

## **Ambiguous Memorial Landscapes in Post-socialist Cities: The Case of Tirana's Pyramid**

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### *ABSTRACT*

*This article is a descriptive study that narrates the history of the so-called "Pyramid" since 1991 and explores why it was never either restored or demolished. The Pyramid is a memorial landscape in Tirana, constructed to commemorate former socialist leader Enver Hoxha. The Pyramid became a landmark building in Tirana and has been recurrently discussed. The Pyramid has survived all discussions, decisions, and plans, but is now in decay. Generating clear answers regarding the continued existence of the Pyramid proved to be arduous, as the Pyramid has been subject to overlapping discourses around architecture and urban design, politics, history, memory, and identity.*

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*The first main conclusion of the study is that the Pyramid is hardly recognized as a memorial landscape. A second is that various governments have developed ideas, discussed, and quarrelled, but political parties could not reach an actionable conclusion – refunctioning of the Pyramid is apparently too complex. A survey was carried out to understand what the general population thinks about the Pyramid. Most respondents indicated that their attachment to the Pyramid is not very strong and they are in favour of redevelopment. The paper concludes with recommendations for adding elements of a memorial landscape to the planned redevelopment of the Pyramid.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) the change from socialism to market economies and democracies in the early 1990s was marked by an immediate and public rejection of socialism. The new model was western, and most CEE countries regarded a dismissal of socialism and a ‘return to Europe’ as different sides of the same coin (Light and Young, 2015). All countries that had socialist regimes in CEE have maintained their architectural, planning, and landscape legacy of the former period. This legacy includes large objects such as icons with high symbolic significance (Czepczyński, 2010). After the transition, the Berlin Wall was torn down, statues of Lenin and presidents were removed in many CEE countries, and streets were renamed, among other things, to do away with artefacts and memorials from the past that did not fit into the new identities that post-socialist societies were creating (Ira and Jiří, 2018).

Most artefacts built during the socialist period have been kept of course (Lisiak, 2009), and served new functions. Indeed, many buildings with a public function could be adjusted to the new system. “The same time, very pragmatically, only a few iconic constructions and buildings were mimetically communist enough to be destroyed of the course of cultural landscape cleanings in post-communist Europe,” concludes Czepczyński (2010, 73). Some of these mimetically communist buildings were just too complicated and/or disputed to be destroyed. Perhaps the most dramatic example is the Casa Populori in Bucharest, which is a detested symbol of the Ceausescu socialist period (Light and Young, 2013). Other icons outside of cities did not bother the population and were simply left, such as Sofia’s abandoned Buzludzha Monument (Valiavicharska, 2014). Built landscapes of cities are held to be

important in the construction of political identities, especially during times of crisis and/or rapid political change (Light and Young, 2013; Diener and Hagen, 2013), while icons outside of cities receive less attention.

In Tirana, the so-called Pyramid, a memorial landscape to commemorate former dictator Enver Hoxha, has survived all public and political discussions, although the structure is currently in a rather poor state. The Pyramid is an unusual socialist icon to survive, hampering the creation of an urban landscape that reflects and projects a new European capital identity, and withstanding the work of consecutive Albanian governments (Nientied and Aliaj, 2018). In Bulgaria, the empty building of the Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov, the secretary of the Comintern and the head of the Bulgarian state for the first several years of socialist government, was successfully demolished in August 1999 (Valiavicharska, 2014); but its counterpart in Tirana has survived until the present day.

**Figure 1 - Museu Enver Hoxha (Pyramid) in 1988**



Source - Tirana Tourist Guide 1990

The Pyramid has a set of features that, when taken together, are rather particular. Notably, it has a remarkable shape (Photo 1). It has functioned for only a few years as a memorial landscape honouring former communist leader Enver Hoxha, who died in 1985. The building opened in 1988, not long before

the change of system in 1991. It is a large structure, but not colossal like the Casa Populori in Bucharest. The Pyramid is in the heart of the city (See Map, Appendix 1) and the 17,000 m<sup>2</sup> of land framing the memorial landscape is valuable. Popular demands for preserving the Pyramid have been modest. In other words, there seem to be no major motives for keeping the Pyramid. However, the Pyramid is still there. This paper explores the context of why the Pyramid was never restored (it has had only temporary use) or torn down. The Pyramid has been discussed in political and academic circles, while architects, planners, and media commentators have debated the Pyramid. This debate is reviewed below. Additionally, citizens have been consulted in person and online to gather their opinions about the Pyramid.

