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Mobilità, equità e sostenibilità nella Tirana di oggi

Mobility, Equality and Sustainability Today in Tirana

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This article discusses the development of transport inequalities in Tirana during its rapid population and economic growth since the fall of communism in 1990. The first part provides background on the development of Tirana and its urban travel systems, in an effort to take a step towards filling the research void on this city. Tirana's case is particularly interesting because during communism private car ownership was prohibited and there were virtually no cars on the streets. Subsequently, when the population acquired wealth and personal freedom, the city grew substantially in all directions and was invaded by car traffic. The second part of this article analyses the findings of recent transportation surveys, conducted by this author, with a focus on the transport disadvantage that women, children, the poor, the elderly, and the handicapped experience. This discussion is preceded by a brief review of studies reflecting the emergence of concerns about transport inequality issues in other European nations during the past few decades. The article concludes with policy recommendations based on public opinions on transport issues, collected through the author's surveys. Transport problems are never simple to resolve and always result in losses for some as well as gains for others. However, Tirana is in a very favorable position in the sense that its transport problems and adverse transport externalities may be substantially alleviated without exceptional public investments due to the high density, moderate population size, and flat terrain of the city. As a result, much urban travel could be conducted on foot, by bicycle, or with short bus rides. Strategies with a high impact but moderate cost are set forth below, which take into consideration the financial and especially political feasibility of certain interventions in Tirana. The reasons why transport problems have not been tackled at a sufficient level are mainly political rather than technical and financial. The population is politically passive due to the lengthy period of exceptionally repressive police state. There are no traditions or precedents for converting public desires into public policy and there is no public belief in any possibility of successfully pushing for change. The foremost needs of disadvantaged groups in inner Tirana include public transportation and good pedestrian facilities. In the first decade after the fall of communism in 1990, the streets and sidewalks of Tirana were in poor condition. In the last decade, the City has made substantial investments in the creation of continuous, well-paved, pleasant-looking, handicapped-equipped, tree-lined sidewalks, though badly functioning traffic lights remain a major problem. Exclusive pedestrian areas would be an important feature as well, which would reduce air and noise pollution and promote the community spirit. The City has been taking steps to pedestrianize the main commercial district; also, the city center will be converted in a car-free area once a small vehicular ring road around it has been completed.

Introduction

This article discusses the development of transport inequalities in Tirana during its rapid population and economic growth since the fall of communism in 1990. The first part provides background on the development of Tirana and its urban travel systems, in an effort to take a step towards filling the research void on this city. Tirana's case is particularly interesting because during communism private car ownership was prohibited and there were virtually no cars on the streets. Subsequently, when the population acquired wealth and personal freedom, the city grew substantially in all directions and was invaded by car traffic.

The second part of this article analyses the findings of recent transportation surveys, conducted by this author, with a focus on the transport disadvantage that women, children, the poor, the elderly, and the handicapped experience. This discussion is preceded by a brief review of studies reflecting the emergence of concerns about transport inequality issues in other European nations during the past few decades. In contrast with "green" West European policies on urban mobility, some East European countries are promoting car-based transport systems. The article concludes with policy recommendations based on public opinions on transport issues, collected through the author's surveys.

Tirana does not have a long urban tradition. In 1920, when it became the capital of the newly established nation, Tirana had only 17,000 inhabitants. From 1944 until 1990, while under communism, its population increased from 60,000 to 300,000. During that period, Tirana was relatively attractive, clean, quiet, and compact, with a substantial amount of park space (now considerably reduced). However, under the exceptionally repressive communist dictatorship, the population had virtually no wealth and owned few consumer goods. There were only shops for basic

necessities and the city was virtually devoid of cafés and restaurants. In a marked contrast to other Eastern European communist capitals, the city did not develop good public transport systems, built no urban rail infrastructure, and had poor roads. Since the fall of communism in 1990, the capital has experienced a population explosion and a complete transformation (Fig. 1).

When the Communist regime was toppled, restrictions on internal migration and emigration were removed, leading to a massive wave of migration into the capital and emigration to Greece and Italy. At the same time, the combination of substantial remittances from a large number of emigrants, primarily working in Greece and Italy, and the transformation to a market economy led to an enormous infusion of new wealth. In response to soaring housing demand, new 10-12 stories apartment buildings were built at a phenomenal pace, at high densities in the inner city, squeezed in the space among the existing buildings (for background see Pojani 2010a). Now, the population within the City's administrative borders is about 650,000. Tirana's density is high compared to other European capitals, but its overall population and size are small (Fig. 1).

The population in the metropolitan area, which includes seven other small municipalities, is over 800,000.[1]

Fortunately, the poor were not pushed out of popular inner city neighborhoods by the transformation because the former state-owned housing stock, which comprised about 60,000 apartment units in Tirana, was sold at a nominal cost to the existing tenants.[1] Therefore, they did not suffer from locational disadvantages that are common among the poor in other countries. On the other hand, the large wave of new migrants to the city, who were poor and unable to afford regular housing, built relatively large, permanent houses without permits in unserviced urban peripheries, which the government is now taking steps to legalize. Only a small amount of luxury single-family housing has been built in Tirana's suburbs due to the lack of infrastructure outside the inner city and the strong middle class cultural preference for living near the city center.

