

A Historical Overview of the Urban Development of the City of Durrës, Albania

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Abstract. The purpose of this article is to describe the urban development and its influencing factors of the city of Durrës, Albania, throughout the years. It is divided in two periods: the period between the years 1912-1990, and the period from the year 1990- present. The great political changes that took place in Albania in the year 1990, the change of the regime from a communist one to a democracy, as well as its entrance into the world of free market economy significantly increased the differences between the two systems in terms of urban development. The economy, demography and geographic location of Durrës, which are closely linked with the transition from a one-party system to pluralism, are all addressed in the article. These elements are found essential to the urban development of the city. Furthermore, it is important to consider the pre-1990s urban development situation of Durrës, because it contains the necessary elements which continue to be given a priority to the present day. These elements will be analyzed in a thorough overview throughout the article, in the two major historical periods.

Keywords: Urban Development, History, Demography, Social Development, Environment.

INTRODUCTION

The district of Durrës is located in the central part of the Western Lowlands in Albania between the northern latitudes 41°36' and 41°15' and the eastern latitudes 19°27' and 19°35'. The northernmost border crosses the Cape of Skanderbeg (Rodon), while the southernmost border crosses the Agait-Manskuri Stream area (2). The favorable geographical position of the district of Durrës gives priority to its economic development, offers opportunities for the high development and concentration of tourism and touristic activities. Durrës district in the western and northwestern part is washed by the Adriatic Sea in a length of 56.8 km which favors the development of economic activities of the population. Within the administrative boundaries, the district has an area of 433 km² and a population of 292,029 inhabitants in 2021 (11). The maximum height of the district is 178m, known as Durrës Mountain, while the lowest part is at the Dajlan bridge at the entrance of Durrës, with about 0.8m above sea level.

The city of Durrës itself, as part of the district of Durrës and its center, is located at the coordinates 19°26'21" east longitude and 41°18'40" north latitude (2). The city rises above the former Durrës swamp about 3 km along the bay of Durrës and in continuation of the Mountain of the same name. It occupies an area of 46,1 km².

From the administrative point of view, Durrës city is organized in six administrative regions (translated: *Rajone* in Albanian) and a population of 214,550 inhabitants (10).

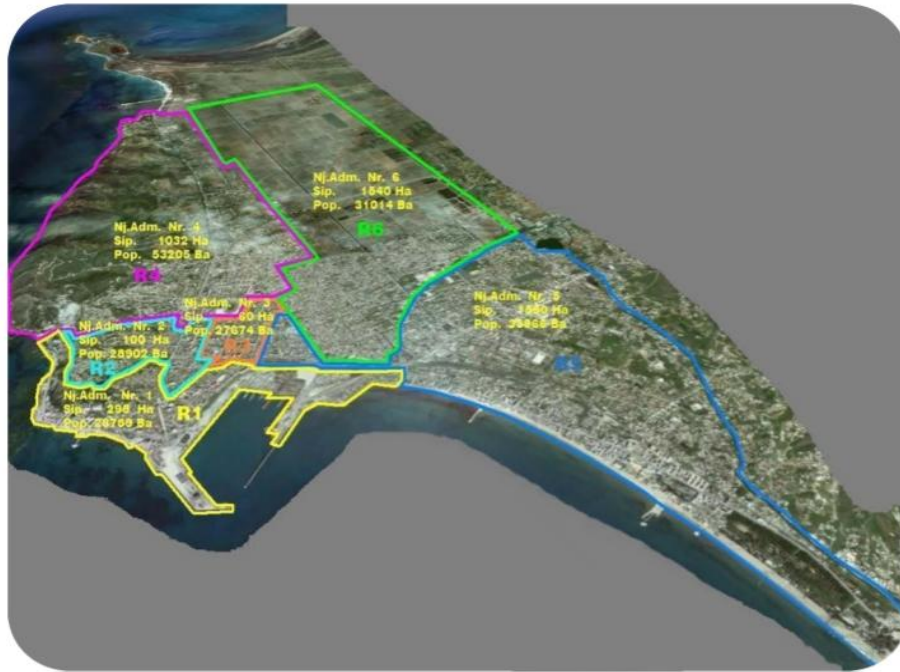


FIGURE 1. Map of Durrës City and Its Administrative Units (10)

