

Bazaars between documentation and conservation. Case studies in Albania and Macedonia.

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Topic: T4.1 Conservation and restoration projects of vernacular architecture

Abstract

The subject of vernacular architecture, as is well known, is a vast concept embracing different fields of investigation. It is a type of art created to suit specific lifestyles of single communities, such as the Islamic community. Bazaars, characteristic markets in Eastern countries, are a significant example in this context. The proposed contribution intends to analyse these architectural and urban environments in Albania and Macedonia, through the discipline of restoration aimed at knowledge, documentation and conservation. The proposed case studies represent a significant example of how the restoration of these areas is of fundamental importance for the urban regeneration of historic cities. The Bazaar in Skopje has always been regarded as the cultural, spiritual, economic and historical centre of the capital. This site, from an architectural point of view, has managed to create an image of the old city in the new city, preserving its original identity features over the centuries. In Tirana, on the other hand, the new Bazaar is a genuine urban regeneration project that aims to preserve the Albanian cultural tradition. If the Bazaar in Skopje is in a precarious state of conservation, while maintaining its original character, the recently rebuilt Albanian market is an important example of not only architectural but also urban regeneration. The proposed research has foreseen different operational phases: an initial analysis of the historical transformations of the areas under investigation; an identification on a territorial scale and a subsequent analysis on an architectural scale using the restoration discipline. The aim of the investigation is to identify the level of use and conservation of both Bazaars, in order to elaborate digital documents on a cognitive basis for the identification of guidelines for the conservation and enhancement project of the case studies taken as a model for the proposed research.

Keywords: Oriental Market, Analysis, Knowledge, Enhancement.

1. Introduction

A Bazaar, as it is known, is a place of commerce and trade located in the central part of Islamic cities in connection with the main roads. Such places can take different architectural forms, divided into sectors dedicated to the sale and production of different products, characterised by particular smells and sounds which, together with the variety of colours and goods, constitute the symbol of the city and Islamic

society (Cuneo, 1986). The Bazaars are a clear example of vernacular architecture that perfectly fits into the issues related to the complexity of the urban fabric of the peripheral areas of contemporary cities and its conservation and enhancement. In this context, architect Pica Ciamarra (2014) argues that:

In order to recivilise the urban, it is necessary to start again from the network of public spaces, to reconstruct their relations, to act in appropriate

terms pursuing this single aim, but with different, specific, punctual actions. Regardless of the size, whether we are talking about cities or metropolitan areas, smaller towns, suburbs or in any case urban areas, we should ensure that whoever lives there can easily interact with at least one element of the network of reference places to be rethought in all urbanised territories. Redesigning public space, acting primarily on the void by helping to redefine it, determining a network of areas of social condensation, reachable on foot in a few minutes, able to offer opportunities for exchange, services, meetings, which are proper to a community. (p. 52).

This quote underlines the importance of knowledge and conservation of urban public spaces as places of social aggregation. In this context, the research proposes the study of two Bazaars in the Balkan territory, that of Tirana and that of Skopje, evidence of full, noisy public spaces, as indecipherable as they are clear and simple in their geometries. The latter have contributed to the development and urban regeneration of historical cities (Mirra, 2020).

2. The method for knowledge, conservation and enhancement

The research was conducted through several operational phases: a historical analysis and of the transformations undergone over the centuries; a subsequent identification of these areas on a territorial scale; a subsequent analysis on an architectural scale through the restoration survey. The first phase made it possible to identify the historical and cultural context of the areas under investigation; subsequently it was possible to identify the points of interest in the surrounding areas; the last phase made it possible to identify their morphoglyphology and level of conservation and current use. The degradation survey conducted on the most degraded buildings represented a peculiar phase of the conservation project, fundamental for the knowledge of the site through the identification

of the surfaces affected by manifestations of degradation and the state of conservation of an historic structure (Picone, 2004).