### **AMBIGUOUS SOCIALIST ICONS**

The case of the Pyramid is treated from the angle of memorial landscapes and is informed by Dwyer and Alderman (2008), Light and Young (2013), Lisiak (2009) and Nientied and Aliaj (2018). Memorials are important symbols, expressing a version of history and casting legitimacy onto it (Dwyer, and Alderman, 2009, 167). Memorials – be it buildings, statues, street names or landscapes – affect citizens' everyday life. They make the past tangible and familiar. Memorials are also a representation of power; the political elite decides what is worth remembering. As Krzyżanowska (2016) points out, commemoration is a key tool of symbolic power and enacting symbolism, a tool that creates an identity for a place and provides various tools for its redefinition and re-construction. Memorials are part of identity formation, as they can be seen as symbols of historical constructions that are constantly being reconstituted according to a “presentist” agenda (Osborne, 2001), i.e. viewing the past with a set of attitudes and beliefs somewhat limited to the present-day. Place identity develops along these lines as well (Nientied, 2018). Big monuments or memorial landscapes can serve as highly visible markers of change.

Colomb (2011; cf. Light and Young, 2013; Begić & Mraović, 2014) suggests that in post-socialist cities, the nature of the reshaping of the landscapes has been influenced by several overlapping discourses around architecture and urban design; politics; history; memory and identity; and the changing political economy. Re-shaping of landscapes is complex and is usually contested. Lisiak

(2009) points out that in Central European cities, memories and material histories of socialist regimes remain particularly difficult to address and incorporate into the new democratic present. The remnants of the socialist past such as prefabricated apartment blocks exist side by side with modern office buildings and brand-new war memorials, thus creating a fragmented as well as aesthetically and historically diverse urban landscape (Lisiak, 2009, 449). In many CEE cities, ‘city-texts’ have been constantly reimagined and rewritten, and the same buildings or squares play diametrically different roles under various political regimes (ibid.). By giving new functions, the structure remains but identity changes and memories tend to vanish.

Dwyer and Alderman (2008) give three main approaches or metaphors for studying memorial landscapes: text, arena, and performance. In comparison to the more elaborated set of metaphors used by Nientied (2016) for an urban icon with a developmental function, Dwyer and Alderman’s basic set of metaphors is appropriate for memorial landscapes. The memorial landscape *as text* suggests analysing the landscape as a symbolic system that is written and rewritten, read and erased by ‘authors’ and ‘readers’ within their own specific socio-spatial context. In this view, landscape is not imbued with meaning once and for all, but meaning is produced and revised, in a dynamic ‘rewriting’ process. The memorial landscape *as arena* refers to the politicized nature of collective memory and to political struggles and debates that revolve around the representation of the past through the landscape. The memorial landscape *as performance* directs attention to the ways in which the memorial landscape serves as a stage, literally and figuratively, for a range of performances. The performance and display of collective memories can constitute, shape, and add significance to memorial landscapes. Examples of such performances include national parades and re-enactments of historic battles. Performance can also be the commercial exploitation of the memorial landscape, to cover costs, develop, or make profits. In the present study of the Pyramid, the metaphors of text and arena are relevant. The Pyramid was only a stage for the purpose for which it was built for a short period. In this sense, ‘landscape as performance’ has not been applicable since 1991, as the activities in and around the Pyramid are no longer a stage for further strengthening the memory of former dictator Hoxha.

## **THE PYRAMID MEMORIAL LANDSCAPE AS TEXT AND ARENA**

### *A changing plot*

In 1988, the Enver Hoxha Museum was opened in Tirana as a memorial landscape and museum of the heritage of Enver Hoxha, the long-time leader of socialist Albania who died in 1985. The museum had a very remarkable appearance in a country that did not have many architectural icons.<sup>2</sup> Klement Kolaneci and Pranvera Hoxha, the son-in-law and daughter of Enver Hoxha, respectively, designed the monument along with two other architects. Space in the city centre was created through clearing a housing area (Manahasa & Manahasa, 2014). Kodra (2017, 218) states “And here comes the paradox of the “Pyramid”: on the one hand, thanks to artistic experimentation, the most modern architectural monument of Tirana was built on the boulevard; and on the other, it is the clearest example of a political power representative’s monumentalization (Enver Hoxha). Due to the particular conditions created for a group of architects to work freely an extraordinary apologetic monument to dictatorship was erected.”

Communism ended in Albania in 1991 as did the interest in a museum celebrating the life of a former dictator. The museum’s objects were removed and the building was renamed ‘Pyramid of Tirana’. In the first years following the change of system, no decision was taken about the Pyramid and it was left to be dealt with at a later date. The plot (of the script in the making, so to speak) of the memorial was completely changed in 1991 with the transformation of the communist system. The symbolic meaning of the memorial shifted after 1991 from ‘an icon of the beloved leader’ to ‘waste of funds on the memory of a former dictator’. It was inconceivable in 1985, when plans were made for Hoxha’s museum, that collective memory would have such short expiration date. Soon after 1988, the term ‘Hoxha’s mausoleum’ was often used in tandem with Hoxha’s museum.

