, which prioritized social identification above primal identities, reduced the influence of religious and ethnic forces during the Communist era [1].

Ethnic minorities and majorities coexisted in a state of largely peaceful coexistence. Religious and ethnic groups grabbed control of Albania's political realm in 1990, following the fall of the Communist state and under severe economic hardships [2]. These factors benefited from a poor country's redefinition of itself in the global system. The Albanian people were ignorant of ethnic and religious conceptions for a long time, but these identities have just been vigorously reawakened. These identities, however largely constructed artificially, are now a powerful political force. Additionally, ethnic populations speak a variety of languages.

Figure 1. Ethnic map Balkan 2010 [3].

In Albania and in Tirana can be distinguished different ethnic-based social groupings such as the Greek community, Rome community, Romanian community, and other small, insignificant groups.

B. Religious-based social groups

The Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, and this basic right is generally upheld by the government in day-to-day operations. There is no official religion and all religions are recognized as equally valid, according to the 1998 Constitution.; however, due to their historical dominance in the nation, the major religious communities such as Sunni Muslim, Bektashi, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic, benefit from greater levels of official recognition (including national holidays) and higher social standing. All legally recognized religious organizations are entitled to acquire land, structures, and bank accounts. Religious holidays from all four major organizations are recognized as official holidays [4].

International Journal of Current Science Research and Review
ISSN: 2581-8341
Volume 06 Issue 08 August 2023
DOI: 10.47191/ijcsrr/V6-i8-62, Impact Factor: 6.789
IJCSRR @ 2023

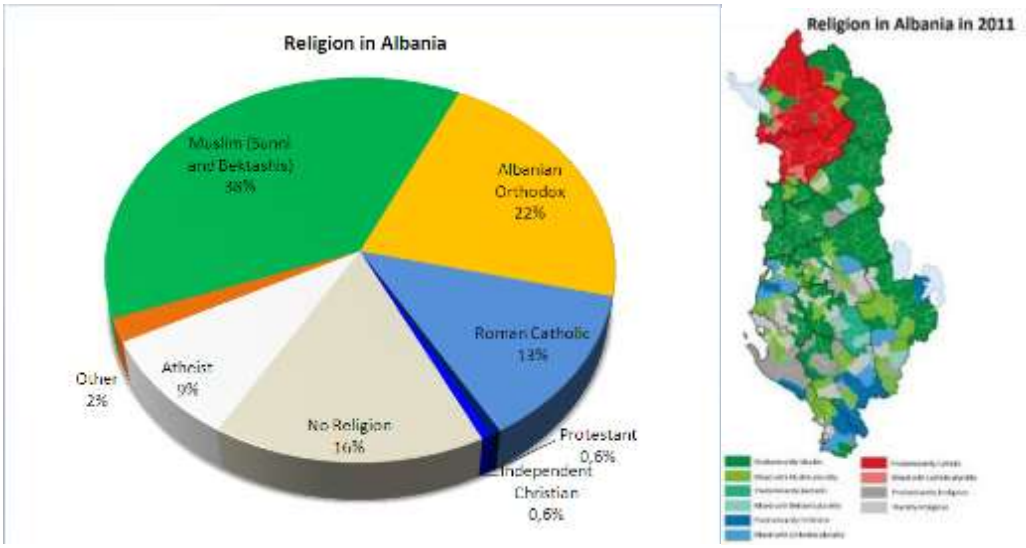

Figure 2. A. Religion in Albania in percentage [5] B. Religion map in Albania (2021) [6]

In 1938, the population census was conducted in Albania, where, among other things, everyone was asked about their religious affiliation. The result was 70% Muslims - Sunnis and Bektashis - 20% Orthodox and 10% Catholics. This served as a base for other surveys [7].

According to the Figure 2. A majority of the Albanians are Muslim and Bektashis 38%, the Orthodox community 22% and Roman Catholics 13%. The rest are Atheists or they do not want to declare their religion.