As a result of the densification and economic transformation, inner Tirana has become a vibrant city, packed with new condominium and office buildings, nightlife, crowded cafés and restaurants, and shops. Unfortunately it is also jammed with cars. In contrast, in the massive squatter suburbs commercial and social amenities are lacking, unemployment is higher, and women rarely work. Squatter residents are dependent on the inner city for work (typically as construction workers).[2] Thus a dual city has been created

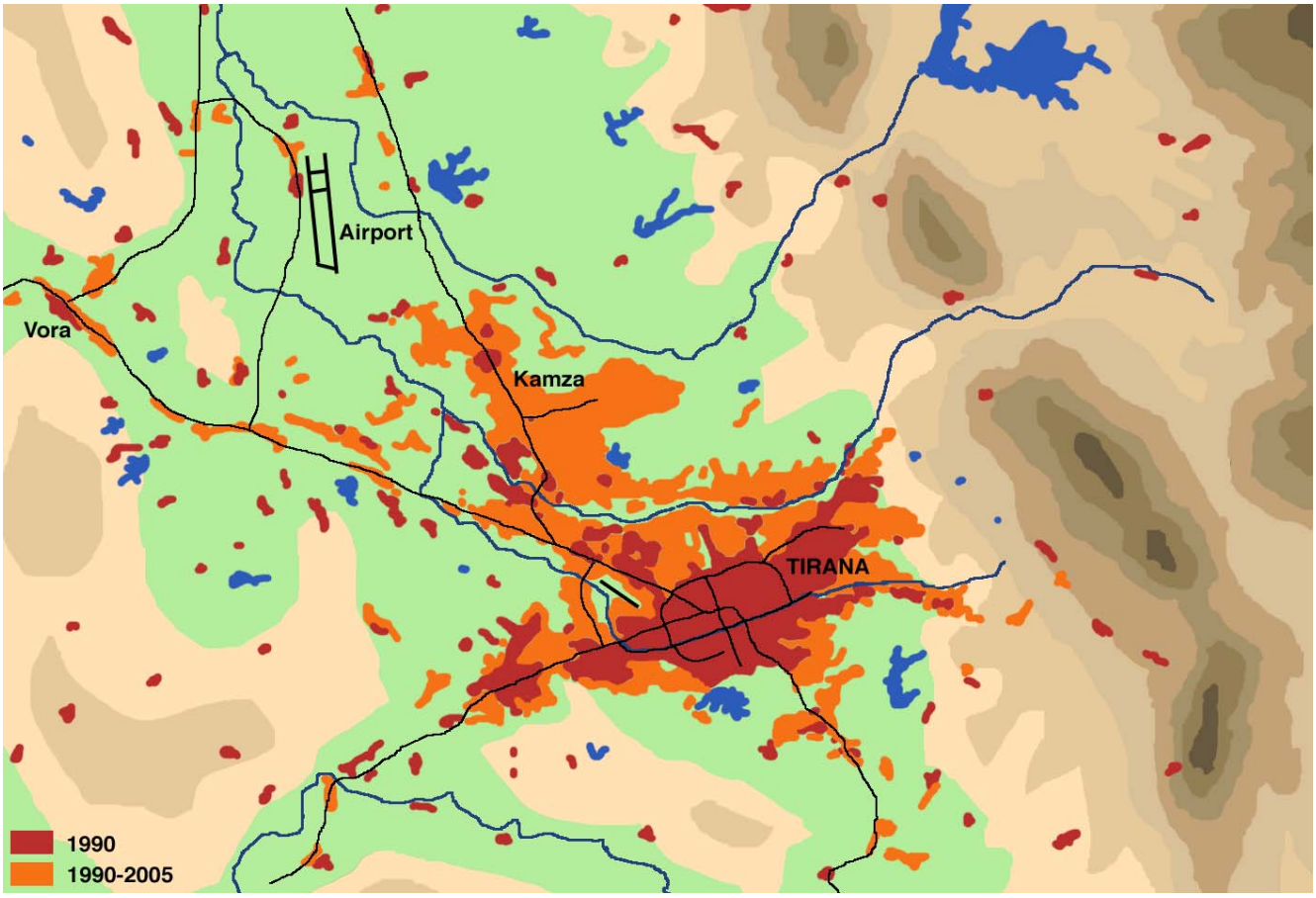


Figure 1

with a distinct dichotomy between the central city and the peri-urban settlements.
Most of the population lives in the compact central areas of the city where a substantial portion of travel for work and/or other daily tasks and social meetings can be on foot. However, in terms of urban transport, the current situation is less than desirable. After the fall of communism, car use exploded. This form of travel, which was virtually nonexistent in the communist era, is considered as a great luxury and a status symbol. Also, car ownership is widely sought in order to avoid the time and inconveniences associated with travel on the inadequate public transit system and in order to undertake recreational use on weekends. However, the compact city was not designed to accommodate car traffic and is in a gridlock much of the day. Apart from causing gridlock, the high density of cars on city streets has led to very unpleasant conditions for bulk of the population which conducts most of its travel on foot, navigating streets and sidewalks with high levels of pollution, inadequate crossings with malfunctioning stop lights, and encroached upon by building extensions. The bus network, which is the main mode of motorized travel for two-thirds of the population, offers frequent service but is overcrowded.
Also, due to the high levels of car traffic and unruly driving bicycling is now largely unfeasible and perilous. In recent years, the City has made some investments in public transport and bike lanes, but the bulk of its investments (and of foreign aid) has been in roads to accommodate more auto traffic (see Pojani 2010b; Pojani 2010c; Pojani 2011).
Under these circumstances, two forms of transport inequalities have taken root. In the inner city, women, the elderly, the poor, children, and the disabled are dependent on a poor bus system and are more vulnerable to car traffic. Also, with the stratification of income, inner Tirana is losing its egalitarian tradition and is becoming status-conscious. As such, a general sentiment is surfacing that walking (other