2.1. Tirana Bazaar. Historical notes

The old Bazaar in Tirana (Fig. 1) was for centuries considered the economic, commercial and financial centre of Albanian society. It was a place of meeting, entertainment, exchange and cultural and social experiences for the inhabitants of the surrounding villages and towns, a typical feature of Ottoman cities. The old Bazaar of Tirana, organised in different spaces, was the predominant hub. The latter, as well as all structures of this type, was located at the centre of the main road networks and covered an area of three hectares dating back to the 18th century. Among the most important architectural spaces in the area was the Ethem Bey Mosque, dating from 1789. The old market consisted of an open space for the sale of agricultural products. It was divided into nine main areas for the sale of specific products: *leshna* (wool market), *orizna* (rice market), *krypna* (salt market), *hasra* (mat market), *dithna* (grain market), *djathna* (cheese market), *gjelna* (poultry market), *pema* (fruit market) and *qerret* (cart market).



Fig. 1. Tirana Bazaar: historical image from 1939 (Source: OBC Transeuropa, 2010)

As the importance of the Ottoman markets increased, the importation of products by local craftsmen and those from as far away as the towns of Kruja, Elbasan and Kavaja was

encouraged. As a result, by the second half of the 20th century, the old Bazaar was too small to accommodate new craftsmen, merchants and traders, as well as new shops and shops opening nearby. The situation was further aggravated by World War II, when the old Bazaar was gradually abandoned until it was demolished at the end of the 1960s. Following this event, the old Mosque and all the historical pre-existences of the city were demolished and, consequently, the history and memory of Albanian citizens were buried in the rubble of these buildings (Krase & Uherek, 2017). It was only in 2018 that it was decided to build a new Bazaar (Fig. 2), a real urban redevelopment project that aims to preserve the Albanian cultural tradition by giving life to a new context with a commercial and cultural destination of considerable interest. The new configuration of the market is characterised by an innovative intervention consisting of a glass and metal structure. This space, used for the sale of fruit and vegetables, has the primary objective of transmitting the memory of the roofs of the indigenous houses of Tirana, confronting a less recent reconstruction of covered areas for the sale of used goods consisting of geometries similar to those of the past. The new market respects the oriental traces of the past, integrating the old style of the old bazaar into the new one.



Fig. 2. Tirana Bazaar: photographic image of the current state (Source: Mirra, 2021)



Fig. 3. Skopje Bazaar: historical image (Source: OBC Transeuropa, 2022)

Of considerable importance in the project to reconfigure the new market is the role of colour, desired by the mayor of Tirana, Edi Rama, used in the form of abstract designs of various kinds in the adjacent buildings to bring light and vitality to the universal grey plaster of the former communist city

2.2. Skopje Bazaar. Historical notes

The old Bazaar in Skopje (Fig. 3) represents the historical core of the city, a centre of economic, cultural and social interaction. In spite of turbulent historical events, this urban area has managed to preserve its identity characteristics by creating an image of the old town in the new town (Koneska & Balkoski, 2020). Some sources testify to the presence of a merchant district in the 12th century where, following a major and rapid urban development, some thirty mosques, numerous caravanserais and other monumental Ottoman buildings were built. These include the old Bazaar in Skopje, built from the 15th century onwards, whose original configuration is connected to the new town by a bridge that divides the old Ottoman town from the new capital. Following the earthquakes of 1955 and 1963 and World War II, the original Bazaar was severely damaged. The present market (Fig. 4) is the result of successive reconstructions, which have respected the original architectural and multicultural characteristics. In the interior, there is a fusion of predominantly Ottoman structures, remains from the Byzantine era that are still evident and recent reconstructions using modern languages (Mirra, 2017).



