

The Decommunization of the Pyramid in Tirana, the Mausoleum of Enver Hoxha

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The communist regime that governed Albania during 1944-1991 has left considerable architectural remains that are now disappearing according to new urban developments. The project presented here will explore the perception of the monumental heritage of the socialist regime starting from the monument of Piramida. For the first time in Albania, a futuristic and avant-garde architecture was built, too modern and too innovative for the time. Embedded in the urban context of Tirana, the function of this building was being the mausoleum for the chairman of the Communist Party Enver Hoxha, a place of (obligatory) pilgrimage for the citizens of that time. It was designed in 1988 by the dictator's daughter Pranvera Hoxha, his son-in-law Klement Kolaneci, Pirro Vaso, and Vladimir Bregu. This building is raised on platforms and stairs which create a square that looks like a pedestal holding for the Pyramid. According to its architects, the top view goes in harmony with the shape of Mount Dajti. In the years that brought great socio-political changes, it was used as a cultural and social center that over the years has been much neglected and eventually has been transformed as a sort of place of “modern archaeology”. For the new generation, the Piramida is something that has always been there, a part of the effective geography, or a contextual horizon, both a foreground and a background in which people feel free to be themselves. From the point of view of the generation that has lived during socialism, the value of the heritage of the dictatorship was unavoidably connected to the memory of the time spent living during the regime. These features contribute to the production of a well-rounded image of the life under the regime in all its facets, and to a better comprehension of post-socialist societies.

Keywords:

Unwanted Heritage, Socialism, Mausoleum, Albania, Digital documentation, Modern archaeology.

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INTRODUCTION

The busts and objects bearing the name of the dictator were not enough for a museum, this time not only to bear his name but to tell the story of the dictator Enver Hoxha through objects, to make his presence once and for all immortal.

Why was this building a pyramid? Was this an idea to give Enver Hoxha the size of a Pharaoh for Albania?

The architect team leader stated that the initial idea was not to make a pyramid. The choice of the pyramid is related to three motifs, starting from the antiquity of the nation's history with the tombs, although it was clear that there would be no grave. Because a nationalist ideology is often constructed based upon people's understanding of their past for ideological purposes and quite often adaptive.

Looking at the Pyramid, especially from above, it is possible to have a beret that it goes in harmony with the form of Dajti Mountain [Kolaneci 2014] (Fig.1) which resides at the back of the structure and on both sides; the clear intent of the socialist dictatorship achievements in modernizing the country and bringing progress to the Albanian society.

Then, the idea was to create a constant contagious space with the whole environment. Almost all public buildings had been definitively adapted to new functions in the new regime; the Pyramid remained probably the only public structure of the communist period in the capital that did not have a clear future.

A few know that this was a NATO Headquarter, one of the main centers for the Balkan, this happened during the war of Kosovo in 1999. It has been a fantastic musical scene for Jazz concerts, a place for fairs events and with long

series of functionality. This building explains in the most effective way our transition politics in the last 30 years. It is been part of the emotions of Albanians and it will be in further years.

To further emphasize the distance of the 'new' Piramida from the regime, in 2006 the right-wing government decided to nominate the International Cultural Centre after the iconic figure of Albanian anti-communism and gulag survivor, Pjetër Arbnori [Iacono and Këlliçi 2016].

It was in its own innovative architecture, with a strong presence. In its language, it is possible to read the intention of astonishing the visitors. Tirana was a new town, the symbol of the evolution from a simple, difficult, agrarian past [Constantine and Chekrezi 1919] to the new concept of industrial society and modernity. So wrong, at that time the idea of modernity was the Communism in the interpretation of Enver Hoxha and later on of his family, one of the most abnormal regimes around Europe mixing the ideals from the dictatorship of the proletariat with some local/vernacular nationalism [Galaxy and Watkinson 2006] and the cult of personality that isolated Albania from the whole world.

The whole city was going to be transformed into a new urban pattern, to host the people moving from the countryside, but also to disseminate the concepts of communism even through the language of architecture. The intervention from the Italian domination was suitable for this will, while the new housing was proposing an "equal for all" solution that soon would have revealed its limits and issues [Islami et al. 2018].

