

# Tirana\_ Plan Build Live

## Everyday Life in Albania's Capital City

13th July 2010 to 17th September 2010

**Curators:** Adolph Stiller, Katia Accossato

**Exhibition location:** Exhibition Centre in the Ring Tower  
VIENNA INSURANCE GROUP  
A-1010 Vienna, Schottenring 30

**Opening times:** Monday to Friday: 9:00 to 18:00, free entry  
(closed on public holidays)

**Press entry:** Monday, July 12, 2010, 10.30 am

**Speakers:** Adolph Stiller, Katia Accossato, Artan Lame, Artan Shkreli, Maks Velo

**Opening:** Monday, July 12, 2010, 6.30 pm (admission only with invitation!)

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*The “Architektur im Ringturm” series of exhibitions hosted by the Vienna Insurance Group continues its architectural journey of exploration through Central and Southern Europe by focussing on another southerly area of “terra incognita” in Europe that lies where the Adriatic meets the Mediterranean. Planning, building and living in Tirana – the capital of the little-known country of Albania – is the topic of this exhibition and publication.*

### **Tirana, a planning laboratory**

Until the late 1980s, 35 percent of Albania’s population were farmers and the country had a strict anti-urbanisation policy. In less than two decades, Albania’s society changed dramatically and 60 percent of the population now lives in cities. On the basis of figures provided by the National Statistical Office, migration into the capital city of Tirana has increased by 7 to 9 percent each year since the early 1990s. The poorly equipped city administrators were taken completely unawares by this huge pressure, which was the result of private initiative.

Nowadays, Tirana has expanded to at least twice its former size and the population has more than tripled. Furthermore, the capital has combined with the new peripheries and the main port of the county, Durres, to form a metropolitan agglomeration. Suddenly a society that one imagines to be a strictly planned one has transformed into one in which there is no longer any room for planning. Over 500,000 illegal homes and businesses were rapidly constructed – alongside the boom in legal investments – all over the country, but mainly in the capital. In fact, a third of the entire population of Albania is concentrated in the metropolitan region of Albania.

Co-PLAN, a non-governmental organisation founded in the 1990s, which manages the structuring of informal habitat development, is concerned that three quarters of the population will be living here in the next 15 to 20 years – a heavy burden for society and the environment, if nothing else. As a result, Tirana may well be the most interesting “planning laboratory” in Europe.

There is currently no clear picture of Tirana in Central Europe. The dramatic explosion of the population, the fast pace of construction and the huge increase in traffic has barely been noticed, even though it is only 90 minutes from Vienna by plane.

### **PLAN**

Looking at the interesting aspects of Tirana’s structural development, such as its incredible dynamism, its current urban planning and its large number of “informal” constructions, use is now being made of historical urbanisation concepts to throw light on the reasons it has developed in the way it has. For instance, historical relationships between Austria and Albania are notable. Austrian actions taken at the beginning of the 20th century, in particular, are still considered to be the first urban construction measures. At the end of the Balkan War, the Habsburg monarchy developed an increased military and diplomatic presence in Albania. Starting in the Northern Albanian city of Skhodka, where the military base was established, they became active across the entire country. The country was measured by the Military Geographic Institute, city plans were drawn up, administrative division was implemented on the basis of Austria’s own internal model and all localities were recorded in indexes which are still valid today. In Tirana, which was selected as the capital, a series of preliminary urban planning studies were carried out, which Austrian architects were involved in until the 1930s. For example, the Officers’ Casino, constructed in 1913 in the centre of the city (now a theatre) and the so-called American School were designed by Austrian architect Hans Köhler. Even today, people like to remark in fun that the Austrians were responsible for constructing over 900 kilometres of streets in only four years, while the legacy of the 600-year Ottoman reign amounted to just four kilometres.

## **BUILD**

During the communist dictatorship, there was no freedom of travel or settlement in the country, no private cars and only a low level of construction activity, which was almost completely collective. After the collapse of communism, hundreds of thousands of people moved to the city from the agricultural regions of Albania in the hope of finding education and employment. They moved to the outskirts of the cities, built their own houses on property with unclear ownership rules, no water, waste and electricity supply, no construction approval and without the legal security of citizenship. The number of inhabitants in Tirana almost tripled in 10 years, the informal settlements grew beyond the city border, where they now intermingle with the residential construction projects of developers. The free market initially took over the green areas, pavements and promenades in the city centre: in the parks, on the riverbank and along the avenues, kiosks, cafés, pub gardens and makeshift shops sprung up almost overnight. Due to the cost of building shops and restaurants at ground floor level, kiosks and market stalls were simply set up in the street.

## **LIVE**

At the same time, the sudden increase in motorisation resulted in a complete change in public life on the streets and in the town squares. Before everything changed, pedestrians, cyclists, horses and carts and the odd service and freight vehicle painted a very leisurely picture of street life. After the political upheaval, however, anyone who could afford it bought a car. Soon informal warehouses for spare parts, car washes and the first garages appeared in the side roads of Albania's towns. The empty spaces in the wide streets and squares, which had been built during the Italian-influenced city development of the 1930s and 1940s, were quickly filled with chaotic traffic. However, the estates of apartment buildings from the planned economy era did not have enough streets and parking spaces. The situation in the informal settlements which had begun to develop at the borders of the city was also precarious. The houses were built ever more closely together and public space was reduced to any areas that were left. Small barely accessible roads leading to construction sites, secondary buildings and garages were squeezed into the "public" space and restricted these even further.

## **Exhibition**

The exhibition aims to make the reality of Tirana, which is quite difficult to understand, more tangible by providing a visual dialogue in the form of large-format images. Old images from the largest historical collection in the country (Artan Lame) are linked to specially produced contemporary images. A special visualisation bar conveys the city's diverse and colourful Mediterranean life in the form of a contemporary travelogue.

## **Catalogue**

Architektur im Ringturm XXII. Editor Adolph Stiller.

Contributions and previously unpublished images by Katia Accossato, Besnik Aliaj & Sotir Dharmo, Andreas und Hannelore Haller, Moriz Haller, Artan Lame, Rainer Mayerhofer, Artan Skhrelly, Adolph Stiller and Sybilla Zech in addition to a joint seminar study by TU Wien / Polis-University Tirana.

144 pages, numerous unpublished images and plans

**Price:** 25 euros; students, school pupils, civil servants, pensioners (with valid ID): 15 euros