

Temporal Morphologies: Bridging Historical and Contemporary Patterns in Shkoza's Urban Design

DOI: 10.37199/o41011123

Arjola SAVA *PhD IDAUP / University of Ferrara*

Dejvi DAUTI *PhD IDAUP / University of Ferrara*

Abstract - *Urban design flourishes at the intersection of historical context and contemporary requirements, with temporal morphologies playing a significant role in creating resilient and sustainable urban environments. This paper investigates the evolution of Shkoza, a peripheral region in Tirana, by analyzing historical patterns alongside modern urban dynamics. The study synthesizes data collected from various maps of Tirana with contemporary morphological research to explore the impact of historical codes on modern design interventions.*

The main goal of the proposed intervention is to establish a network of plazas that will transform Shkoza into a dynamic urban center. This initiative serves as a structural and functional foundation by connecting different urban areas, decentralizing processes, and alleviating traffic in Tirana's city center. The project highlights the significance of roadways, plazas, and natural features in creating an urban fabric that balances functionality with aesthetic coherence, drawing inspiration from Camillo Sitte and Kevin Lynch.

The methodology includes an analysis to assess the terrain's development potential, including natural flood control measures and the creation of green buffers. This approach ensures the integration of topography with urban design, enhancing land use while promoting sustainability. The analysis also proposes strategies to improve Shkoza's connectivity and functionality within the metropolitan network by utilizing undeveloped areas to accommodate social and commercial activities.

This study underscores progressive development, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive measures for long-term urban resilience, positioning Shkoza as a model for the co-evolution of historical and modern patterns. To address the challenges of urban fragmentation and sprawl, the article advocates for a comprehensive approach to urban design that embraces temporal morphologies and merges historical continuity with contemporary innovation. The findings offer a replicable paradigm for similar contexts, aiming to balance sustainability, mobility, and heritage in urban planning.

Keywords - Decentralization, Mobility, Morphology, Patterns, Sustainability

Introduction

As part of the international workshop organized by Polis University and the University of Ferrara in December 2024, the Shkoza area was the focus of the workshop. The aim was to create a new center node for the city of Tirana while trying to mitigate traffic through the formal reconceptualization of the City.

Shkoza, an area in the east of the city, serves as an excellent case study that combines the fragmented urban patterns resulting from different historical changes with urban development. In recent years, uneven growth has led to fragmented patterns, as the area serves as a transit hub between the

rural periphery of Shkoza and the central urban nucleus. This part of the city serves as an open laboratory for understanding the coexistence of ancestral patterns and modern ones, manifesting in a complex morphology generated by spontaneous constructions from the 1990s until late urban interventions.

Despite the fact that this appears problematic, we will attempt to use it to conceptualize a morphological lens that converts these lacks of coherence into empathy for place and time. This paper aims to examine temporal morphologies to understand the city's historical stratifications and

connect them to the current demands of urban planning. Employing a temporal filter to explore the urban morphology of this area highlights the importance of using historical layers as a guide for accurate and informed architectural and urban interventions. Using morphological theories in conjunction with a critical approach to planning, a new interpretation of Shkoza is presented as an intermediary area where urban planning serves as a link between the past and the future.

Meanwhile, this study aims to investigate Shkoza's transformation while analyzing the connection between historical structures and contemporary urban developments. To make it clearer the orientation of this research, this article tends to give answers to questions: How did Shkoza evolve in relation to urban historical models and existing morphological structures? In what way could these findings orient further interventions on a metropolitan scale? By answering these questions, the purpose is not only to describe the development, but also to identify lessons that can serve as a basis for planning in similar areas in other cities.

The unplanned development of Shkoza, like that of other post-socialist city outskirts, has resulted in an unequal urban landscape with various building typologies, ranging from spontaneous residential buildings to remnants of an industrial past that has already been abandoned; they coexist. With its origins in various social, economic, and political changes, this diversity creates a fertile ground for investigations that aim to both analyze and redefine urban form.