The pyramid was built in three years by the socialist government immediately after the death of the Albanian dictator, who passed away in April 1986 and was inaugurated in October 1988. It was to be the epicenter of the memory of the dictator Enver Hoxha, as his museum itself that had lasted only four years. But not for many years, as the fall of Communism in Albania could not be delayed. But would this building fall with him?

LOCATION

Tirana has experienced successive developments under the impacts of different regimes. It has served as a mean of expressing political visions and ideologies. With the political and economic transformations in the past decades, the role of Tirana's city center needed to be transformed: From a single community serving land to serve the public in a multi-functional manner. The importance of the Pyramid in Tirana has played a fundamental role and is one of the main elements of the "Dëshmorët e Kombit" boulevard as a clear example of a political power representative monumentalization.

By focusing on the practice of monument under a dictatorship, we do not mean to suggest that other political types, such as capitalist democracies, do not actively seek to control the past. Rather, we would argue that there exists a continuum. Governments at one end of the scale may routinely manipulate and will often distort the monumental record.

It is impossible to imagine Tirana without it. All this time, it played a multifunction role such as a place for fairs, festivals and public/private events.

This was a reason why the project did not have restored or preserved, it was not properly administered, and special parts were maintained and other parts were falling apart. The depreciation of these parts made its prestige drop too.

A lot of damages are caused to this very special construction, and it is already of crucial importance that any retraining interventions that will be made, to not lose the volumetric identity and the spatial role that this integrated building within Boulevard has. The entire area where the Pyramid lies along with its parks is about 30,000 m², in the central area of the city, and this has been the motive that has always been at the forefront for its exploitation and the disappearance of a very important part of the history of architecture and for the history of building engineering and urban planning in Albania. This made it possible to create protests from every citizen who responded to the call for its preservation, making it difficult for us to connect to the dictator, but to link it with other objects of symbolic sentiment.

SYMBOLISM AND THE HISTORY

Looking from above the Pyramid has the shape of an Eagle, becoming somehow the main symbol of Albania. A. Shkreli, an Albanian architect, has said that a French critic has made an analysis of the Pyramid, which he referred to as a post-utopian architecture that arises at a moment when the purpose it had, had died, not just the dictator himself, but the ideology [Shkreli and Tempull 2017].

The object is amortized with the carrara (Fig. 2), an imported marble from Italy, which made the Pyramid brilliant not only during the day but also at night. This material has an internal gloss that reflects every kind of light. By using a combination of marble and glass, the classic and modern are unified in rendering the monumental building more open to space and evoking the transparency. This marble was removed when it was thought to transform it into a theater [Klosi and Lame 2011]. This brought on the surface the concrete structure, the main material used in the 80s Brutalist Architecture in Albania. This structure is made of latex-based mortar, a material characterized by appreciable hydro-isolation properties.

Furthermore, inside it contained the focal point of the museum, a marble statue of a seated Hoxha in the center of a round hall. The museum had neither a proper entrance nor a ticket counter. The hall opened immediately in front of the visitor with Hoxha's statue in the center (Fig.3). The Pyramid was topped by the most significant communist symbol: by a red star to surmount the outer extremity of the building (Figs. 4 and 5), which has also now been removed. The Pyramid's interior was once quite luxurious and multi-functional. The building's interior floors were designed as mezzanines on different levels, creating an amphitheaters square look.

The 3D digital modeling of this building is a very interesting challenge to show the heritage from the communist period and also a great way to understand and present its special shape and functional aspects as a mystical land shrouded with memories to demonstrate the power of the visualization. The geometry and composition come out in their robust presence, as well as the brutalist-monumental intention of presenting a large, strong and surprising architectural context, a sort of focus for the renewed city in real time and how one thing, and how the use of color can make change happen (Fig. 6). But the fact that the shape and the guiding composition cannot be perceived from the ground level is probably a limit of this idea. The visitor moving on the ground level is going to see only "the Pyramid".

In this sense, the 3D digital model is again a great opportunity to inspect the strategy of the Pyramid (Fig.7), including the building itself, transforming the symbolic and gain a better understanding of this architecture that will perform a massive sculpture with the existing main structures being completely preserved (Fig.8). The 3D digital model also provides a way for the space to communicate the message of reality; owing to the fact that the "Pyramid" won't have the same construct in the future.