But, according to a closer survey, conducted in 2011, the resident population of Albania, 56.7% declared themselves Muslim, 10.03% declared Catholic, 6.75% Orthodox, and 2.09% Bektashis. But this was a census disputed by almost all religious communities, as well as by the academic environment, for the lack of seriousness and scientific parameters. According to this census, a large percentage of the population preferred not to answer regarding religious affiliation (13.79%), while 5.49% consider themselves religious, but did not want to identify their religious affiliation [7].

The Muslims are mostly concentrated in the center, northern and southwestern parts of Albania, the Orthodox in the southern, southwestern, and central parts of Albania, the catholic in the northern part, and the Bektashis in the southern and central part of Albania as seen in Figure 2. B.

C. Political-based social groups

The Communist Party, established in 1941 and formally named the Workers Party in 1948, was the only political party in existence before the 1990s. It had around 147,000 members in November 1986 as opposed to 45,382 in 1948. The main supplementary group of the party was the Albanian Democratic Front; other auxiliary organizations were the Women's Union of Albania and the Union of Albanian Working Youth. According to the 1976 Constitution, the Workers Party's first secretary served as the military's supreme commander.

Considering the Constitution, the Worker's Party is the only political force that directs politics in the state and society. The Democratic Party is one of the major political parties (led initially by Sali Berisha after then by its successor Lulezim Basha and recently by Enkelejd Alibeja), a conservative party with Western influences; the Socialists (led initially by Fatos Nano and then by Edi Rama), founded primarily of former members of the Communist Party in cooperation with the Social Democrats, a left-wing Western-style progressive party with strong ties with socialists (the Socialist Party is currently governing the country); and LSI (Socialist Movement for Integration led initially by Ilir Meta and then by Monika Kryemadhi) which was the third political force in the country. Recently this party has changed its name to Freedom Party led by Ilir Meta. Although there were real ideological divisions between the parties in Albania's early post-Communist years, those lines have subsequently eroded [8].

International Journal of Current Science Research and Review
ISSN: 2581-8341
Volume 06 Issue 08 August 2023
DOI: 10.47191/ijcsrr/V6-i8-62, Impact Factor: 6.789
IJCSRR @ 2023

D. Cultural and education-based social groups

Tirana is represented by various cultural groups on the basis of which different social groups are formed. People's preferences change over time and also their cultural preferences but there are always fanatics to their tastes.

In Tirana, there are groups with different cultural characteristics. There is a group of people that prefer theater in the city of Tirana, a category of people who prefer cinema, a category of persons who prefer nightlife (mostly in the center of Tirana "Bllok Area" and a category of persons who prefer or are fond of sports. Some of the main focal points for those interested in sports in Tirana are Air Albania National Stadium, "Stermas Stermasi" Stadium, the Sport Palace "Asllan Rusi" and many more. There is another category (social group) of people who prefer the National Theatre of Opera and Ballet of Albania, and the National Theater (recently demolished in 2020), a category of people who prefer Museums or structures with artistic content such as National Gallery of Figurative Arts of Albania or National Historic Museum of Albania, National Albanian Library, etc., a category of people who prefers to spend their free time in malls and shopping center such as QTU, TEG, City Park, Toptani center, Ring center, etc., a category of people who prefers to spend their free time in parks such as Artificial Lake Tirana's park, Dajti's National Park, the prolongation of the boulevard "Zogu i Pare", etc.

Within this grouping, there is also another category that realizes a division of social groups taking into account education, as well as position in society. Different social groups can be created in society based on this fact. In general, people prefer dating based on their educational level, as well as their position in society.