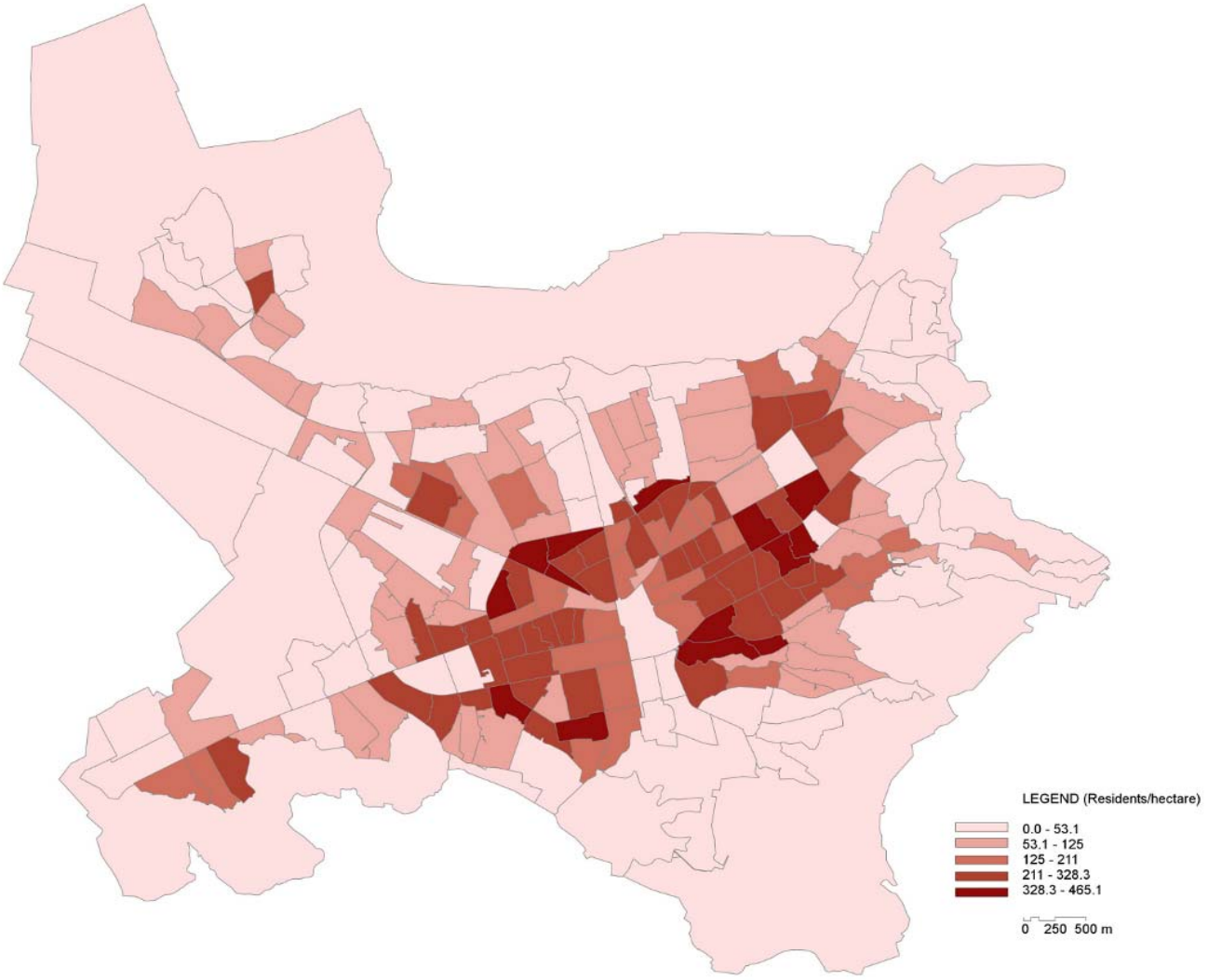


Figure 2

than recreational walking), cycling, and public transportation are lower-image modes.
The transport disadvantage of urbanites in city fringes is foremost a product of their residential location (and lack of adequate transport) in relation to the areas of employment, which are generally in the inner city.[3] For peri-urban residents bus trips to the inner-city are time-consuming, uncomfortable, and costly. Often, peri-urban residents must rely on informal transport, in the form of eight-seat minivans.