For the generation that lived during Communism, the values of the heritage of dictatorship were unavoidably connected to the memory of the time spent under the regime (Fig.9). This is because its peculiar shape and plan had become a standing symbol of communism, difficult to adapt to the new democratic regime.

Through all the centuries of their history, the Albanian people have always striven and fought to be united in the face of any invasion which threatened their freedom and their motherland. This tradition was handed down from generation to generation as a great lesson and legacy, and precisely herein must be sought one of the sources of the vitality of our people, of their ability to withstand the most ferocious and powerful enemies and occupiers and to avoid assimilation by them. [Hoxha 1984:11]

To create a more completed vision about the building, it is very important to ask the opinion of as many people as possible. For this reason, one of the key points in this research is based on a study that includes the point of view about the Pyramid of the group from all ages.

The Pyramid of Tirana is a symbol to our community and it is been a long debate about demolishing it. In regards to architectural laws, a building has to be old in order to have a value but it is not like that. In the last few years, it is thought about the revitalization and the transformation of it. What can this building give us in the future?

THE STATISTIC

From the statistics, most people feel attached or extremely attached to communist monuments, while young people do not feel attached at all. The younger age groups are a little more indifferent when it comes to the memories of the

regime. However, while the ages increase, more and more people say that they feel related to this monument. Obviously, the history of the building is associated with the dictatorship, but it is also essential as part of the city of Tirana.

As well, the statistic put in evidence the unwanted heritage and the communist nostalgia that goes in parallel with history and the generation differences seems to be much more significant with the age increasing. The percentage of people associating the Piramida with Tirana decreases the percentage while it is related to the dictator Enver Hoxha as a communism period which is less important for the people. That is why most of the people are against the plans of the demolition. The majority disagrees and wants to protect it.

The reminiscing makes people to want the protection of the cultural heritage of the dictatorship as part of themselves and not as something horrible, as they used to. It is important to preserve this heritage for the younger and future generations to give them the possibility to understand the older generations, themselves and their society better. This reflects why the communist heritage is a controversial issue and that is why Albanians today disagree on the communist period and what it represented for them [Myhrberg 2011].

THE FUTURE

Tirana in these years is in a period of great transformations, a large number of new projects are renewing the townscape, integrating, most of the time replacing, the previous structure of the town [Various 2017]. This kind of transformations is applied to single buildings as well as to the public spaces [Romano 2012]. In this “liquid” condition there is maybe a chance for the “Pyramid” as a pure object and the city, which the colors will come out everywhere, a mood of change will start transforming the spirit of people [Rama 2012].

Indeed, for its future, a new project of the MVRDV Architects [MVRDV 2018] revealed initial design for Tirana Pyramid in the presence of Prime Minister Edi Rama, Mayor Erion Veliaj, The “Albanian-American Development Foundation” (AADF) and the public.

The 11,800 m² former communist monument is set to revitalize and transform the Pyramid of Tirana into a large multifunctional technology education center for young people focused on computer programming, robotics, and startups (Figs.10 and 11). It is said to add volumes and different functions inside. Every function can find its own and to spill out their functions in order to use all the potential by creating these pavilions for the future of the Pyramid.

Assisting the roof, all the way to the top by stairs as a place you can stay and creating destinations into the roof. Flooding the building with the landscape can help to be more attracted to the people.

The project will have finished by June 2019. Also, the project purposes to give the building back to the public and making this ruin into a self-sustaining actor into the urban environment of Tirana.

These days, by maintaining the same structure, we can say that we can keep a part of our history in line with the modern one to open the structure to the public.

The most dedicated area of a city could not only be a museum, but it is also part of the boulevard that wants to show the past, but this environment should be a point to show the future because Albania is a country that wants to leave behind its past. As well, today does exist the boundary between inside and outside of the structure.

Piramida is something that had and always will be there. All these symbols that create the area around are one the part of the privacy for the Pyramid. It is a harmonize space that you cannot see the inside from the outside and this project aims the reverse, to be open to the public, to be transparent to the future and the city.

And that does not mean we should forget, but going smoothly from the past to the modern future.

“A people lives happily in the present and future so long as it is aware of its past and the greatness of its ancestors.”