Literature review

In architecture and urban planning, how form is treated has changed from a functionalist standpoint to a more sophisticated one that considers history, time, and the complexity of cities. This theoretical transition has drawn attention to urban morphology as a dynamic process rather than merely a built structure. It emphasizes how important it is to understand the city through its layers of history, impromptu changes, and socioeconomically driven fragmentations. Understanding interrupted places like Shkoza, where spontaneous structures, former agricultural portions, topographical divisions, and

contemporary interventions create a landscape that defies comprehension by a single design logic, requires these components. Aldo Rossi, a prominent architect who has had a significant influence on this approach, claims in his 1966 book "The Architecture of the City" that the city must be viewed as a structure of collective memory in which typologies and artifacts not only serve as functional components but also express identity, history, and a way of living in space. According to Rossi, the city is a palimpsest created over time, where the past is ever-present and crucial for all future interventions, rather than a structure that emerges according to the logic of modernist design. Similar to Rossi (1982), Camillo Sitte (1889) highlights the significance of public form and aesthetic sensibility in the construction of historic cities. This reading, based on Rossi and Sitte, is essential to Shkoza's context: agricultural parcel trails are not "urban chaos," or fragments from independently, but rather indicators of a morphological continuity that must be recognized and understood. The 1994 orthographic map (fig. 1 left) clearly shows these parcel traces, while the 2024 orthographic map (fig. 1 right) shows the filling of parcels with spontaneous structures. As stated by Rossi, it is clear that the historical urban structure appears as a man-made object in modern times, which gradually takes on new meanings. As a result, agricultural land becomes more and more recognized as a part of living structures.

In their 1978 book "Collage City," Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter reaffirmed this view by criticizing the concept of the city as a singular endeavor. They argue that contemporary planning tends to obliterate informality and history in favor of imposing a new, largely context-indifferent order. Instead, the authors suggest that the city is constructed as a collage in which elements of origin, time, and various functions are skillfully blended together without losing its unique identity. They acknowledge that fragmentation is an inherent feature of modern cities and propose that coherence through plurality, rather than artificial uniformity, should be the goal of architecture and urban planning. This strategy is particularly effective in Shkoza because it aids in conceptualizing a new design that transforms existing fragments into components of

a new integrated urban system without destroying them. As Rowe and Koetter point out, this new, contemporary area of Tirana has always been—and always will continue to be—a collage—a blend of the formal and the informal, the utopian and the pragmatic—highlighting the fact that Shkoza is not created as tabula rasa. They also highlight that the city must be encouraged in (Sitte, 1889) (Lynch, 1960) its disjointed state, and we might provide design frameworks that integrate these pieces with memory. In the same logic of the collage of Rowe and Koetter (1978), Kevin Lynch (1960) points out the legibility of the city through the structures as roads, nodes, and referential points, which help in constructing the spatial understanding. As seen in Figure 2, the most important buildings from history (the fabrics) are preserved as strong elements that have remained unaffected by the passage of time.

Additionally, Vitor Oliveira's theories in "Urban forms: the death and life of urban block" (2016) provide a morphological analysis model based on three processes: sustainability, transformation, and substitution. This idea of the city as a complex structure has found practical application over time. According to Oliveira, a thorough and accurate examination of urban blocks, parcels, and infrastructure allows us to piece together the history of how this area of the city came to be. It also helps us determine which structures have remained in use, which have been modified or are no longer in use. This helps in determining the possibility of effective solutions that do not take away from the area's current nature. This method gives tools to read the ground as a dynamic system in transition in Shkoza, where functional fragmentation and topological interruptions coexist, as we can see in the figure 3.