International Consideration of Transport-Based Social Exclusion

In the transitional economies of Central and Eastern European countries there has been little consideration or study of transport inequalities, although published information on urban transport in general in the region exists. Some recent scholarship on social exclusion in this region focuses on poverty outcomes but does not connect them to residential location or transportation access (see Lelkes 2006; Cerami 2008). This research gap is partly explained by the region's communist past, during which poverty, inequalities, and exclusion could not be discussed. However, there is growing understanding among professionals in the region of the negative effects of motorization and decline of public transport (Suchorzewski 2005).
Transportation-related inequalities in former socialist states are exacerbated due to the particular urban spatial structure developed during socialism, with massive high-rise apartment complexes at the peripheries of cities, sometimes around industrial plants.[4] These peripheries were often ill-served with public transport and led to extremely long journeys to the city center (Pucher and Lefevre 1996). These patterns will remain a troublesome legacy for many years to come. In addition, current trends to residential and commercial sprawl intensify the problem (Pucher and Buehler 2005).
In the rest of Europe and other developed economies, transport inequalities and exclusions based on income, gender, age, and/or disability resulting from inadequate transportation have now become important issues (Pickup and Giuliano 2005; Wenglenski and Orfeuil 2004; Hine 2004; Shi 2007). Studies have documented transport-based exclusions of disadvantaged groups from employment, social services, educational, and cultural opportunities. However, even in Western Europe, especially within continental Europe, there appears to be an absence of dialogue between the transport profession and mainstream social policy makers (Gaffron et al 2001, Pickup and Giuliano 2005).
Consideration of gender-based inequalities in transportation has received increasing attention as partly a result of growing worldwide female participation in the labor force (see GTZ 2007). In Tirana women comprised a substantial portion of the workforce during communism but are now reducing their participation. While unemployment increased for both men and women after the fall of communism, male unemployment was largely mitigated by migration, which did not lead to female labor substitution. Between 1989 and 2001, female unemployment more than doubled. The Albanian Institute of Statistics cites mobility restrictions that limit women's access to markets as a possible explanation for the disproportionate amount of female unemployment, in addition to social sanctions that confine women to household activities, elimination of female intensive activities (state enterprises), and predominance of male intensive activities (trade and construction) (Instat 2004).
Also, research on the mobility and accessibility needs of the elderly is increasing. With a growing number of people living longer than ever before and maintaining active lives, especially in developed countries, the transportation planning profession is starting to recognize that catering to this group might require special pedestrian and vehicular infrastructure and more flexible public transport options (see Alsnih and Hensher 2003). In Albania, the average life expectancy is 78 years (81 years for women), though the population is relatively young, with a median age of 30 (CIA World Factbook 2010).
Income-based social exclusion (alternatively called "spatial mismatch") has been well researched and documented in the UK, where transport inequalities pose particularly severe problems due to lower population densities and levels of public transport provision outside of densely populated urban areas. Despite substantial research, in the UK accessibility planning for social inclusion is still in its infancy. The poor have to rely on private automobiles to reach jobs and other necessary destinations (Lucas 2006; Olvera et al. 2004).
In continental Europe, public transit systems are extensive and the mobility disadvantage of certain groups due to land use and transportation patterns is less well documented, although some research indicates that it is evident. For example, in Spain's largest metropolitan areas, Barcelona and Madrid, a process of population and job decentralization, coupled with weak regional planning and lack of land-use and transport coordination, has curtailed public transport accessibility outside central cities. This, in turn, has led to an increase of car ownership. As a consequence, carless, lower-income, households are penalized (Matas et al. 2009). Furthermore, in some cases, such as in Barcelona, toll-road policies designed to limit car use have curtailed the accessibility of lower-income earners, who are excluded from the highly priced housing in the inner city (Vallejo 2004).
Despite the failings noted, in Western European countries there is growing pressure on the transport planning profession to make the links between social inclusion policy

and sustainable transport policy more transparent and accountable. Some studies suggest that in more socially-oriented countries, such as France and Switzerland, high investments in public transport have improved the accessibility of disadvantaged groups (Beaucire and Saint-Gerand 2004; Kaufmann 2004). In Paris in particular, the significant growth in reverse commuting, due to the rise of employment sub-centers that are well served by public transport, has resulted in lower car dependency (Aguiléra et al. 2009).

Transport in Tirana

Within Tirana two thirds of the households own a car. A little over one third of the households primarily use cars; almost half primarily use buses for urban transport. In some peripheral neighborhoods, public transport is the main transport mode for 60-70% of the residents (City of Tirana 2007, 2008, 2009). Increases in car ownership in Tirana have been paralleled with increases in low-income individuals in the peri-urban areas and satellite towns, who use public transport to commute to work in the capital. Three-fourths of the residents in the metropolitan area are public transport users and more than half use public transport every day. The main public transport users are the residents who live at the outer ends of the bus routes, although buses to suburban destinations run every half hour or hourly. Less than one fifth of the residents in the overall metropolitan area use cars as their primary transport mode. Car users typically spend over 10 times more per week for transport, mainly on fuel, compared to public transport users ($38 vs. $3.5) (CoPlan 2007).

Consideration of transport inequalities in Tirana is hampered by a lack of public research, which provides data on transportation patterns and, in particular, on differences among population subsets. Some surveys on transportation patterns and preferences have generated a substantial amount of information, but lack compilations by gender, age, or income subgroups. The Albanian Census does not include transportation-related questions, other than on car ownership. Since 2000, the City of Tirana has conducted citywide opinion surveys on urban issues, including transportation, with a sample size of 1,100 households as part of its "Transparency" program aimed at increasing public participation in urban planning (City of Tirana 2007, 2008, 2009). A 2007 survey was conducted by an urban planning research institute CoPlan, which was funded by the SOROS Foundation. This survey, which targeted more than 2000 residents, had a specific focus on public transport (CoPlan 2007).