Heinrich Himmler, 1936, *quoted in Hassmann (2002:84).*

FIGURES



Fig.1. The Pyramid from above that it goes in harmony with the form of Dajti Mountain. (Source: Web)



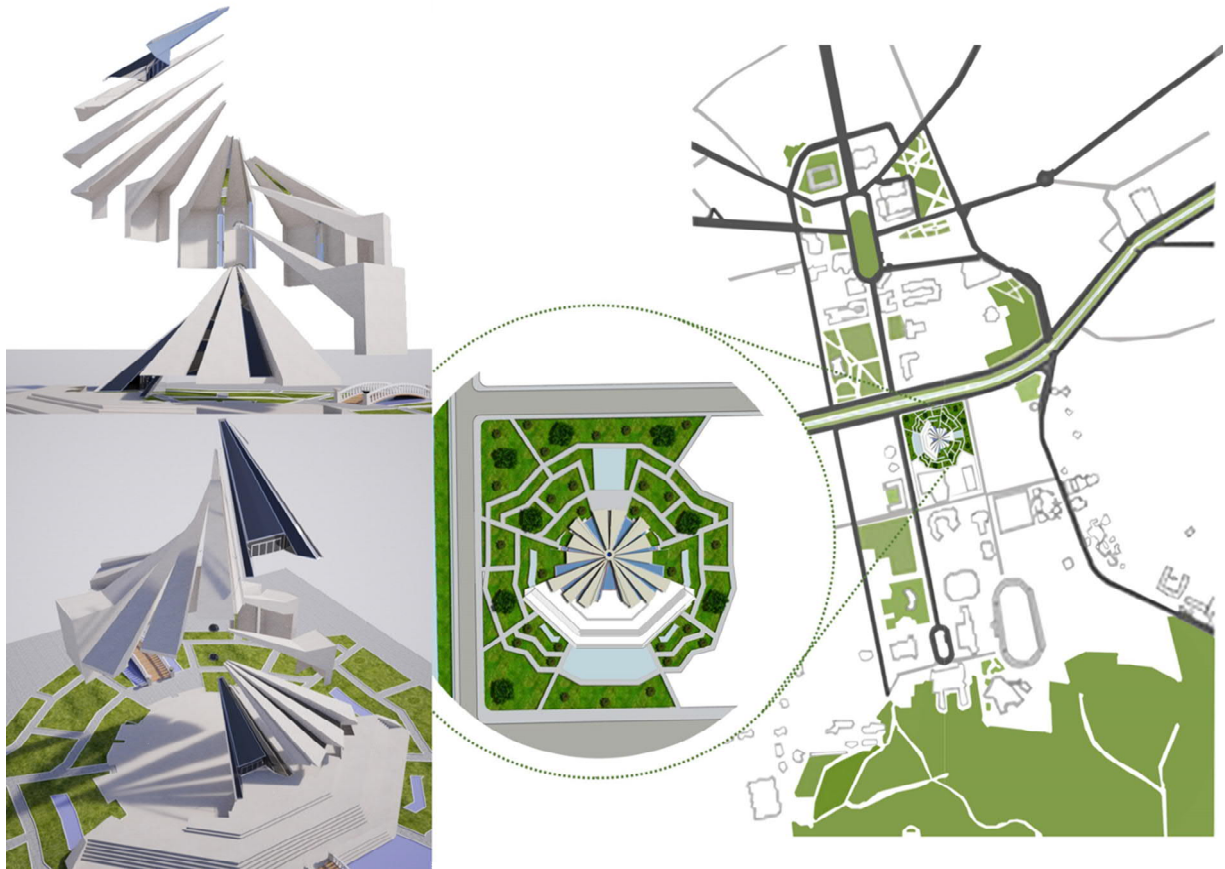
Fig.2. The Pyramid (Piramida) former museum of Enver Hoxha during its inauguration (Source: Ylli, November 1988)[Iacono and Këlliçi 2015]



Fig.3. Hoxha's statue in the center of the Pyramid. (Source: Wikipedia).