The first ten years of the transition in Albania were very problematic. In this period, the name of the Pyramid was changed but a decision regarding the new status or function of the Pyramid area was not a priority. Albania had been more isolated than other CEE countries (it has been labelled as the North Korea

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<sup>2</sup> See Iacono and Këlliçi (2016) for details on the history of the Pyramid.

of Europe) and building a democracy and new institutions were difficult tasks during the 1990s in a context with minimal state authority and, at times anarchistic conditions. During the turmoil of 1997, the government fell and a civil conflict resulted in the loss of 2,000 lives. In a multinational UN mission, 7,000 soldiers helped to restore order. The priorities of the (weak) government were getting basic political, bureaucratic, and market institutions working as well as pursuing its own interests, leading to widespread corruption.<sup>3</sup> It was not concerned with the potentially sensitive issue of the Hoxha museum.

#### *The spatial context and connections to the environment*

The Pyramid is located in the city centre, along the main north-south axis (See Map, Appendix 1). It is close to ministries, hotels, the prime minister's office, embassies, and new commercial developments. The parcel of the Pyramid and surrounding park is 17,000 m<sup>2</sup> and has substantial value. Over time, the Pyramid area became dilapidated and the Pyramid building now stands as an abandoned structure, on expensive ground, next to government buildings in the city centre. As a public space, it has been clearly 'under-managed', resulting in neglect and degradation (Pojani & Maci, 2015).

#### *Activities and commerce*

The Pyramid has been used on an ad-hoc basis for various purposes including an exhibition hall, a night club, and a conference centre. Currently, a TV broadcasting station has been occupying the office buildings of the Pyramid. During the Kosovo War in 1999, the Pyramid even served as a temporary NATO base. During the last decade, it has been used occasionally for exhibitions and gatherings.

#### *Hanging out*

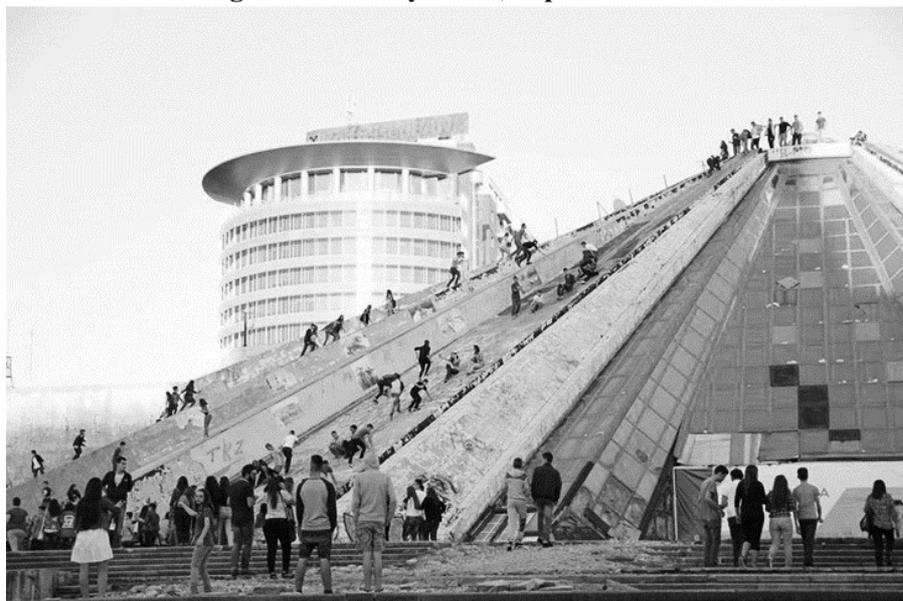
The Pyramid attracts other activities such as young people hanging out and climbing the Pyramid (Photo 2). The structure was listed on the website of Dark Tourism, which reads, "Time required: not long, maybe 15 minutes or so to walk around it to view the structure from all angles, and maybe even climb

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<sup>3</sup> See the research work of Mathisen (2003) and Kajsiu (2013).

to the top. Most normal tourists and locals alike spend no more than a few seconds glancing at it, shaking their heads, or ignore it altogether.”<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 2 - The Pyramid, September 2015**



Source: photo Eranda Janku

### *Visitors experiences*

The Pyramid is no longer open to the public, but hosted several events in the past, from exhibitions to book fairs. The inside of the building is not associated with communism any more. In addition, because of the peculiar shape of Hoxha’s mausoleum, the outside is not reminiscent of the brutalist, socialist architecture that was popular in the Balkan region.<sup>5</sup> Visitors who have been inside the Pyramid on various occasions and at different times all agree (including the authors of this article) that the Pyramid is an unusual building and that it does leave a strong impression.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> [www.dark-tourism.com/index.php/15-countries/individual-chapters/89-hoxha-pyramid-tirana-albania#b](http://www.dark-tourism.com/index.php/15-countries/individual-chapters/89-hoxha-pyramid-tirana-albania#b)

<sup>5</sup> See Stojiljković and Trajković (2018).