This author conducted a random door-to-door transportation survey of 201 adult individuals, mostly living in a particularly desirable central city neighborhood, in 2003, and followed up in 2007 with a citywide random telephone survey of 384 adult individuals. The 2007 sample size allows for a survey of Tirana's official population (650,000 inhabitants) with a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 5. The 2007 survey responses were well distributed within the city but did not reach peri-urban residents. The surveys were conducted in the evening and included a broad range of transportation and opinion questions.

The use of the two surveys in order to provide a comparison over time is limited because target populations were not identical in the two surveys and the questions in the two surveys differed to some extent.[5] While the surveys may suffer from some methodological limitations, they provide an overview of transport patterns within the city. Some other data on urban transport are available from transport and land use studies conducted by various consultants, Albanian and foreign, in the course of the last twenty years (see ITS 2006; CGEA 1999; ECAT 2008; GTZ and IOER 2002; Landell Mills and Buro Happold 2007; Louis Berger S.A. 2005; PADCO 2002; Peter Guest 2006; Regional Consulting 1995; T.E.C.N.I.C. and Transurb 2000; Transurb 1994). However, these studies did not include population surveys.

Transport Inequalities

Disadvantaged groups considered in this discussion include women, the elderly, the poor, children, and the disabled. In regards to gender-related inequalities in the metropolitan area, the CoPlan survey of 2007 revealed that men took far more motorized trips than women within the town where they lived (75% versus 40% daily) and outside their town (21% versus 6% daily). This is due to the fact that employment levels are particularly low among women in the suburbs. The lack of mobility options and spatial isolation of suburban residents (1) reinforces the inequalities between the center city and the suburbs (2) prevents peri-urban migrants, especially women, from taking advantage of the various cultural activities that the capital has to offer, and (3) deepens the impression of backwardness that inner-city residents have towards poor squatters. The daily social life of some female squatters does not differ from lifestyle in the rural settings that they came from, though they are not employed in agriculture any longer.

Within Tirana, women have travel patterns and needs that differ from men's (Table 1). They travel in cars less than men and are far less likely to drive. A significant part of women's walking trips involves escorting young children or carrying shopping bags. Therefore, they are more impacted by serious impediments to pedestrian travel including breaks

in sidewalk paving, cars illegally parked on sidewalks, as well as the common absence or poor functioning of traffic lights at busy intersections, and high vehicle speeds.

The 2003 survey by this author of inner city residents showed that only a small percentage of women used cars daily and that most women never used a car. More women than men commuted by public transportation and on foot. Bus commutes were more stressful, commonly involving transfers. Bike usage, on the other hand, was much lower for women compared to men. In contrast, prior to 1990 large percentages of both men and women used bikes extensively for the work commute and other activities; however, no data was collected on bike use during communism.

	2003		2007	
% of people who:	Men	Women	Men	Women
do NOT drive*	-	-	24	61
travel in a car every day	29	6	63	56
never travel in a car	56	78	-	-
commute by car	30	8	42	27
commute by bus	43	58	23	38
commute by bike*	15	3	6	1
walk to work	12	31	13	23

The percentage of households with cars increased from 44% in 2003 to 64% in 2007. The 2007 surveys showed that, while women traveled by car more than in 2003, they were still less car-oriented than men. A higher percentage of women than men did not drive and rode buses or walked to work. Bicycle use during the commute had dropped to a minimal level for both sexes. Possible explanations for this include the replacement of bikes with cars as household incomes increase and fear of traffic accidents due to unruly driving.

When making transportation choices, women were more concerned about saving money, while men focused on comfort and speed. While commuting times were similar for men and women -less than 30 minutes for two thirds of both groups -women tended to spend less money on their trips to work. Women's employment level was lower than men's; therefore, on average, they might have had less disposable income of their own to spend on transport and other services.

The individuals in higher-income households who took buses to work were typically women. They chose this mode to save money or because they had no other travel options. In many higher income households in Tirana, even if women work, men are the main breadwinners. This might explain why women in these households still feel compelled to save money and believe that they are not entitled to the same level of comfort as their husbands.

The author's interviews with women of various social statuses in Tirana reveal that some of the women, who do not drive but live in car-owning households, do not obtain driver's licenses because they think driving is a man's activity. Other women think that they are incapable of learning how to drive, navigate Tirana's hectic traffic, and deal with aggressive, mostly male, drivers. Commonly, husbands do not allow their wives to use the car or discourage them from learning how to drive as they think they are likely to get involved in accidents. Also, the traffic police tend to think that women are worse drivers. For example, the head of the traffic police said in a press interview a few years ago that while women drive more cautiously, in his opinion their reflexes are much slower than men's (*Tirana Observer*, 5 November 2005). At the same time, many women in Tirana consider driving a remarkable sign of emancipation.