*Figs. 4-5 The Pyramid and the most significant communist symbol, a red star. Photo during 1980.
(Source: Web)*



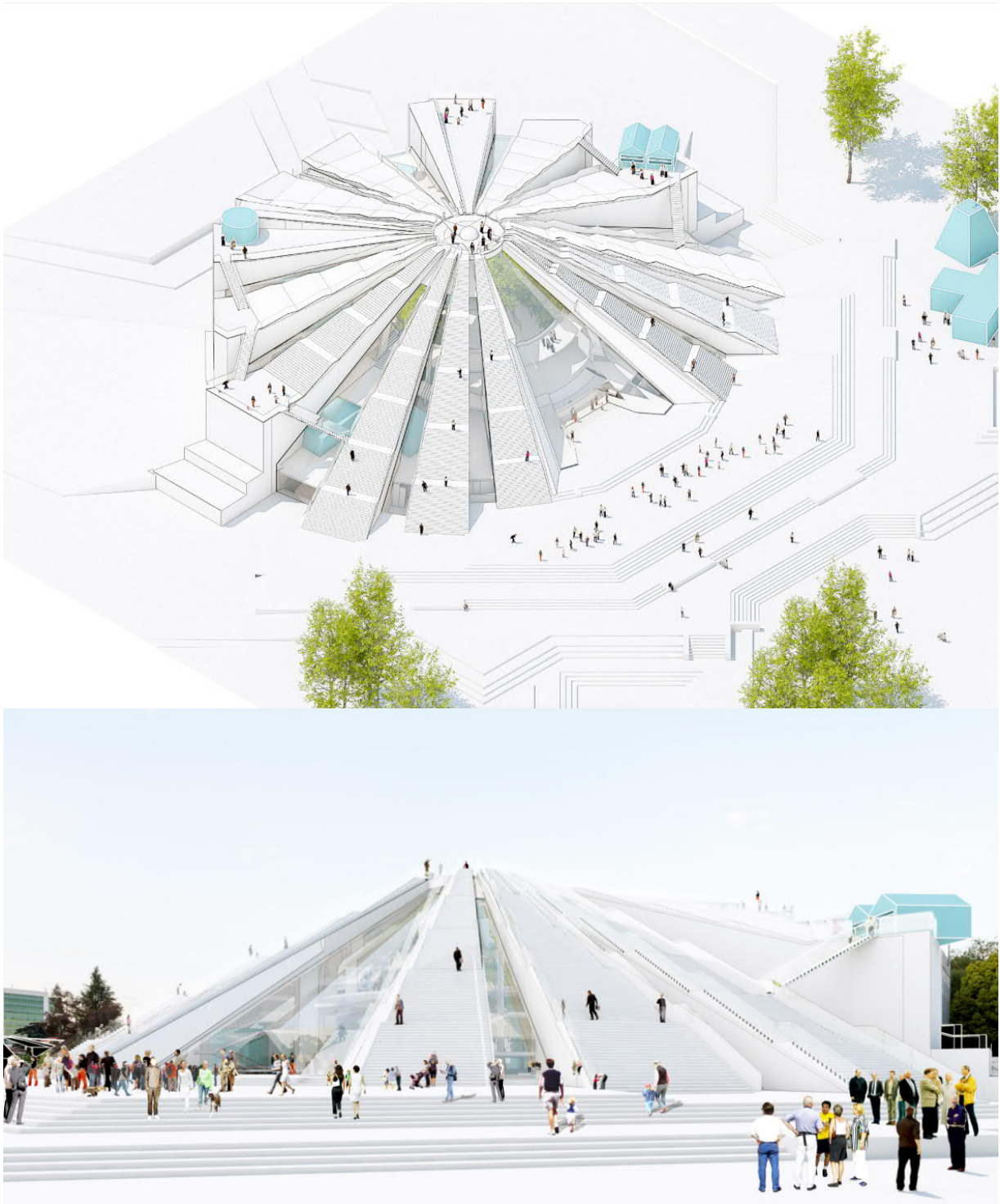
Figs.6-7. 3D model of " Dëshmorët e Kombit" boulevard and the entire area where the Pyramid lies along with its parks in the central area of the city. (Visualization: J. Demiraj)



Fig.8. 3D Model of the Piramida' as it appears nowadays. (Visualization: J.Demiraj)



Fig.9. A photo was taken under the regime. (Source: Web)



Figs.10-11. Model 3d of the new project of the MVRDV Architects for the transformation of the Pyramid of Tirana into a large multifunctional technology education center for young people. (Source: MVRDV)

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