TABLE 1. Area in km² and Population of Administrative Regions of Durrës City

	Administrative Region 1	Administrative Region 2	Administrative Region 3	Administrative Region 4	Administrative Region 5	Administrative Region 6
Area in km ²	2.98	1	0.6	10.32	15.8	15.6
Population	29180	29589	28263	54852	36072	36594

URBAN DEVELOPMENT OF DURRËS BEFORE 1990

The City of Durrës Between the Years 1912-1939

After the Declaration of Independence from Ottoman Empire in 1912, Albania was an agrarian underdeveloped country, which was also reflected in the economic and social life of the country's cities. The cities were generally concentrated in the coastal and coastal area, a distribution dictated by the geographical configuration of the Albanian land in the interior of the territory, which softens to the west and ends in the coastal lowlands.

The most important cities of the country, which remained after its fragmentation within the state borders were: Shkodra, Korça, Gjirokastra, Tirana, Elbasan, Berat, Kavaja, Vlora, Durrës, Kruja, Përmeti, Devlina, Tepelena and Saranda. With the exception of Shkodra and Korça, other towns were small. The population concentrated in them equalled 12% of the country's total population (3). Their urbanization was done slowly, because the movements of the population from the countryside to the city were few due to the slow development of the urban economy itself. Also, in these years emigration was quite widespread. A large part of the urban and rural population, in hope of better life, were forced to leave their homeland and look for work in different parts of the world.

While Durrës, which in the pre-Ottoman Middle Ages was an important Episcopal (religious) center and the largest city in the country, during the Ottoman occupation it was completely destroyed and after for centuries slowly grew as a center of transit trade, counted at the time of the declaration of Independence only 4,175 inhabitants (3).

The small population of the city is a consequence of the slow pace of population growth where from the period of 1917 to 1919, in Durrës, the population increased with just 30 inhabitants (3).

During the Albanian Kingdom period (1928-1939), the city felt a gradual economic increase, thanks to the injection of Italian capital and investments, and the strengthening of local capital which made possible the establishment of several factories such as: flour factory, cigarettes, pasta.

The development of the city was followed by the construction of new roads, the start of the construction of the Durrës port in 1928, the creation of the first joint stock companies, etc. Several factories were set up, such as: the flour factory of the Shijaku brothers, the pasta-making factory of Tahir Beshir. In 1930-1932, the flour factory of the Ekonomi brothers was set up, the brick factory of Fon Laku and Anastasiadh, the soap factory "Drita" of the Xhumori brothers, the Papaj mechanical workshop, etc (3).

Urban Development of the City of Durrës in the Years 1945-1990

After the end of the Second World War, the city of Durrës experienced a major political, social, and economic change, which also affected the demography of city and the urban development. The city slowly expanded in the direction of Shkozë in the area of the former Durrës' Swamp, and started to industrialize.

During the war, the population of the city was reduced considerably. Thus, the Albanian government implemented new demographic policies and strategies. They saw the small number of inhabitants in Durrës as a major problem. The process had an immediate impact and success in the demographic development of the city. Among the main policies and strategies used by the government of Albania were: the lack of family planning, the increase of the number of marriages, implementation of laws against abortion. As a result, the population of Durrës increased considerably, from 14,000 inhabitants in the beginning of 1950s (9), to 52.100 in the 1960s (1). The high population growth of the city can also be explained by the restriction of movement from the rural to urban areas and vice-versa. Such movement was regulated by the state. In 1980, the population density of Durrës was 247 inhabitants/km² (9). The population of the city of Durrës occupied almost 48% of the population of the district (1), ranking Durrës the second the urban center in Albania in terms of its population size, after Tirana.