Jeremy Whitehand, who represents the Conzenian approach to morphology, emphasizes the significance of interpreting the city by its physical elements, such as the road network, site shapes, and building typologies, in a similar manner to how urban facts are analyzed. In "Conzenian Urban Morphology," he makes the case that the form of a city is built upon a series of successive transformations that may be traced via the analysis of urban planning. By interpreting the grammar of urban form in this way, it is possible to see the periphery areas—which are based on disorganized manners—as crucial components of a larger historical process. In Shkoza, where the lines separating rural areas, informality, and other novel interventions are blurred but not invisible in the alphabet of plans, this is particularly crucial.

However, Alexander R. Cuthbert goes beyond the formal analysis in his 2003 book "Analyzing Cities," placing these readings in a broader, more critical context and contending that the city's shape also reflects ideology, capital, and power. According to him, economic actors' interests are frequently prioritized over the requirements of the populace in urban development, and these asymmetries must be taken into account in critical planning. In this sense, fragmentation is caused by politics that marginalizes one area of the city while favoring another, in addition to the form. This idea is particularly relevant to Tirana, where neighborhoods like Shkoza have the potential for inclusive and sustainable urban redevelopment despite frequently being overlooked in development. Like others, Maria Cecilia Marengo's study of Cordoba, Argentina (Urban Growth by Fragments, 2023) examines in detail how public housing politics have produced isolated, mostly fragmented

districts that are not connected to other parts of the city. Marengo notes that this low-cost land-based intervention in outlying areas creates new types of spatial segregation and is driven more by commercial interests than by community needs. This reasoning is the same as that seen in Shkoza, where the functional and physical divisions come from both informality and the lack of a coordinated urban development goal, even though the settings may differ.

From another perspective, considering Sotir Dhamos' analysis of the three urban models in Tirana, or "Patterns at a Glance" as the author called it, the integration of space quality, social areas, and land use patterns results in the development of new models. These models are frequently associated with the inhabitants, social relations, and informal dynamics. This way, we can study Tirana as a model for Shkoza and also as a caution for future scenarios. Finally, this concept approach aligns with the findings of Reyes-Schade et al. (2024) in their research of Barcelona, Spain's Trambesos neighborhood, where public spaces and public transportation are integrated as part of the city's framework. In order to overcome urban fragmentation and create a new integrated, functional structure, they propose interventions at various urban scales, ranging from nodes to articulation axes. The most pertinent aspect of this work is the use of transportation as a vertebral structure of the city, which reduces motion and establishes new spatial and social relationships. This reasoning could lead to interventions in Shkoza, where the lack of functional connections and public infrastructure has left the area divided; however, there is also a significant opportunity for urban reconciliation through a modern and sensitive morphological approach.

Tools and Methodology

This paper's methodology combines critical reflection on the potential for architectonic intervention, historical spatial layering interpretation, and urban morphological study. The Shkoza area in eastern Tirana was selected as the case study because it is a representative area of a transitioning morphology, which is marked by spontaneous urban forms, agricultural development patterns, construction associated with new infrastructure, and prospects for additional integration into the metropolitan structure.

Working directly with the selected area during the 10th International Workshop, "The Mitigation of Traffic in Tirana through the Formal Reconceptualization of the City," which was conducted at Polis University in December 2024, has been a crucial component. In order to establish techniques for graphic interpretation, visual analysis, and the idea of Shkoza as a new urban node of Tirana, an experimental terrain was created during this workshop. Graphical methods such as density analysis, access networks, vacant space identification, and the possibility of overlapped functions (mixed-use strategies) were used within this frame. By using the current morphology as a foundational model for future forecasts, these methods are used to construct possible possibilities for progress without discounting it.

This study's primary methodology is morphological analysis, which is grounded in the Conzenian tradition. This analysis focuses on three elements: building type, agricultural parcels, and the road network. To enhance the credibility of the results, it employs triangulation by comparing historical maps, field observations, and institutional data



Fig. 1. Shkoza's changes from 1994 (left) to 2024 (right) are illustrated with orthophotos from Asig Geoport. The aerial images reveal the expansion of the built-up area and landscape transformation, highlighting the gradual urban sprawl over 30 years. The images clearly depict the densification and fragmentation of the space, providing a direct illustration of the broad urban transformation.