<sup>6</sup> A video was posted in 2016 on the inside of the Pyramid, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVkUbrP7i-M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVkUbrP7i-M)

### *Plans*

The Pyramid has been the subject of long political discussions that have not reached a conclusion about whether to demolish, improve, or redevelop it. More accurately, conclusions were reached but they were not implemented. The first plan was to turn the Pyramid into an opera. In 2005, the then Berisha government proposed to repurpose the Pyramid into a national library, but a year later the same government stated that the Pyramid would serve as the International Cultural Centre Pjeter Arbënorë, named after the late parliamentary speaker and political prisoner who died that year. In 2008, Berisha's government changed its mind again and asked the Ministry of Culture to transform the building into a pantheon that would host a theatre, a music auditorium, an art gallery, an underground library and a youth centre. In 2003 the Pyramid had been placed on a protected cultural heritage list and in 2009 the Pyramid was declared a cultural monument. In some countries, the status 'monument' has consequences – the owner may have to restore the building, keep the building in its original form, or seek local government permission to make changes to the building. In Albanian society however, the monument status is not that consequential. In 2011, plans were proposed to demolish the Pyramid and use the space of the memorial for a new parliamentary complex. The government launched a design competition, a winner was selected,<sup>7</sup> and a law to tear down the Pyramid was passed (which led the opposition to boycott the parliament).

### *Authors and texts*

There is no lack of opinions and viewpoints of the Pyramid. After the 2011 plans were initiated to knock down the Pyramid and build a new parliament on the spot, the Pyramid area was an especially hot topic of debate. The debate revolved around politics rather than on the repurposing or the preservation of socialist heritage, i.e. the meaning of the Pyramid in the urban landscape.

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<sup>7</sup> It was Architects Coop Himmelb(l)au, cf. [www.dezeen.com/2011/04/01/parliamentary-complex-of-the-republic-of-albania-by-coop-himmelblau/](http://www.dezeen.com/2011/04/01/parliamentary-complex-of-the-republic-of-albania-by-coop-himmelblau/). [accessed 24-10-2018] Also architectural competitions by themselves are debated – and outcomes translated as 'corruption'. See for example <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/socialists-see-red-over-albania-s-new-parliament> [accessed 26-10-2018]

Opponents of the demolition demonstrated and submitted a petition signed by 6,100 people. These opponents came from circles of architects and historians, and from political opposition parties. Their main point was that it was not correct to erase the country's recent past.

Shtylla (2014) discussed the proposal to demolish the Pyramid and use the land for a new parliament. He claims that the initial intention (a memorial) and the shape explain why all projects that aimed to transform the interior into offices, a theatre, a library, or exposition area never worked. The Pyramid was created as a memorial and cannot change its character. For Shtylla (2014), the Pyramid is a symbol of the communist ideology and was built in the past as a memorial of the regime. Shtylla suggests that it should be demolished and the new symbol of a parliament as a house of democracy be built.

Fuga (2014) also claimed that the Pyramid does not represent nor symbolize the communist period or the communist leader. He argued that the huge construction, after it was built, served as a museum only for three years. It was never associated with the Hoxha objects inside. During the late 1980s the people of Tirana were observing how the government was preparing to leave the ideology, and how, during the then severe economic crisis, the government still had money to waste on a colossal infrastructure. The Pyramid should not be considered as cultural heritage from the past, Fuga (2014) further stated, since there is no memory inside the Pyramid itself – the Pyramid has no relation with dictatorship. He concludes that the Pyramid is a space for re-development. It is a discourse over the land on which the object is built, the object itself has little or no meaning, Fuga claims.

Domus authors Stefa and Cantoni (2011) wrote after the announcement of the Berisha government (in power during two terms until the socialist party of Rama took over government in 2013) that the Pyramid would be destroyed and replaced by a new Parliament. "..., the pyramid becomes an innocent victim (the target) of a political decision, which somehow failed to see the mass of concrete and glass as the physical image of a constantly changing people. It is as if the narcissist power that generated it to exalt the figure of a man and celebrate his memory were raising its head again, decades later, in an attempt to bulldoze what has today become a receptacle of shared values, a place that belongs to the Albanian people without them being the owners." They add, "Re-enacting the functions and significance, contemporary Albanian society, therefore, proved to have metabolized its own history, conscious of the

dominating complexity of this process, but even more aware of the impossibility of building a future that did not have a past.”