The development of the mechanical industry, which provided ¼ of the industrial production of the district, also took off. One of the enterprises of the mechanical industry was the shipyard that started working with few workers, who repaired small boats. In time, the shipyard was transformed into a factory where large tonnage ships and metal boat manufacturers were constructed. In the port of Durrës, in 1985, 10 to 15 ships of different tonnages could be anchored and processed at the same time. The volume of goods turnover of one month brought the need to realize the process with advanced technology and mechanisms. This resulted in the employment of 2,500-3,000 workers (2). 85% of the import-export volume of Albania was carried out in the port of Durrës (2). In those years, the navy expanded with the transoceanic ships "Arbëria", "Tirana", "Vlora", as well as the high-tonnage steamer "Teuta".

The chemical industry was also very developed. The chemical and plastic products that were produced in Durrës were known all over the country. Furthermore, the well-known radio and television factory, which increased the production range of both radio and television in 1978, managed to produce twice as much as in 1970. The "Telat Noga" factory was very famous both at home and abroad, being as a continuation of the former "Stamles" cigarette factory. Also, in the city of Durrës, the food production industry was developed, which was represented by the large factories of flour, pasta, fruit and vegetable processing factories, wineries, etc. The many different factories and manufactures that were set up in Durrës during the period 1945-1990, accounted for 10.6% of the total industrial production of Albania (9).

Durrës is often referred to in Albania, as the "city of great movements", because it was an important transport hub during the Communist Regime. Maritime, rail and automobile transport intersected here, as in no other city in Albania. According to the data of the time, Durrës held 45% of the transport of the whole country. During 1975 alone, about 8,000,000 people traveled by train in Durrës. There have been cases in the summer days, within just one day, at the railway station of Durrës to move 40,000 passengers, as much as the number of inhabitants of an entire city in Albania (2).

In the first decade after the end of the Second World War, the development of tourism in Durrës was almost not possible. This was as a result of the difficult economical and infrastructural situation the city was in after the war. However, the situation changed drastically after the visit of First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev in 1959. This event had a major influence in the sudden increase in the number of tourists from the Soviet Union and other countries that were members of the Warsaw Pact. As a result, the Albanian government began the construction of new holiday villas and cabins, and expanded the capacity of the existing ones (4).

URBAN DEVELOPMENT OF DURRËS AFTER 1990

The city of Durrës, after the fall of socialism, faced a dramatic social and economic change and an unprecedented rate of urban growth which has deteriorated the existing infrastructure conceived for a different model from the current one. All the historical and cultural heritage as well as the economic opportunities offered

by the city make it one of the most important migration destinations from the less developed areas of the country. This process, in the last three decades, helped the city of Durrës to more than double its population.

After 1990, the urban development of Durrës can be described in two separate periods (up to 2006 and after 2006) in terms of causes, factors, and geo-urban outcomes. New politico-economic forces indicated a territorial reassessment via spatial urban center and peripheral recapitalization (7). The economy of urban physical land and human assets, return on trade center and senior services, the increase of the importance of shipping and the Port; retraining in the center through contemporary urbanization and its central functions; reorganization of the periphery through transfer of some urban functions and urban agriculture and further agglomerating the urban space through urban functions were among the elements that the reassessment of the urban development of Durrës was based upon.

Changes in Demography and in the Economic Sectors of Durrës

The statistical indicators for the demographic developments of the city of Durrës, shown in absolute numbers reflects an increase of 27% of the city's population for a decade, no doubt after the 1990s in combination with the new political and economic conditions facing the whole country, would mark the regeneration of the secondary and tertiary sector of the economy.