Source/ ASig Geoport (2024)

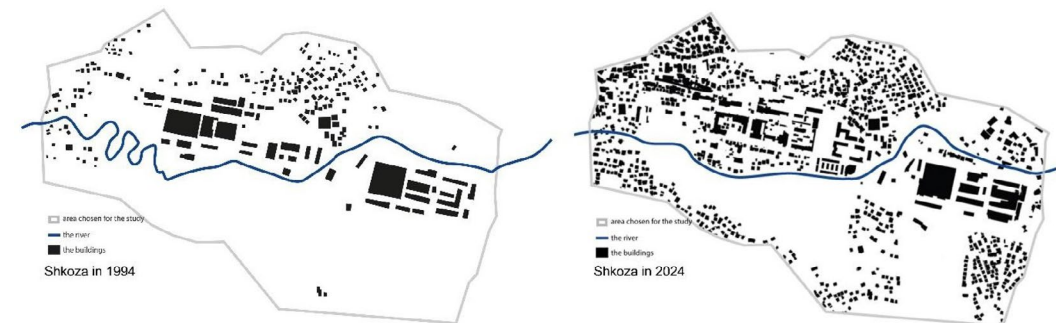


Fig. 2. Shkoza's existing buildings from 1994 (left) to 2024 (right). The visual comparison emphasizes the swift urbanization of the cityscape, where spontaneous interventions and historical layers evolve alongside new developments.

Source/ Elaborated by the author, 2025

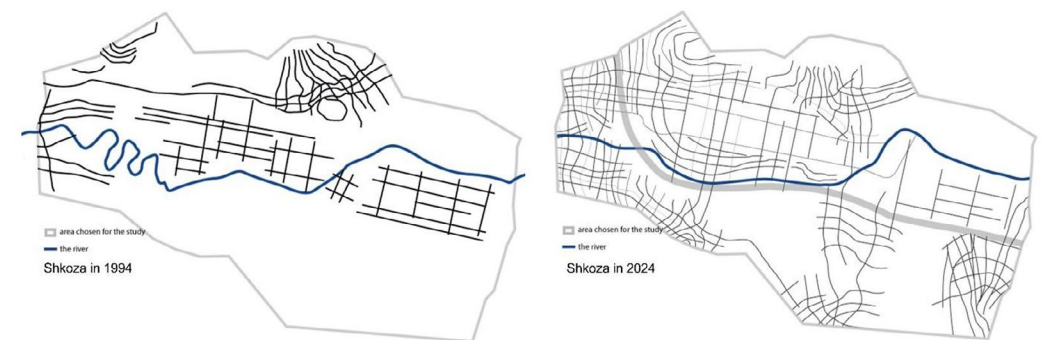


Fig. 3. Morphological analysis of the existing structure in Shkoza in 1994 (left) and 2024 (right). This comparison illustrates the shift from a dispersed urban layout to a more dense morphological structure, where new buildings have filled empty spaces and altered the existing typology.

Source/ Elaborated by the author, 2025

on urban development. This approach helps mitigate limitations that could arise from relying on a single data source. Although the study does not directly incorporate the voices of institutional bodies or local communities, their perspectives are vital for a comprehensive understanding of urban changes. Therefore, including insights from residents and decision-makers is recommended as a next step to add the social and political context to the morphological analysis. This is achieved by contrasting the real advancements depicted in digital platforms (such as Geoport, Asig, Google Earth, and OpenStreetMap) with the urban changes in the region (as shown by orthographic imagery). In order to detect changes over the past few decades and determine if the

physical structure of the land is coherent or not, the surveillance is finished with terrain recording using digital photographs, sketching, etc. Along with formal analysis, the study additionally employs a diachronic method, which seeks to discover historical layers of interventions and their effects on actual form in order to comprehend how the region has changed over time. Archival materials, urban documentation, and the interpretation of past spatial, encompassing parcel traces morphology are all used to accomplish this. This reading is also full of theoretical references that help to structure the analysis: Cuthbert for the relationship between the form and social and political forces, Whitehand for the continuity of the structure, Oliveira for the transformation logic of

the urban block, Rowe and Koetter for collage as a building method over the existing, and Rossi for the city's memory.