E. Economic-based social groups

Tirana is a city of contradictions. On the one hand, one can distinguish the excessive luxury of some categories of people and on the other hand the sad way of living in very poor areas of Tirana, mostly in the outskirts of the city. Typically, these classifications create social groupings. Such social groupings are based on a very important factor which is the "economic situation". During 1990-2010, over 90% of all buildings in the Municipality of Kamza, one of Tirana's informal housing communities were built illegally. The process of legalization started a long time ago and is continuing. Early in the 1990s, much of the settlement's land was used for farming, but nowadays the settlements expanded significantly, housing over 105 000 residents. In search of a better life, people from Albania's northeastern areas have been relocated. The unemployment rate was at 50%, and 50% of all households were below the poverty level, up to the year 2010. The typical dwelling is twice as large as those in Tirana's inner city, approximately 119 square meters. Shack-style housing is originally constructed, then when resources were found and remittances were received, it was renovated. There was no space for social infrastructure, despite the fact that planning initiatives and the activities of NGOs like Co-PLAN have increased resident trust and generated investments totaling US$110 million [9]. Nowadays, this area has benefited from investments in infrastructure, services, and transport, making it an integral part of the city.

Figure 3. Kamza region (**Source:** Xhexhi, K, 2013)

F. Street children's social group (included in the economic-based social groups)

According to a questionnaire, 94% of the young people interviewed were males between the ages of 10 and 14, and up to half of them began working before turning 10. Children of many ethnic minorities, including the Roma and Egyptians, as well as Albanians, were included in the survey. Despite they belonged to a minority group, the children's motives for remaining in the street were frequently the same. One of the primary causes of youngsters begging or laboring on the streets is family poverty. Many of them work seven to eight hours a day on average, and others work up to 18 hours a day. Their families receive the majority of their job

International Journal of Current Science Research and Review
ISSN: 2581-8341
Volume 06 Issue 08 August 2023
DOI: 10.47191/ijcsrr/V6-i8-62, Impact Factor: 6.789
IJCSRR @ 2023

earnings. Over 80% of street children work mainly during the day, therefore their rate of school absence is relatively high. However, according to the survey the majority of children said that they would be happy to go to school if they could [10].

According to another study conducted in Bangladesh about 87.2% of children living on the streets have been diagnosed with various illnesses, including skin infections, hepatitis, injuries, and STDs. Meanwhile, 80.8% are frequently sexually or physically abused. Poverty is the main reason that obliged them to stay and work in the streets [11].

According to Michael (2002), in the interconnected domains of human development and human rights, NGOs are one of the most obvious groups of stakeholders, and they may play a significant role in achieving security for mankind [12].

Le Roux (1993), Keen (1990), and Oloko (1999) state that the reasons why the majority of children abandon their families, range from physical abuse and emotional issues to being expelled from the house due to offenses or family separation and financial difficulties [13, 14, 15].

Poverty and welfare constitute two important social groupings in the community. Difficulties and obstacles usually unite people by characterizing them in a certain social group.

Figure 4. The two different realities of Tirana, poverty versus welfare A. Tirana city center, (**Source:** Xhexhi, K, 2021) B. Tirana informal settlement; (**Source:** Aldoni, D, 2013)

SOCIAL MAPPING OF THE CITY OF TIRANA

A visual way of displaying the distribution of different individuals (such as male, female, adult, children, landed, landless, literate, and illiterate) as well as the social structure, groups, and organizations of a region is called social mapping. The distribution of such categories in the city of Tirana depend in the strategy of the city expansion and the demand of the market for new constructions. Urban growth nowadays is more powerful within the Historical Ring of Tirana. However, there is e tendency to develop also the suburban areas of the city, considering the politics of the Municipality of Tirana.