Children are particularly exposed to risk of accidents in a high traffic city like Tirana. Children under 14 comprise 27% of the population (Repoba 2001). The Institute of Public Health recently reported that traffic fatalities cause 13% of children's deaths in Tirana (*Gazeta Panorama*, 8 June 2009). (Citywide, in the 2003 survey, 17% of the respondents reported to have been involved in a car accident during their life.) Drivers' mistakes cause about half of child injuries and deaths; however, child pedestrians are often as fault too, as they act unpredictably, do not understand traffic rules, and if they do, they do not fully understand their responsibility to follow them (Qiriako 2008). The potential for car accidents harms children even if they are not directly involved in car accidents. While traditionally Tirana's children were able to play outdoors on the sidewalks, today this activity is nearly impossible, for fear of traffic accidents. The Directorate of Public Schools recently wrote to the press about the high risk of accidents that children in inner-city schools are exposed to and the need to introduce low-tech traffic calming devices near schools, such as stop signs or speed bumps (*Gazeta Shekulli*, 1 May 2009).[6]

More than 4,600 disabled people live in Tirana but they are rarely seen outdoors. The lack of handicapped-accessible public infrastructure, including road and sidewalk infrastructure, is a main obstacle for participation in daily life of the disabled (Ministry of Employment, Social Work, and Equal Opportunities 2006).

Persons over 65 comprise 8% of the population in Tirana. From a transportation point of view, the very elderly, who have difficulty in walking and with their vision, can be considered along with the disabled. Older people tend to be Tirana natives and more frequently own flats in neighborhoods near the city center (Instat 2002), which

have good accessibility to services but also the highest rates of car traffic. In the author's 2007 survey, older people (over 65 years old) were generally poorer and less educated than the general population. Almost half did not work; however, if they did work, they traveled to work mainly by bus or foot. A majority did not own a car and did not drive. None of the women surveyed, who were 65 years old or older, drove or biked.

The income level is another factor that limits people's, especially women's, travel options and accessibility levels in Tirana. In the author's 2007 survey, 58% of the households had incomes lower than $500 per month.[7] Individuals in lower income households were less likely to own a car, less likely to drive, less likely to commute by car, and more likely to take public transportation than respondents from higher income households.

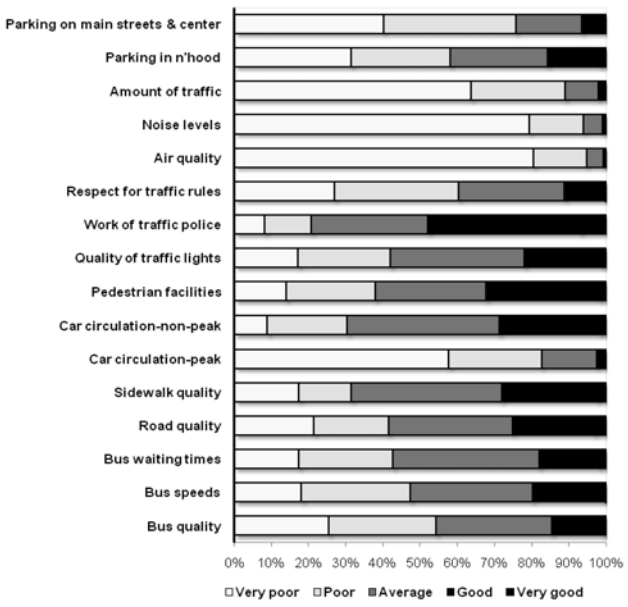
Public Opinions about Transport Issues

In the City of Tirana surveys of 2007-2008, at least one third of the respondents were dissatisfied with the quality of residential roads and at least one fifth were dissatisfied with the quality of main streets, mainly from a pedestrian's perspective. The improvement of public transport and road infrastructure ranked high in citizens' priorities, especially of those who lived farther from the core, and car traffic levels were perceived as bothersome by 70% to 80% of the respondents.

The CoPlan survey (2007) on public transport revealed that less than 10% of respondents were "very satisfied" with the bus service, while three times as many respondents were "very dissatisfied". Among suburban and rural residents, in particular, one third were "very dissatisfied". City residents tended to be more neutral towards the public bus service. The main complaints about buses included (1) sexual harassment by other passengers (2) poor hygiene (3) risk of theft, and (4) people pushing each other. The nature of these complaints is particularly unfavorable to women.

While urban bus users complained more about bus overcrowding, slow speed, and low frequency, suburban bus users complained more about high fares, frequent stops, frequent changes of bus stop locations, the fact that some suburban routes end far from the city center, and the fact that passengers are allowed to transport trading goods on buses. Eighty-eight percent of the suburban lines users and 35% of the urban lines users indicated that public transport vehicles make extra stops, in addition to the formal bus stops, on passengers' requests. The least satisfied users were the commuting employees and students, who comprise a majority of passengers. Respondents cited the carelessness of the public transport staff, the heavy traffic load, the low number of buses, and the lack of controls by authorities as the main reasons undermining bus service quality. A great majority of respondents (83%) in the metropolitan area survey by CoPlan said that they would use public transport more if the service was improved. Moreover, 67% of car users said that they would use public transportation more if the service was improved. Only 15% of car users said that they would not switch to public transport under any circumstance. The most desired improvements were an increase in service frequency and an improvement of vehicle quality. About 60% of respondents wanted longer service hours. Less pressing requests included the extension of service in peripheral areas, increases in and improvements of bus stops, and reductions in the fare. However, 57% of respondents said that they would be happy to pay a higher fare if the public transport service was improved. Interviewees who did not support fare increases commonly indicated that it was pointless to pay more because the additional revenues would be absorbed by corruption rather than used for improvements. This author's 2007 survey also included a series of questions asking respondents to evaluate transportation-related elements in the city, such as vehicular flow, parking, pedestrian facilities, and environmental quality. Chart 1 sets forth citywide views. Based on the author's survey analysis, the views of the more disadvantaged groups barely differed from the overall citywide views.