Fig. 4. Skopje Bazaar: photographic image of the current state (Source: Mirra, 2018)

2.3. Surveying campaigns

Following the analysis of the historical informations relating to the two Bazaars studied, the research included a cognitive field survey. This method of knowledge had a twofold purpose: on the one hand, the identification of historical pre-existences in the vicinity and any connections between them and the markets, and on the other hand, the documentation of the configuration and state of conservation and use of both Bazaars. To this end, the survey activities carried out between 2018 and 2021 were of fundamental importance. At this stage, the survey was considered as a tool for critical observation and investigation, which, combined with the graphical processing of the data acquired through both historical and field analysis, allowed us to interpret the reality by serving as a fundamental knowledge base (Carocci & Circo, 2015). The latter has been useful for the subsequent identification of guidelines for the conservation and enhancement of complex historicised urban centres. The choice of the most appropriate survey technique required the analysis of different factors, such as the purpose of the research, the available budget, the morphological characteristics of the site and the level of detail to be obtained (Remondino, 2011). For this purpose, the image-based survey procedure carried out by means of digital cameras and drones proved to be the most suitable both for the need of a quick and economical measurement and for the possibility offered by the latter to obtain detailed digital models of the tangible and planimetric appearance of the analysed artefacts

(D'Aprile & Piscitelli, 2019). The graphic elaboration of the data obtained through the subsequent phase of aligning the photographic images by means of corresponding points has allowed us to obtain three-dimensional elaborations, such as point clouds (Fig. 5), comparable to an interactive model between the real and the virtual (Manfredini A. & Remondino, 2010).

3. Results

The investigation carried out by means of surveying campaigns and the processing of the data acquired made it possible, first of all, to represent the planimetry of the the Bazaars of Tirana and Skopje and their urban context. In addition, it was possible to identify the nearby historical pre-existences, possible connections, the state of conservation of the buildings within the markets and the degree of usability of the complex as a whole. The first Bazaar analysed for this purpose was the one in Tirana, whose planimetric layout (Fig. 6) shows the presence of an important Albanian square in the vicinity, namely Scanderberg Square, and of some ancient roadways connecting the latter to the new Bazaar.

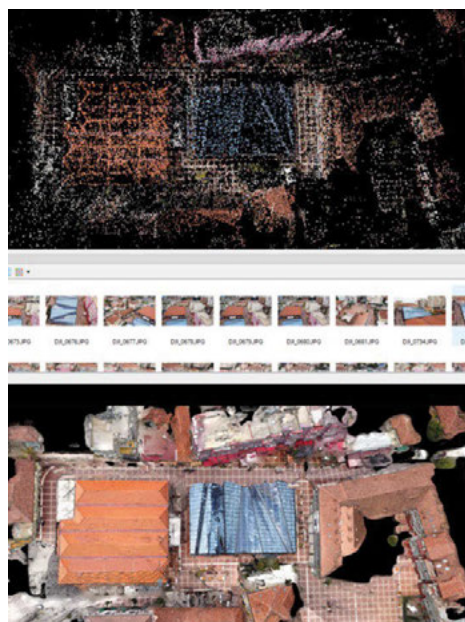


Fig. 5. Point cloud processing from photogrammetric survey (Source: Trematerra, 2022)