Internal migration of Albanians played an integral part of the demographic development of Durrës. After the liberalization of the restriction of the movement in 1990, nearly 60000 people decided to move from their region to Durrës and surrounding area (5). The major reasons that made Durrës a highly attractive area was the city's economic and geographic position, its close proximity to the capital and to the main import and export hub of Albania, The Port of Durrës.

Until 1990, the number of inhabitants registered in Durrës was 87559 (13). From the data published by the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) in 2009 the population of Durrës more than doubled. Durrës city at the time had 203550 inhabitants. The following graphic (Fig.2) shows the major demographic changes in the two decades after the change of political regime:

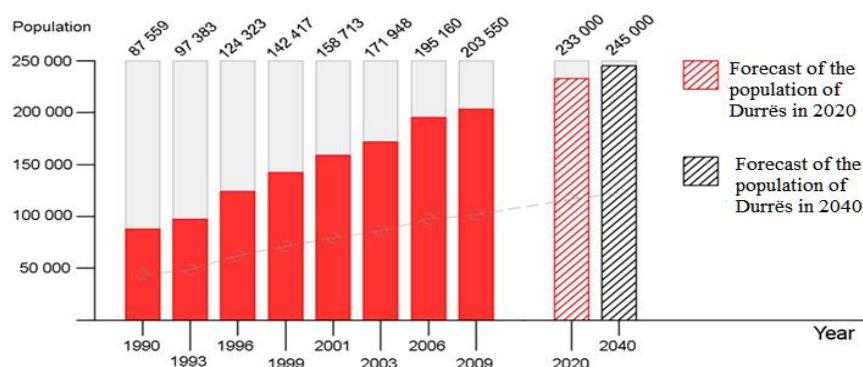


FIGURE 2. The Demographic Change of Durrës City from 1990 to 2009

Figure 2 shows that there are two major periods of population growth, the first one starts in 1993 and ends in 1996, and the second is the period of 2003-2006. This is evident at the following table, which shows the percentage of the population growth from 1990 to 2009:

TABLE 2. Percentage of Population Growth of Durrës from 1990 to 2009

	1990	1993	1996	1999	2001	2003	2006	2009
growth in %	-	11.22	27.66	14.55	11.44	8.34	13.5	4.3
growth % from 1990	-	11.2	42	62.7	81.3	96.4	122.9	132.5

Another sector that experienced major change in its structure was the industrial sector of Durrës. Until 1990, Durrës' industry held the second place nationally. After the change of the system, the mining sector (coal mines), metal processing and chemical industries were no longer functional. The economic activity was oriented in the industrial production coming from the tailoring industries, trade, transport, fishing, alcoholic beverage industries, etc. The main feature is their distribution throughout the city. According to the statistics of DKSHP undertaken in a study, it was concluded that there were 511 workshops and manufactures identified as: small industrial workshops in duralumin, wood and marble production focus, objects of food industry, construction, transport. The number of registered companies in operation before 1993 was 16, while the companies that entered into operation during the years 1993- 2000 were numbering about 196, and after the year 2000 the number was increased to 299 working ones (12). What is worth noting is their concentration mainly in the suburban neighborhoods that are characterized by urban expansion during these years. For example, in neighborhood nr. 14 (Shkozet area) there were about 79 facilities and in neighborhood nr.15 (the area of Porto Romano) about 38 (12).

The growth in the heavy industrial sector has been slow compared to the retail and construction sectors. The manufacturing and tailoring sector provided 19% of employees. The construction sector is currently one of the most active in the local economy and accounts for 7% of employees (12). In the general context of tertiary sector development, trade, and the retail sector grew steadily. Given the limited choice of employment and the relatively low start-up costs, it is estimated that trade accounts for about one-half of all registered businesses and 23% of employment in the city. About 57% of new firms since 1990 are located in the trade sector (12).