In general, Tirana's residents were critical about transportation infrastructure and other transportation-related elements in the city. The percentage of positive views was low compared to negative answers. The quality of the environment was the element that respondents felt most strongly about. More than 90% of the surveyed population considered the levels of air and noise pollution very high. This is a drastic change from 2003, when only a



small percentage of the surveyed population considered air quality a priority issue. Interestingly, older people were slightly less negative about air pollution levels. This might be due to lack of information among this group on the health dangers of pollutants in the air or less concern due to their age.

Another element that the residents were very unhappy about was the amount of vehicular traffic in the city.[8] Older people were slightly less concerned with vehicular flow. This might be due to the fact that they drive less than the average. However, they considered traffic levels, which harm them in the role of pedestrians, to be a big problem.

The availability of parking, especially on the main streets and in the more central locations, was a major preoccupation of the respondents. In fact, the supply of parking spaces is small in Tirana as the city was designed during the communist era only to handle pedestrian and public transportation. Available parking is free everywhere in Tirana, with the exception of a few main streets and private parking lots. Since 2006, the City has been planning to implement a parking plan, which would introduce charges in residential neighborhoods according to "parking zones" and put in place a sophisticated, computer-based model for charges on main streets (Peter Guest 2006); however, this plan has not yet been implemented. Respondents were mostly neutral about the quality of roads, sidewalks, and traffic lights. This outcome reflects the City's enormous effort in road and sidewalk improvements since the beginning of this decade and the corresponding shift from public concern over road conditions to concern about the quality of public transport and pollution. In fact, less than 12% of the residents named road and sidewalk repairs as their most immediate need. In contrast, in 2003 more than half of the residents considered road and sidewalk repairs an immediate priority. People who did not own cars were less preoccupied with the quality of roads. The element that residents felt most positive about, across all groups, was the work of the traffic police. Surveyors commented that the respondents felt sympathetic toward traffic police officers because their job is hard: it involves standing for hours in the middle of crowded intersections, in all weather and pollution conditions, often dealing with unruly drivers.

Therefore, answers might have reflected a desire not to criticize the police. The surveys by this author included a number of questions on preferred transport-related improvements and policies. Generally, the results of these types of surveys are subject to the limitation that hypothetical statements about future conduct do not necessarily predict future behavior. However, it is still useful to find out whether certain transport concepts have gained or lost popularity (see Table 2). Tirana's residents are increasingly in favor of progressive urban planning ideas such as the creation of bus and bike lanes, the conversion of the most crowded spots, such as the center and the commercial district (Bllok), into pedestrian areas, and traffic limitations, citywide and in residential neighborhoods. Moreover, a majority favors pricing mechanisms such as parking charges and higher taxes for polluting vehicles. The responses barely differed by subgroup. The growing interest in features such as bus and bike lanes and pedestrian areas might be explained by the fact that during the 1990s, almost one million people out of Albania's population of three million immigrated to other countries mostly in Western Europe; therefore, a large percentage of the population has been exposed to the higher quality of public transportation and built environment of many Western European cities. Interestingly, college-educated people were less in favor of the more progressive interventions than the others; this might be due to the fact that they are more likely to own cars. In 2003, about one quarter of the surveyed residents supported the introduction of urban rail transport as a priority measure compared to road-based public transport. Now, just a handful of people still think about the introduction of rail-based transport in Tirana as the public has become more aware of the cost issues related to its development.

A substantial majority of the residents supported the enlargement of the Ring Road in 2003, which was occurring while the survey was administered and was accompanied by other measures such as the creation of green medians and parking pockets, the demolitions of kiosks blocking the sidewalks, and many improvements in favor of pedestrians. Now, only a very small percentage of the respondents think that further enlargements of urban roads are desirable.

Conclusions and Future Strategies

The author's surveys reveal substantial inequalities from a transportation perspective, on account of age, sex, income level, and residential location. For a majority of Tirana's residents, buses are the only available motorized transport mode. Also, the survey data show that there is large and growing concern about the environmental quality in the city, and other transport-related issues, such as high congestion levels and insufficient parking supply. The quality of public transport services is another major preoccupation of Tirana's residents.

Meanwhile, there is broad public support for progressive interventions such as the encouragement of non-motorized modes, limits on car use, and public transport improvements. Transport problems are never simple to resolve and always result in losses for some as well as gains for others. However, Tirana is in a very favorable position in the sense that its transport problems and adverse transport externalities may be substantially alleviated without exceptional public investments due to the high density, moderate population

size, and flat terrain of the city. As a result, much urban travel could be conducted on foot, by bicycle, or with short bus rides. Strategies with a high impact but moderate cost are set forth below, which take into consideration the financial and especially political feasibility of certain interventions in Tirana. The reasons why transport problems have not been tackled at a sufficient level are mainly political rather than technical and financial. The population is politically passive due to the lengthy period of exceptionally repressive police state.