After a brief account of what the Pyramid meant in the daily life of Albanian citizens, commentator Iva Gjoni wrote a small piece in 2013 in the paper *Illiria*: “In the 90s, the pyramid was attacked by little scoundrels in rags, some were gypsies that climbed to the top and slid to the bottom on the slanted walls. All the pictures of the dictator, together with the clips on the TV screens, were tossed into an old storage facility. The pyramid’s belly was emptied. Outside, in the fancy gardens positioned between marble stairs and fences, a new tradition was begun: hanging out. The youth crowded the marbled steps — girls just emerging from communism, boys wearing tight blue jeans (brought as gifts from the West or bought at the new market that sold used Western clothes). That was it. The Pyramid had become a meeting place. ... The pyramid now symbolized nothingness, some kind of life that had nothing to do with death any longer.”<sup>8</sup>

Dyca (2011, 7), then a student, writes: “As the debate about the Pyramid proceeds, one can’t help but start considering the Pyramid as a symbol of what it represents for the Albanian society today, rather than as just decayed, dysfunctional and distasteful”. Student Myhrberg (2011, 54-55) claims that in the comprehension of communist heritage changes, there is a tendency to appreciate them in a different, less rejecting manner. One of her informant’s pointed out the lack of self-analysis or self-criticism in the Albanian society over the communist period. The generation born after 1991 grew up in a period in which Albania wanted to forget the painful communist period, and therefore has a limited understanding of what happened and what the significance and history of the Pyramid were. Manahasa & Manahasa (2014) indicate that the Pyramid should be preserved because it is the human, mental, and manual work of the Albanian people. They suggest that it has construction value (the best construction from the communist period) and that it has been built by volunteers.<sup>9</sup> At the time of the debate about whether the Pyramid should be demolished for a new parliament, Glass (2011) collected several conflicting

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<sup>8</sup> [illyriapress.com/a-pyramids-life/](http://illyriapress.com/a-pyramids-life/)

<sup>9</sup> Opinions on voluntarism during communism vary – most people narrate from experience that ‘volunteers’ work’ was forced by the state.

opinions. Politics, heritage, identity, and other themes, are mixed together during the discussions.

In 2014, the Albanian Ministry of Culture, in collaboration with Polis University,<sup>10</sup> organized an open international design competition to gather concepts and project ideas from students and young architects for the Pyramid in the framework of the Tirana Architecture Week. The goal of the competition was ‘to provide a strategy for harmonizing the layers of history into an actively functioning, attractive, and distinctly contemporary space by re-envisioning the Pyramid Square as a part of an active system within the city,’ according to the brief. It continues, ‘The international competition for Pyramid Square is also part of the strategy of the Ministry of Culture to re-activate the ghost spaces of the communist past.’ A winner was announced, but the proposal was not followed up upon; the competition was meant as ‘an activity to open a debate about the Pyramid, and raise awareness for both society and government, that it is time to take a decision about the future of the Pyramid, in order not to ignore it further’. As Photo 3 shows, the process of decay continues four years after the design competition.

**Figure 3: Pyramid entrance, March 2018**



Source: photo Peter Nientied

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<sup>10</sup> See the special issue of Forum A+P, [://issuu.com/polisuniversity/docs/forum\\_a\\_p\\_vol\\_08](http://issuu.com/polisuniversity/docs/forum_a_p_vol_08)

Isto (2016, 26) suggests that the current rhetoric and projects of the Prime Minister Edi Rama and Tirana's mayor has been one of renewal: his reforms since entering office are referred to as 'Rilindja' or 'Re-naissance'. According to Isto, the reforms are without an understanding of history, since everything must be 'new'. During the last two years, more debates followed about Prime Minister Rama's preference for modern design. In these recent debates on various 're-naissance' projects, politics, planning, architecture, culture, memory, and identity are conflated.

In early 2017, an event was organized in the Pyramid around the question of its future use. The building was cosmetically improved, and an interesting exhibition was opened that featured various architectural and urban projects and strategies by two Italian architecture schools. Tirana's Mayor Erion Veliaj, a former minister under Rama, announced intentions to transform the Pyramid into an International Cultural Centre in June 2017, which would promote young artists.<sup>11</sup> Since 2016 the Pyramid has been under municipal jurisdiction, which makes decisions easier since they no longer need to be taken in the parliament but now fall under the responsibility of Mayor. After the elections of 2017, the socialist government obtained a majority at both the national and municipal level. If Veliaj and Rama agree on a new option, developments can take place. A new plan was announced in March 2018, and further explained in May 2018, turning Tirana's Pyramid into a multi-functional centre for youth, focusing on digital education, art, and culture. The architectural office MRDV put the plans for the initial design on their website one day after the May 2018 presentation.<sup>12</sup>

## **CONCLUSIONS SO FAR**

Three main themes of scholarly and popular discourse on the transition from socialist to post-socialist urban identities, suggested by Diener and Hagen (2013), may serve to draw some conclusions on the discussion so far. Their first theme is '*active forgetting and selective remembrance*'. The demolition of

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<sup>11</sup> Albania Daily News ([://www.albaniandailynews.com](http://www.albaniandailynews.com)) 30 June 2017 and 9 November 2018.