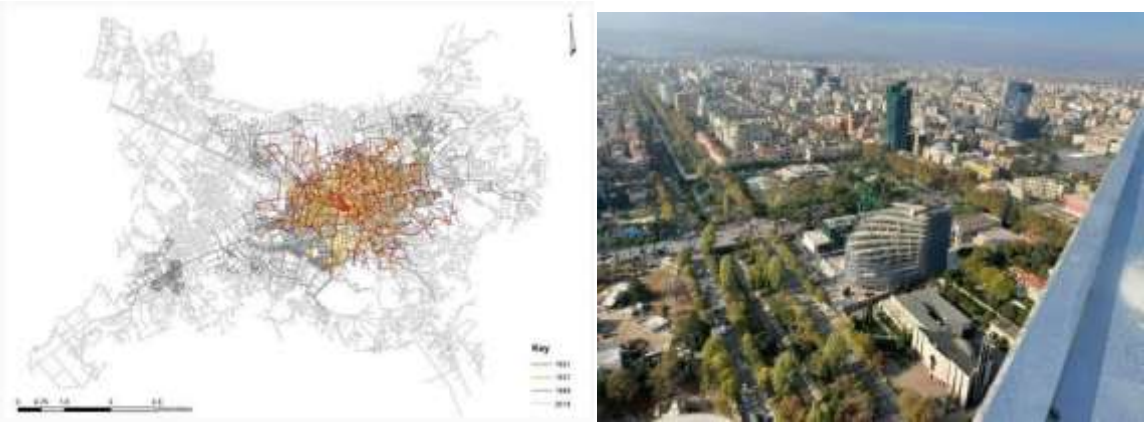

Figure 5. A. Urban growth map of Tirana [16]; B. Aerial view of Tirana; (**Source:** Xhexhi, K)

International Journal of Current Science Research and Review
ISSN: 2581-8341
Volume 06 Issue 08 August 2023
DOI: 10.47191/ijcsrr/V6-i8-62, Impact Factor: 6.789
IJCSRR @ 2023

It is observed that urban growth in the city of Tirana is continuously changing. Due to GLP (General Local Plan) and DLP (Detailed Local Plan) in the inner city the density is predicted to be higher than in the outskirts of the city.

The new master predicted in the city of Tirana (Grimshaw, 2015) will develop the city mostly in the south-north axis up to Paskuqan. New social gathering points will be born in order to develop multipolar small centres within the city of Tirana. The aim is to distribute the focal of interest of the inhabitancy not just in the centre of Tirana.

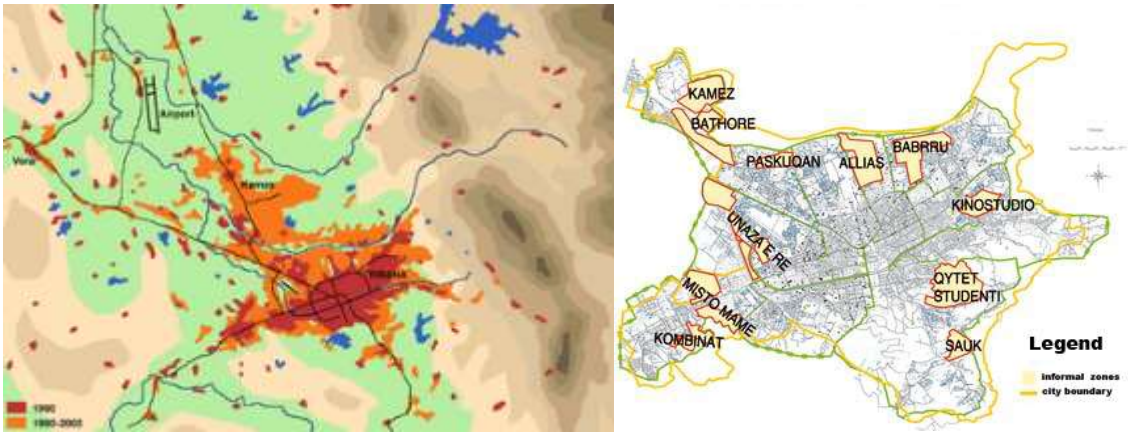

Figure 6. A. Tirana extension 1990-2005 [17] B. Tirana's major area of informal settlements inside the inner city (2013) [18]