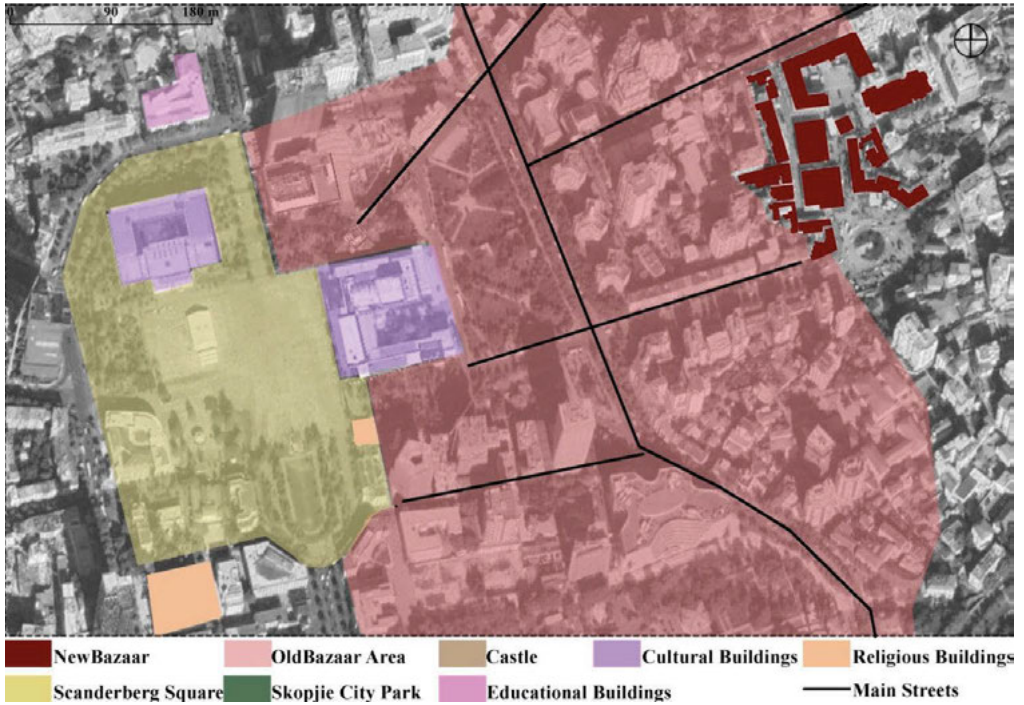


Fig. 6. Tirana Bazaar: territorial mapping with identification of routes and points of interest (Source: Trematerra, 2022)

These streets, which defined the layout of the old Bazaar, are wide (between seven and ten metres) and paved with cobblestones and a central drainage channel. They were named after the trades they housed, such as the butcher's street, the barber's street, the blacksmith's street, the coppersmith's street and the silversmith's street. Following the demolition of the Old Bazaar in 1960, the New Market (Fig. 7) remained for a long time the only large shopping centre for second-hand goods, meat, fish, fruit and vegetables in Tirana. From a commercial space to a 24-hour interactive space, in the mornings it is used more as a market, in the afternoons as a place for leisure and entertainment thanks to the presence of bars, restaurants and spaces for artistic activities such as cultural festivals and events. An interesting element of the design of the new Bazaar is the new terracotta flooring, which brings back memories of Tirana's old quarters of clay walls and tiled roofs.

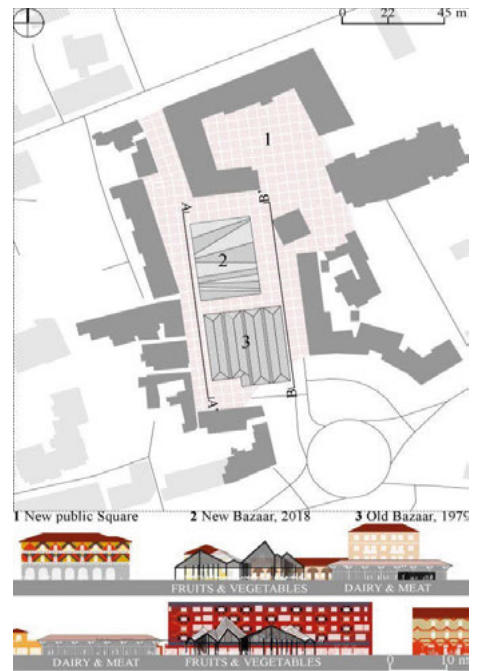


Fig. 7. Tirana Bazaar: general plan with territorial sections (Source: Mirra, 2022)