<sup>12</sup> See: [www.mrvd.nl/en/projects/tirana-pyramid](http://www.mrvd.nl/en/projects/tirana-pyramid). This is merely a concept – detailed plans and cost estimates have not been made as yet.

socialist icons is an example of this. The persistence of the Pyramid shows that policies of active forgetting have not been actively applied in this case. Selective remembrance is illustrated by the fact that the name of the structure was changed from a museum for Enver Hoxha into ‘Pyramid’ soon after 1991. Fostering selective remembrance was not really needed since the Pyramid lost its memorial status soon after the inauguration, although the building remained an unignorable landmark in the city. The second theme of *ambiguous spaces and banal practices* is relevant for the Pyramid. Diener and Hagen (2013, 503) write “... socialist relics permeate the urban landscape, but their ideological foundations are largely forgotten amid the banal routines of everyday life and localized identities.” In other words, in everyday life, people tend to forget the origin of monuments or memorial landscapes and, as time passes, the intended meaning of memorials ceases to exist. The Pyramid became a place for youth to hang out and for sporadic events. The third theme of Diener and Hagen (2013) is *globalized identities and cultural hybridities*. Post-socialist urbanism has featured efforts to reconcile traditional notions of local and national identity with new customs of regional and global integration. Cities were to become attractive places for foreign investment. This theme is also clearly visible in Tirana (Nientied and Aliaj, 2018). Given this trend, it is remarkable that the Pyramid memorial landscape has never been repurposed and has been left to fall into decay, which shows how difficult it is to settle this issue.

For over 25 years no decision has been reached about the Pyramid’s redevelopment that has led to more than temporary use (with the exception of the TV channel occupying the office part of the building). No simple explanation can be given for the surviving icon. During interviews conducted with various informed people, a wide range of accounts and opinions were expressed. These interviews confirmed to the researchers the observation of Coulomb (2011) that, in Tirana, the debate on the Pyramid is influenced by several overlapping discourses around architecture and urban design; politics; history; memory and identity; and the changing political economy.

Albania’s governments, like other CEE governments, have not been very sensitive to Albania’s history in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – erasing the communist past was a leading practice. Only recently has the Albania’s past been appreciated again by opening museums of the socialist period (Isto, 2017), but some claim that this is for tourism rather than the genuine recognition of the country’s socialist past. What Tirana’s citizens think and feel about the Pyramid is not

very clear. Iacono and Këlliçi (2016) conducted a survey between December 2013 and February 2014, partly online and partly face to face, among 360 respondents. The results show that in that period, over 75% of the respondents were against the demolition of the Pyramid and that more than 75% of the respondents older than 60 years, felt attached to the Pyramid (45% even ‘very attached’; 61% for the whole group of respondents). Older people tend to associate the Pyramid with Enver Hoxha and younger people to the city of Tirana in general. The researchers do not explain why attachment (a positive emotion) among senior citizens is high while sentiments regarding the socialist period are mostly negative. The authors of the present article decided to conduct a survey with a short questionnaire, asking opinions from people on the street next to the Pyramid before inviting inputs through social media.

Firstly, the Pyramid is hardly seen as an element of the communist regime, because soon after its opening the system changed. Moreover, the structure was distinct – a significant structure in the city and very unlike the buildings that were typical for the communist period. Everyday life goes on and everyday practices substitute the memories of Hoxha. Secondly, governments, practitioners, and academics have developed ideas, discussed, and quarrelled, but the ruling political parties have not been able to reach an actionable conclusion. The Pyramid has been a theme for political disagreements, promises, and designs without follow-up. The result of such long, drawn-out discussions may be that citizens don’t seem to care very much anymore, as life goes on and politics are not effective. A third point is that the structure is in a bad shape and temporary use has become impossible.

## **SURVEY**

To compare these points to Tirana’s citizen’ opinions, the authors of this article organized a survey that was conducted in March 2018. First, a face-to-face survey was done (100 respondents interviewed on four afternoons opposite the Pyramid), followed by an on-line survey (183 respondents). A four-point Likert scale was used to tabulate results. Table 1 shows the statements and the average score on the scale of 1 – 4, according to age group.

**Table 1: Average score per age group on survey statement (n = 283)**

Statement	18-25 y (n=108)	26-40 y (n=128)	41-60 y (n=33)	61> y (n=14)	Average (n=283)
1 The Pyramid reminds me of former leader Enver Hoxha	2.4	2.6	3.3	3.4	2.6
2 The Pyramid is an important symbol for Albania	3.4	3.7	3.2	3.1	3.5
3 I feel attached to the Pyramid, it should be kept	2.3	2.9	2.2	1.5	2.5
4 The Pyramid should be replaced by commercial use (offices, housing, hotel, etc., at the cost of congestion)	3.9	3.8	3.7	3.8	3.8
5 The Pyramid should be improved and turned into a park (at public cost)	3.8	3.7	3.8	3.8	3.7
6 The Pyramid should be improved and serve as a touristic attraction	3.7	3.8	3.4	3.9	3.7
7 The Pyramid and the Pyramid Square should be sold to the highest bidder	1.6	1.5	2.0	2.1	1.6