According to a survey conducted by Xhexhi, K (2023) in a specific neighborhood of Tirana, it was observed that inhabitance prefer mostly to live near the center of the city, despite the fact that their apartments were not in very good physical condition [19, 20]. Due to that fact and the increased demand of the inhabitants for housing purposes near the city center, the density of new construction is higher near the center of the city, and generally, new constructions are being developed not far away from it as seen in Figure 6. A. Meanwhile, informal settlements were established mostly on the outskirts of the city, because of more available free land, due to the lack of certain specific regulations and poor governance of that time as seen in Figure 6. B.

According to another study conducted by Xhexhi, K (2019) conducted in the city of Kruja, Albania, inhabitancy of the historical buildings has a high level of place attachment to the building they are living in, regardless the fact that the physical conditions of their dwellings is very poor. Meanwhile, it was revealed that the most unfriendly category is the inhabitancy of the building constructed during the period of socialism [21].

DISCUSSIONS

The city perceived significant changes as a result of government reform that started in 1991 and 1992. When people gained the freedom of moving everywhere and the ability to run their own enterprises, activities in the informal market rapidly surpassed those in the public sector. Streets in the city center, the urban periphery, and lots contained stores and squatter homes. In formerly agricultural areas and open spaces, rural migrants and economically disadvantaged worker families started to build. The local government was totally unprepared to deal with the flood of immigrants or to benefit from an economy based mostly on imports, rising land values, and building trades. Tragic confusion in terms of maintaining infrastructure, distributing urban space, and the quality of the environment was and continues to be the consequence. The population in Tirana is distributed from the center to the periphery. In the center of the city mainly live rich people and in the suburban area mainly live poor people. This is an important issue for the percentage of social poverty and welfare distribution in the city [22].

The development of informal settlements in Tirana is linked to the wave of urbanization in the 1960s and 1970s. Others link the episode to the 1990s wave of immigration and refugee arrivals. Some of the reasons why informal settlement areas exist include poor spatial planning, outdated and confusing legislation, unsustainable housing policies, and outdated public administration systems. Tirana has faced several difficulties as a result of illegal construction activities in urban areas, which are frequently brought on by a complex system of property rights and urban poverty. Concentrations of many informal settlements are located on the outskirts of Tirana city or outside the official border city core [23]. Objects of particular significance of culture are mainly

concentrated in the center of Tirana. This indicates that the formations of different social groups who prefer these categories focus mainly on the downtown and are mainly residents who live within the historic ring of Tirana. From the religious point of view, it has been observed a greater expansion of the range of influence not only downtown but also on the outskirts of town. Cult facilities are mainly concentrated in the concentrations of the most important centers of residence which surround the city center. The most important ones are concentrated in the center of town. Can be mentioned the" Ethem Bey" Mosque that is part of the urban situation in "Scanderbeg "Square [24]. Politically, it is important to mention a split and a random distribution of the population. The population mainly with a view to the right consists of immigrants from Northern Albania, and with a view to the left from the south. But, the political mixture of the population does not prevail over this.

CONCLUSIONS

The study explores the interconnected economic, social, and environmental issues involved with these phenomena as well as a typology of new social groupings that have emerged in post-socialist cities. The focus is on Tirana, where various forms of informality, the growth of informal settlement types, various types of religions, various types of minorities, etc., show the complexity of the issue and the requirement for developing diverse and contextually sensitive solutions. Analysis done by examining only some of the social groups in Tirana clearly reveals the socially high rate of fragmentation of this city. The new master plan predicted will help to balance the situation.