A major sector that played and continues to play a very important role in the urban development of Durrës is the transportation and infrastructure sector. After the 1990, the infrastructure sector functioned as a compass for the new economic directions, particularly in the services sector. In the first decade, however, government infrastructure spending was negligible (1990-2000). Afterward, the foreign investments in infrastructure development and maintenance have steadily expanded. Durrës became a crucial and transitory location with the building of the 8th Corridor. There are three types of transportation infrastructure operating in the city: road, rail, and sea. Meanwhile, the Port's importance to the city and its economy has remained constant throughout history. It is an vital point that connects the people of Durrës and Albania to the rest of the world (6). In 2018, The Port of Durrës handled 92.7% percent of all maritime traffic in the country (14). It also serves as a vital hub for ferries and passenger transportation.

Tourism in Durrës, also, remains a crucial economic activity. After 1990, the central government and local administration enhanced the tourism sector by developing new policies, investing in the infrastructure and services, conducting research and evaluation and promoting the natural, historical, and cultural values and resources of the city. Tourism, due to the historical and cultural heritage, as well as the close proximity of the city to the Adriatic Sea, is an industry with significant impact on the economy of Durrës. With over 750,000 visitors a year, this is the most important area of the country in terms of mass tourism (11).

Prospects for Sustainable Urban Development of Durrës

During the last 30 years, Durrës and Albania in general, has been subject to a profound urban transformation, which has changed the structure of the land in space, density, variety of functions, and pronounced inequalities in access to services.

This change has particularly affected the city of Durrës, and the coastal areas to the south starting from the Port and descending to the south along the urban periphery of the old town to the east to the edge of the coastal cape (Administrative Region Nr.1 and Nr.5, check Fig.1). This is the area where urbanization is very active, resulting in high value of land and construction with its critical effects on the quality of urban life (lack of urban services, road infrastructure by standards, lack of car parking and utilities).

The changing political and economic systems, as well as population mobility, contributed to the modification of Durrës' terrain after 1990. The population density per unit of surface grew, particularly in Porto-Romano (Administrative Region 4), with individuals primarily from northeastern Albania. Building areas were increased, and new structures proliferated across the city. Moreover, many objects became obsolete, resulting in landscape damage, particularly in Shkozet and Porto-Romano.

Every day, green space is dwindling and being replaced by high-rise skyscrapers. The forest and marshy areas of the Administrative Region 6 are gradually shrinking as the population grows, while residential areas and streets expand.

The coast has changed dramatically as a result of numerous structures recently built for housing, tourism, and other purposes. According to a study done by the Municipality of Durrës and the Institute of Cooperation and Development, the uncontrolled urban activity has degraded the environment of sand tourism of the municipality (Durrës and Rrushbull) orienting it towards mass tourism with low added value, due to the massive development of hotels, residential complexes and restaurants with basic quality level (12). The same finding

applies to the informal area of Këneta where uncontrolled urbanization has directly affected the quality of services and living of residents. Moreover, the coastal area is threatened by the high risk of landslides due to the lack of hydro-geological balance caused by the erection of tall buildings on the slopes of the coastal cape. They have also profoundly degraded historical, environmental and landscape values. These new developments have started by "eating" up to a narrow strip the coastal area along the east coast (towards Currilave).

The immediate change of regime and economic policies led to the closure of a number of plants and factories with major environmental implications, such as the chemical plant in Porto-Romano, which was one of the most problematic not only for Durrës and Albania, but also for the Balkans. The chemicals were left adrift and dispersed everywhere once the plant stopped functioning, polluting the water and soil. The huge population in the area is entirely exposed to the chemical pollution, which comes directly from the soil, water, and air, as well as indirectly from agricultural goods and cattle.

However, the Administrative Region 6 (Porto-Romano area) is not the only region with environmental and urban problems in Durrës city. In the industrial areas of Shkozë, there are many industrial buildings which have already been abandoned. In Manza area, during the communism, there were coal mines operating near the beach, which after their end of operational work, created a lot of industrial waste. In the Currila and Durrës Bay, there is a lot of construction and urban waste.