There are no traditions or precedents for converting public desires into public policy and there is no public belief in any possibility of successfully pushing for change. The foremost needs of disadvantaged groups in inner Tirana include public transportation and good pedestrian facilities. In the first decade after the fall of communism in 1990, the streets and sidewalks of Tirana were in poor condition. In the last decade, the City has made substantial investments in the creation of continuous, well-paved, pleasant-looking, handicapped-equipped, tree-lined sidewalks, though badly functioning traffic lights remain a major problem. Exclusive pedestrian areas would be an important feature as well, which would reduce air and noise pollution and promote the community spirit. The City has been taking steps to pedestrianize the main commercial district; also, the city center will be converted in a car-free area once a small vehicular ring road around it has been completed. Bicycling was a popular transport mode during communism. A few bike lanes, exclusive or shared with buses or on sidewalks, have already been created on some main streets in the center. Tirana is an ideal place for bicycling from the perspective of topography, city size, buying power, and weather: it does not snow and over 280 days per year are sunny. The city is perfectly flat and compact and it can be crossed on a bicycle from one side to the other in less than an hour; the areas that contain most of the population can be traversed in a half hour on a bike. Many people who cannot afford to own cars are able to buy bikes. However, bike trip shares have fallen down so steeply and unruly driving presents such a public danger that only the introduction of an interconnected, continuous, network of exclusive bike lanes, fully protected from the rest of traffic, might revive this mode. Although the population supports this, the City of Tirana has not shown commitment to such a drastic intervention. While transport inequalities stem from lack of car access, the eventual purchase of cars by disadvantaged groups is not a solution in light of the low average incomes of the population, the very high levels of congestion and pollution, and the social discrimination against females. Furthermore, traffic congestion in the inner city is already very problematic (though intercity roads are still operating below capacity).

Clearly, enhanced public transport is paramount in improving the accessibility of substantial portions of the population, particularly for residents in peripheries. What specific steps to take is a matter of debate. Subsidies to private bus companies do not seem to be a realistic solution as the City cannot afford them. Increasing public transport fares more in line with expenses (while requiring lower fares for lower-income groups) might draw away a portion of the customers, as already occurred in other Eastern European countries (Pucher and Lefevre 1996).

A crucial step would be the provision of dedicated bus lanes on all bus routes, a public policy and investment which also needs to be accompanied by improvements in network planning, fleet quality, and service frequency by the private bus companies.

Favored Transportation Interventions	General Population	
	2003	2007
Bike lanes	80%	92%
Exclusive bus lanes	62%	89%
Parking charges	52%	66%
Stop car circulation one day/month	77%	75%
Limit car circulation by license plate	49%	-
Lower speed limits	28%	-
Traffic calming in residential neighborhoods	-	77%
Higher taxes for old polluting cars	47%	62%
Enlarge roads*	91%	6%
Improve bus service**	13%	39%
Introduce rail-based transport***	23%	1%
Pedestrianize the commercial district****	9%	77%
Pedestrianize the center	76%	-

Notes

1 Tirana's density is approximately 14,500 inhabitants/sq. km. (Paris – 20,000, Brussels – 4,500, Rome – 2,100 inhabitants/sq. km.) None of the other Albanian cities is comparable in size to Tirana. One other city, Durres, has a population of 200,000. No other city has a population of over 100,000. In those cities, which are quite compact and small, most destinations can easily be reached by walking.

2 This type of housing privatization was standard in Eastern Europe.

3 In 2002, the author worked in squatter areas as an interviewer for an Albanian NGO, which was the local partner in a World Bank infrastructure project. Women worked in virtually none of the more than 70 households interviewed; many men were also unemployed. Entire households lived on remittances sent by their relatives abroad.

4 However, other factors limit their accessibility to urban employment, such as gender inequalities, low level of skills to compete in the service-oriented urban economy, and general lack of jobs in the Tirana region.

5 In Tirana, only one leapfrogging industrial neighborhood was built during communism, comprising approximately 4000 residents.

6 The education level of the respondents in both surveys was well above the city average. This bias might be explained by the higher willingness of college-educated individuals to participate in surveys on urban issues. In both surveys, the female respondents were relatively younger than men, which is possibly due to high emigration rates among young men. In the 2007 survey nearly two-thirds of the respondents were women. This sample bias is probably explained by the fact that the surveys were conducted after work hours, when men are more likely to be out for the evening.

7 In addition, in the last twenty years, many playgrounds within neighborhoods have disappeared to make room for new construction and parking lots. As a result, informal outdoor sports have been replaced by television watching. These issues have been brought up by several medical doctors and the Public Health Institute, who have repeatedly written to the press about the alarming increase in childhood obesity rates and type-2 diabetes (see *Gazeta Ballkan*, 6 November 2008; *Gazeta Ballkan*, 15 December 2008; *Mjekesia*, 12 July 2007).

8 The national average household income in urban areas is approximately $370/month. "Poverty" is generally defined as an income of less than $2/day/person.

9 "The peak" is not well defined in Tirana due to the informal nature of the job market with varying schedules and the tendency of workers to take a siesta and several breaks during the day.

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