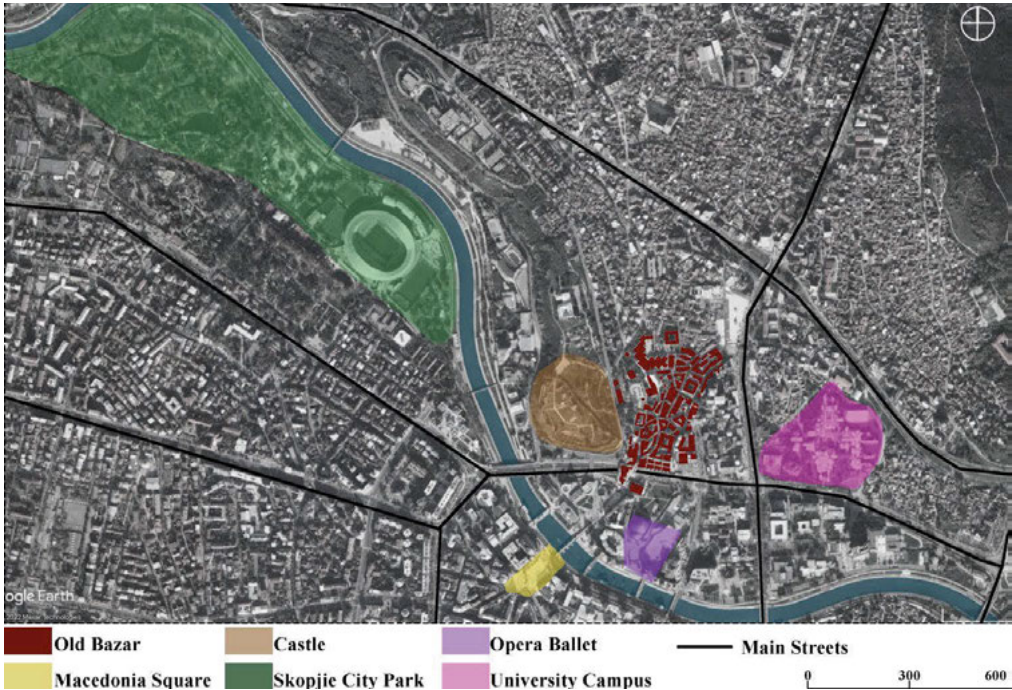


Fig. 8. Skopje Bazaar: territorial mapping with identification of routes and points of interest (Source: Trematerra, 2022)

This project decision invites and welcomes visitors into the internal spaces of the market using a modern language, offering both merchants and local inhabitants a celebration of the memory of a lost identity. The project also included a real urban redevelopment, with the construction of a car park, a square for social gathering and further restoration of the facades of the adjacent buildings. The Bazaar in Skopje, in contrast, does not present a project for urban recovery and revitalisation, being in a precarious state of conservation. At the same time, the site has a wealth of interesting historical pre-existences, unlike the more recently built city of Tirana, which is undergoing restoration and new construction. The current configuration of the Macedonian Bazaar is only a shadow of its former glory, but the site remains rich in interesting pre-existences, including the main mosques and churches of Skopje (Mirra, 2018). The urban context (Fig. 8), likewise, presents numerous points of interest including: a city park, a castle,



Fig. 9. Skopje Bazaar: general plan with identification of points of interest (Source: Trematerra, 2022)



Fig. 10. Il Bazaar di Skopje: ortomosaico di un edificio commerciale (Source: Mirra, 2022)

an opera and ballet theatre and a square. The Bazaar proper is built in oriental style and is formed by streets of different paved widths. It contains numerous historical and cultural buildings, including: Churches and Mosques, universities, museums and a monumental hammam, now converted into the National Art Gallery (Fig. 9). Many of the buildings within the Old Market, at the same time, are abandoned and, consequently, severely degraded. Many of them are characterised by a disorganised configuration, as a result of some interventions carried out on the façade according to personal taste and without regard for the identity of the place (Fig. 10). In this regard, the investigations carried out made it possible to identify the state of conservation of the most critical buildings, identifying the forms of deterioration through the Normal 1/88 Lexicon (Consiglio nazionale delle Ricerche-Istituto Centrale del Restauro, 1990).