A flexible and interdisciplinary approach that tends to maintain tension between three elements—history, spatially analysis, and planning—defines the methodology used. By employing temporal morphology as a means of interpretation and a foundation for time-sensitive architectural interventions, this project aims to not only comprehend Shkoza but also to advance a larger conversation about design in fragmented contexts.

Conclusion

The developed analysis in this paper, supported by the experience gained in the international workshop on Shkoza and the theoretical literature readings on urban morphology, highlights the importance of understanding the city as a complex and multitemporal system. Shkoza, as an area positioned between the consolidated city and the untreated periphery, represents a tense area between unconsidered history and rapid, primarily informal development. This spatial fragmentation should not be viewed solely as an urban problem but as an opportunity to understand new dynamics of cohabitation between the form and usage of urban space. The findings of this study reveal that a thorough examination of morphological layers—such as block configurations, transportation networks, land parcel sizes, and building interactions—offers a robust framework for comprehending a region's history and its future development potential. The notion of “temporal morphologies” promotes a non-linear interpretation of the city, allowing historic sites, spontaneous adaptations, and modern requirements to harmoniously coexist in an open and collaborative framework.

In this regard, it is suggested that urban planning processes and projects adopt a strategy that respects and involves the historical context of places like Shkoza. This approach does not imply merely nostalgically preserving the past, but instead promotes a thoughtful and innovative understanding of how historical layers contribute to new urban perspectives. Techniques such as “urban collage,” Conzenian morphological analysis, and visual storytelling can serve as valuable tools in this effort.

Furthermore, engaging the local community in exploring and reshaping the space is essential. The workshop revealed that small-scale interventions, whether symbolic or functional, could foster gradual transformations that are sustainable and resonate with residents. This approach ensures that urban fragments are integrated into a growth framework, where the relationship between the old and new develops organically rather than being forcibly applied.

Ultimately, this reflection and action model should be applied to other areas with similar characteristics, whether domestically in Albania or internationally, by recognizing challenges and opportunities for innovative design and urban planning solutions. Beyond analyzing the concrete case of Shkoza, this study aims to contribute to a broader understanding of urban transformations in the peripheral areas of Albanian cities and beyond. By examining how historical layers coexist with new interventions, it offers valuable insights for urban policies and practices that need to preserve local identity while addressing modern development needs. This approach could serve as a model for similar analyses in peripheral areas, expanding the impact of these findings beyond the case study

boundaries.

References

Allmendinger, P. (2001). *Planning in Postmodern Times*. London & New York: Routledge.

Cuthbert, A. R. (2003). *Designing Cities: Critical Readings in Urban Design*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.

Dhamo, S. (2021). *Understanding Emergent Urbanism, The case of Tirana, Albania*. Springer Cham.

Koetter, C. R. (1978). *Collage City*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Lynch, K. (1960). *The Image of the City*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Oliveira, V. (2021). *Urban forms: The death and life of the urban block*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.

Rossi, A. (1966). *The architecture of the city*. (T. D. Ghirardo & J. Ockman, Trans.) Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Sitte, C. (1889). *The art of building cities: City building according to its artistic fundaments*. (C. T. Stewart, Trans.) New York, NY: Reinhold Publishing.

Whitehand, J. W. (2001). *The urban landscape: Historical development and management*. London & New York: Routledge.