*Explanation: 1 = Fully disagree; 2=Disagree a bit; 3 = Agree a bit; 4 = Fully agree.*

Such a survey cannot give more than an impression of opinions of the general public since the sample is not well balanced. The number of respondents of the face-to-face survey was limited to 100; in practice, 135 people were addressed but 35 people did not want to co-operate since they were in a hurry or not interested. The non-reply increased with age. The on-line survey offered via social networks resulted in 183 responses. The online survey has, compared to the face-to-face street survey, a bias towards the 26-40 years old group, and a bias towards an audience of interested people on-line. Because of these inherent limitations in terms of representation, no statistical analysis was carried out – the figures merely give an indication of what the selected public thinks.

The broad tendencies in the table are outlined below.

- Regarding the statement about whether the Pyramid reminds people of the former leader Enver Hoxha, the average score increases with the age of respondents. It can be deduced that older respondents in particular have stronger associations of the Pyramid with the former regime.

- Respondents think that the Pyramid is quite an important symbol for Albania. At the same time, the answers to the statement on attachment to the Pyramid show lower averages. Attachment tends to decrease with age.
- The answers to the statements on what should be done with the Pyramid (Questions 4-6 in Table 1) indicate that the responding public thinks that something should be done. Scores on these questions are closer to ‘fully agree’ than others. However, the authors prefer to interpret the answers as *further from* ‘fully disagree’ rather than *closer to* ‘fully agree’ responses, since the public is not very outspoken regarding *what* must be done with the Pyramid area. Differences between the answers to the last four statements in the table are limited, though these statements present quite different options. The respondents largely agree that something *should* be done. These answers reveal that what will be done is less important than improving the Pyramid and turning it from a blot on the landscape into an attractive building. Respondents did not think that the Pyramid area should be sold to a highest bidder.

Differences in answers between men and women was minimal, as were answers from respondents of varying educational levels and length of residence in Tirana. This survey comes to somewhat dissimilar results than the those in the study of Iacono and Këlliçi (2016), that showed that people felt attached to the Pyramid and were against demolition. The present 2018 survey comes to other, less outspoken results. Perhaps another four years of seeing the Pyramid decaying further has changed people’s thoughts and feelings about it.

### **TIRANA’S PYRAMID - A MEMORIAL LANDSCAPE**

In 2017, Prime Minister Edi Rama opened a new main square in Tirana. Rama stated that the new square should serve as a national symbol, linking past, present, and future (Nientied and Aliaj, 2018). Irrespective of their appreciation of the new square, most citizens of Tirana would agree that the new modern square does not stimulate a reflection of the past. Various authors on post-socialist cities have described that in many CEE countries the attitude towards the socialist past has gradually been changing from rejection to a more ambiguous attitude and they call for a re-appraisal of monuments and memorial landscapes. For example, Begić & Mraović (2014, 34) suggest with regards to socialist monuments “By their mere presence they constantly remind of the

historic fact that a different social order once existed and make palpable the possibility of an alternative social organization. To symbolically erase that past, one would have to either erase or otherwise mute the symbolism that these structures carry. Alternatively, one could incorporate these monuments as markers of a period that has now passed but that still represents a part of one's personal history as well the history of one's nation, however undesirable or unappealing it may seem." Czepczyński (2010, 77) argues in a similar fashion that "The attitude towards post-socialist landscapes mirrors precedent humiliations and dictatorships, as well as present acceptance and reconciliation with own history and can be seen as an explicit indicator of political and cultural transformations." Trying to wipe out the socialist past because it was an inconvenient period that society does not want to be reminded of does not provoke the much needed, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as analysis and reflection. Rather, it leads to a societal shirking of responsibility for the past and an inability to take away lessons that can be useful for the present and the future. The Pyramid can function as a 'vehicle of memory' (Young and Light, 2015) and can tell the story of the oppression, human rights abuses, and suffering inflicted by the Party. It can also play a role for visitors, including international and especially domestic tourists, in educational formation. Younger people can ask the uncomfortable questions, such as how it is possible that everybody seems to be a victim of the past socialist system but that nobody was responsible for it, except for Enver Hoxha, in front of whose memorial visitors stand. One of the elements of a post-socialist society addressing past injustices is to develop a narrative of the socialist past.