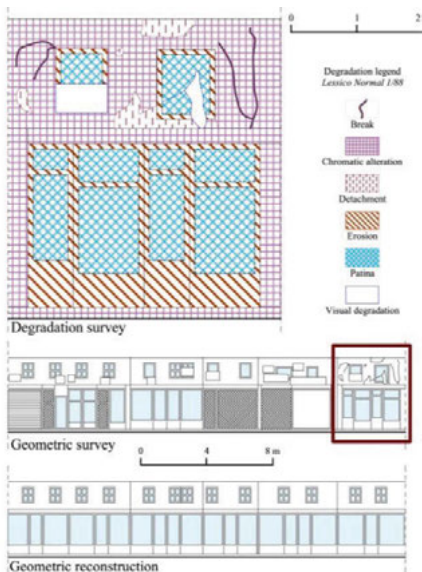


Fig. 11. Skopje Bazaar: degradation survey and restoration of a commercial building (Source: Trematerra, 2022)

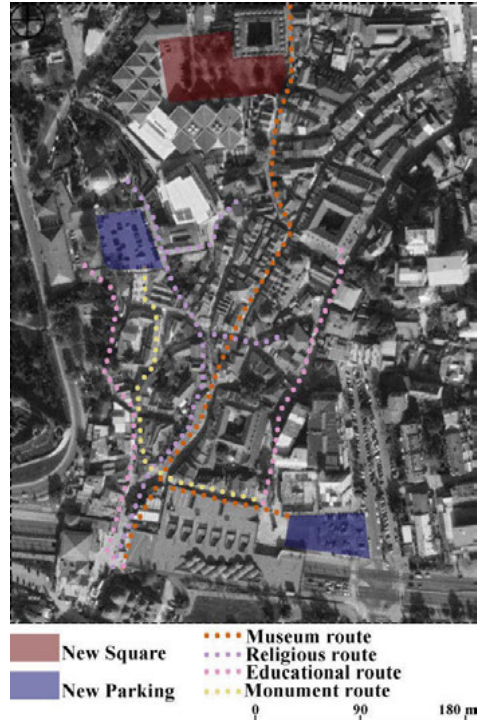


Fig. 12. Skopje Bazaar: intervention concept for flow management (Source: Trematerra, 2022)

The aim is to restore the original appearance of the buildings inside the Bazaar in order to revitalise the site and give it a homogenous appearance (Fig. 11). In addition to the conservation of the historic buildings, the research included the development of intervention strategies aimed at the correct division of spaces and the management of tourist flows. The proposed guidelines foresee the creation of a series of bicycle and pedestrian paths in order to divide the commercial spaces from those for leisure, culture and social aggregation and the creation of a new square and two public car parks (Fig. 12). The aim is to devise intervention strategies aimed at a new use of abandoned historical buildings

capable of creating balanced relationships between architecture and the territorial context and between conservation and innovation (Petrucci, 2016).

4. Conclusions

The investigations carried out made it possible to compare the two Bazaars and the interventions of urban regeneration and revitalisation carried out. The Bazaar in Tirana does not have important historical pre-existences, but it is an interesting example of an intervention of memory conservation aimed at urban enhancement and regeneration. On the other hand, the Bazaar of Skopje is characterised by an urban outline made up of numerous and important historical presences and attractive public spaces, but it has never been interested in the realisation of an adequate conservation and valorisation project. At present, in addition to the lack of a conservation and maintenance plan for the commercial buildings, there is the absence of a coherent division of space on the one hand, and of adequate flow management on the other. For this purpose, the cognitive activities carried out, characterised by both the analysis of the sources found and the carrying out of survey campaigns, have been very useful. The research made it possible to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of both Bazaars, in order to propose possible intervention strategies aimed not only at preserving and enhancing the areas analysed, but also at preserving the memory of the past through a new contemporary interpretation.

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