A new phenomenon, that impacted and continues to impact greatly the urban development of Durrës, is the informal construction of buildings. In an estimate, nearly two thirds of buildings in Durrës are informal. Because of the magnitude of this phenomenon, it is vital to assess its positive and negative effects on the urban development. In both circumstances, the effects are evident and observable.

The majority of improvised structures are not connected to essential infrastructure, resulting in water and power supply issues as well as a lack of sewage systems. When providing services such as areas for education, health care, parking, or traffic management, many crucial planning issues are disregarded. Illegal water and power connections wreak havoc on the city administration, and the water supply system's sanitation is left to be desired. Because most occupations are located in the city, citizens must commute on a regular basis. The low condition of the road network and public transit encourages reliance on private automobiles, resulting in increased traffic and pollution of the air and noise. After the international community's pressure, the Albanian government's response to this sudden increase in building construction in Albania in general and in Durrës city in particular was the implementation of a law supporting the legalization process for informal buildings in 2006 (8), focusing primarily in: a) *Legalization* (giving ownership titles); b) *Equality* (fixed land values); c) *Urbanization* (building infrastructure for the informal settlements); d) *Compensation* (previous owners are given compensation based on the land value).

CONCLUSION

The Declaration of Independence of Albania in 1912 constituted an important political condition and a basic premise for the further development of the country, and the city in particular. But the political circumstances that followed after the declaration of Independence caused great human and material damage. Consequently, the physiognomy of Durrës city on the eve of the First World War did not differ much from that of Independence. Efforts made in economics, finance, administration, etc., were generally not realized and the progress made was too small.

With the complete military occupation of the country during the First World War, some changes took place, in accordance with the military interests of the foreign invaders. From the branches of production, handicrafts declined, caused not only by the competition of European goods, but also by the conditions of war and the lack of raw materials. Industry was isolated from the outside world and trade ties with neighboring countries were severed.

The population of the city had an increase as a result of the natural increase, albeit being negligible. Also the lack of industry and migratory movement of the population from rural areas to the city influenced the stagnation of the city.

After the liberation, in the period between the years 1945-1990, Durrës entered the path of economic development through reforms and 5-year economic plans, based on the principle of centralization of the economy undertaken by the socialist state. Despite the significant investments in the heavy industry, infrastructure and tourism, waste treatment plants, urban waste management, water supply, and recycling in Durrës, were neglected by the government. The use of old technology, and sometimes, the refusal of the existence of these problems led to an increase in toxic gas emissions, dust, noise pollution and residual waste.

Everything changed after 1991, when the political system was changed. Numerous new developments in Durrës' urban conditions occurred as a result of the system's controlled economy being overcome and the concepts of market economy and free initiative being applied. This change gave importance to Durrës as one of

the country's key economic hubs, a vital hub for trade, tourism, government services, and, most all, transportation.

The unrestricted movement of the people, which played an important part in the formation of the landscape in the Durrës region, was also a result of the changing political and economic system. Increased need for roads, telephone lines, water supplies, health centers, educational, cultural, sports, and green places for enjoyment and entertainment has resulted from population growth and residential area expansion. During this time, there has been a considerable shrinkage as well as an abuse of green space. Aside from that, the city's yellow line was greatly expanded, and the number of homes in any section of the Durrës area increased, resulting in a decrease in arable land. The modern landscape has been so humanized that it is difficult to discover any areas that are unaffected by human activity.

Nowadays, it is getting difficult to discover areas of the terrain that haven't been touched by a human hand in the city of Durrës, thanks to the ineffectiveness shown in territorial management by the local administration and the central government. What is absent is an assessment of the value of small-scale area control. At the same time, it is impossible to identify regional traits. That is why, currently, the central government and local administration face the difficult task of retrofitting infrastructure and providing citizen services, such as schools, transportation and hospitals, within the unstructured informal urban development of Durrës.

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