The public is not very attached to the Pyramid in its current state and wants something to be done. Currently, plans are being made to restore and repurpose the Pyramid. Based on the line of thought above, it is recommended that a small but significant part of these new plans develop the Pyramid area as a memorial landscape in order to create a memory of the socialist past, an account of what happened during that period, and an educational opportunity from which lessons can be learned. The Pyramid area as a memorial landscape could be combined with another, new function. The narrative to be developed could include that the building has been repurposed to serve youth and enhance 21<sup>st</sup> century skills like digital literacy, creativity, arts, and critical thinking, among others. This restoration and repurposing could offer an answer to the

past socialist period in which the Pyramid area was used for the memory of a leader who tried to stop people from critical thinking and creative expression. Developing a landscape identity that stimulates citizens and visitors to reflect on the past and look to the future is far from easy. It requires a trans-disciplinary approach, public participation, the integration of multiple methodological toolboxes, and a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods for a better understanding of underlying processes (cf. Ramos et al., 2016). The Pyramid, irrespective of the future function of the building, can become a memorial landscape. Indeed, whatever the outcome of the current initiative to create a modern, multi-functional facility for digital education, art, and culture, the genesis of the Pyramid and the socialist period that governments have tried to actively forget should receive adequate consideration. In that way, the past, present, and future can be aligned.

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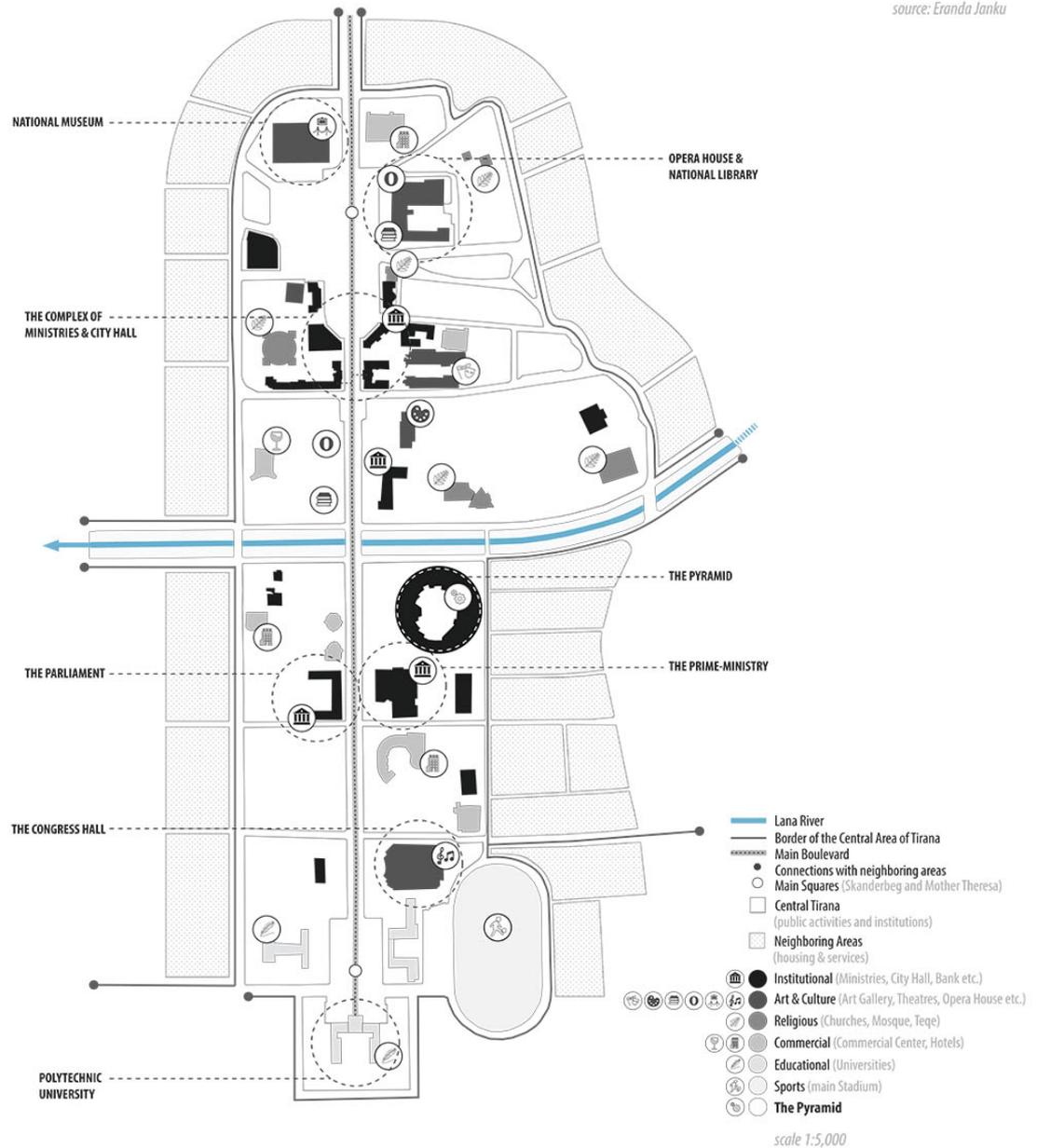
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**APPENDIX – Map of Tirana City Centre**

**MAP OF THE CENTRAL AREA OF TIRANA**

*source: Eranda Janku*



Source: Eranda Janku, 2018