REFERENCES

1. Martin, L.G. & Keridis, D. 2004 Introduction in the future of Turkish Foreign Policy, London: The MIT Press.
2. Suhrke E. Suhrke, 1994 Towards a Comprehensive Refugee Policy: Conflicts and Refugees in the Post- Cold War World," in Aid in Place of Migration, International Labour Office,eds. W.R. Böhning & M.L. Schloeter-Paretes, Geneva.
3. https://www.quora.com/What-trivia-and-or-little-known-facts-do-you-find-interesting-about-Albania
4. International Religious Freedom Report, 2004 Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.
5. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Religione_in_Albania.png
6. https://twitter.com/albanianstats/status/1398689593675993094
7. Zaloshja, E. 2021 Tema newpaper, Tirana, Albania. 19.03.202. 13:33, Blog\ https://www.gazetatema.net/2021/03/19/matja-me-e-sakte-e-perqindjeve-te-perkatesise-fetare-qysh-nga-1938-ta
8. Xhaferaj, A. 2022 Measuring intra party-democracy in political parties in Albania. Institute for Democracy and Mediation.
9. Bloch, Peter C. 1998 Picking Up the Pieces: Consolidation of Albania's Radical Land Reform. In Land Reform in the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, edited by Stephen K. Wegren. London/New York: Routledge Press.
10. Prevalence, Abuse & Exploitation of Street Children. http://gvnet.com/streetchildren/00-StreetChildren.htm
11. Chowdhury, S., Chowdhury, A., Huq, K., Jahan, Y., Chowdhury, R., Ahmed, T. and Rahman, M. 2017 Life Style and Risk Behavior of Street Children in Bangladesh: A Health Perspective. Health, 9, 577-591. doi: 10.4236/health.2017.94041.
12. Micheal, S. 2002. The role of NGOs in human security. SSRN Electronic Journal DOI: 10.2139/ssrn.351240
13. Oloko, S. B. A. 1999. Child labour: The hidden workforce—Children domestic labour. The Progress of Nigerian Children, 48-51
14. Le Roux, J. 1993. Street children: A "man-made" phenomenon. Journal of Pedagogics, 16, 31-39.
15. Keen, J. 1990. Dealing with street children. The Child Care Worker, 8, 8-9.
16. Dino, B., Griffiths, S., & Karimi, K. 2017 The post-socialist urban transformation of Tirana in historical perspective: 348 Mapping the ideological dimension of urban growth. Proceedings of the 11th Space Syntax Symposium
17. www.tamilmovies.net/wiki-Tirana
18. www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=32551
19. Xhexhi, K. 2023. Social Impact in a Specific Neighborhood in Tirana, Albania. In: Ecovillages and Ecocities. The Urban Book Series. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-20959-8_4
20. Xhexhi, K. 2023 Ecovillages and Ecocities. Bioclimatic Applications From Tirana, Albania; Springer Cham; ISBN: 978-3-031-20959-8; DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-20959-8 (2023)

International Journal of Current Science Research and Review
ISSN: 2581-8341
Volume 06 Issue 08 August 2023
DOI: 10.47191/ijcsrr/V6-i8-62, Impact Factor: 6.789
IJCSRR @ 2023

21. Xhexhi, K., Meunier, P.L. (2019). The Influence of Different Age Buildings in People Lifestyle - Case of Kruja, Albania. Sociology and Anthropology, 7(6), 227 - 245. DOI: 10.13189/sa.2019.070602.
22. Besnik A, Lulo K, Myftiu G. 2003 Tirana: The Challenge of Urban Development. CETIS, Tirana
23. Aldoni, D. 2007 Legalization of informal settlements in Albania. Paper presented at the 5th Regional Vienna Declaration Review Meeting, Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, 22–23 October, Vienna, Austria. Typescript.
24. Stefano, B., at al. 2010 World and Its Peoples. Western Balkans. Marshall Canvendish. ISBN 978-0-7614-7883-6.

Cite this Article: Klodjan Xhexhi (2023). The Post-Socialist Socio-Spatial Transformation in Tirana, Albania. International Journal of Current Science Research and Review, 6(8), 5956-5963