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The interpretation of the Pyramid of Tirana

Abstract

This paper investigates the Enver Hoxha Pyramid in Tirana, exploring its evolution through three distinct phases of significance. Originally serving as a museum dedicated to Enver Hoxha during the communist era, the Pyramid later lost its identity following the fall of communism. However, a recent renovation has breathed new life into the structure, leading to its revitalization. The changing social and political landscape in Albania has altered the interpretation of the Pyramid, with some arguing that its long period of abandonment has detached it from its original association with Hoxha, transforming it into an integral part of Tirana's cultural heritage. While the renovation has successfully restored function and purpose to the building, some may question if the extent of the changes has made the original structure unrecognizable.

Keywords

Enver Hoxha, Pyramid of Tirana, renovation, communism, brutalist architecture.

Introduction

In the heart of Tirana, along the main boulevard of Albania's capital, stands an impressive octagonal building that resembles a pyramid. This unique structure has woven itself into the fabric of Tirana's identity, becoming an iconic emblem of the city. Despite being less than forty years old, the Pyramid has quickly become a symbol of Albania's recent history. The fate of this significant building has long been uncertain; they struggled to determine its future. However, the Pyramid remains a focal point of Tirana, reflecting its deep connection to the Albanian people and serving as a powerful reminder of the country's evolving past.

During and in the aftermath of World War II, significant regime changes took place in the Balkans. One notable example is the rise of the communists in Albania in 1944. Enver Hoxha became Prime Minister, later President, of Albania and his authoritarian rule was marked by a reign of terror, with harsh persecution of those who opposed his communist ideology. He ruled the country until his death in 1985 and his rule was characterized by fear and repression. Hoxha's regime was defined by his extreme paranoia, with the construction of numerous bunkers across the country in preparation for a potential foreign invasion (Fevziu, 2016). To commemorate his leadership and influence on Albania's development, the Enver Hoxha monument was erected in the form of a pyramid, reflecting the brutalist architectural style.

After the fall of communism in Albania the building is still standing but it has been transformed. Although this Pyramid have become part of history and was built for a different social context, the meaning of this structure changed in recent years. The trend of the changing meaning is explored in this paper.

This research question will be investigated in this paper: *'How has the changing social and political context in Albania shaped the interpretation of the Enver Hoxha Pyramid in Tirana?'* The findings are presented in three chapters. The first chapter takes a closer look at the time of the design and construction of the Enver Hoxha Pyramid. So, this chapter dives into communist Albania, Enver Hoxha and the meaning of brutalism. It focuses on the influences of politics and society on architecture in the last years of the communist era in Albania. The second chap-

on the abrupt change in the social context that led to the end of communism. The building has been empty for some time and has played an important role in historical moments, such as the Kosovo war. In the third chapter, the renovation of the Pyramid is analyzed by looking at the purpose of the renovation and how people experience the building today.

Various research methods were utilized in this study. Initially, an image review was conducted to examine how the architect implemented the experience. Additionally, a separate image review was conducted regarding the renovation. A comprehensive literature review was undertaken to explore the role of communism and its impact on architecture. Surveys and analysis of digital platforms were also used to measure the perceptions of the Albanian population regarding Enver Hoxha and the Pyramid.

Chapter 1

This chapter delves deeper into the regime of Enver Hoxha and his impact on Albania. To understand how the social context in Albania shapes the interpretation of the Enver Hoxha Pyramid, it is essential to first explore the figure for whom the structure was constructed. The chapter then delves into the role of the Pyramid in the communist regime, examining its significance. Additionally, it also focuses on the brutalist style in which the structure was built.

1.1 Regime of Enver Hoxha

Enver Hoxha came to power during the Second World War as a military commander fighting against fascism. He initiated a communist revolution and established a communist regime. Hoxha's Albania came under the influence of communist Yugoslavia until 1948 and efforts were made to incorporate Albania into Yugoslavia. When former Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union broke off diplomatic relations, Hoxha chose to align with Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union, partly to ensure an independent Albania. However, after Stalin's death and tension with the new Soviet regime, Albania became isolated, cutting ties with the Soviet Union and lead to Albania's total isolation (Sretenovic et al, 2004).

Enver Hoxha's regime was marked by a ruthless grip on power, as he prioritized maintaining control over the country. For instance, in 1967, he imposed a strict ban on religious practices in Albania, despite the country's significant Christian and Muslim population. He justified this restriction of religious beliefs by having more control over the population and by indoctrinating the population, thus seeing religion as an enemy of his ideology (Bani, 2023).

Academics were suppressed and monitored and were forced to integrate Marxism in their topic of research. As is common in authoritarian regimes, the Albanian government actively suppressed academics to prevent any opposition to the regime (Puryear, 1982). So, the intellectuals were viewed as a threat to the communist regime, as their ideas and perspectives could potentially challenge the authority and control of the state and its ideology. Hoxha's ideology was also indoctrinated into the school system. Despite claiming to serve the party, he was the one in control. He can therefore be seen as a dictator. His omnipresent portraits were in public spaces across the country, emphasizing his

dominant and controlling presence (Sretenovic et al, 2004)

Enver Hoxha's propaganda centered on glorifying Albanian nationalism through attention to language, literature, history, ethnology, geography, and folklore. He tried to make communism part of the centuries-old Albanian culture by placing cultural elements at the service of communism. For example, Communist Party celebrations also included traditional folk dance shows so that the population would see the tradition associated with the regime (Bani, 2023).

This approach served dual purposes: encouraging a sense of unity among the people and creating xenophobia as a means of creating fear and justifying isolation policies to guard against potential foreign attacks. As a result, a constant state of fear permeated the country, further reinforcing Hoxha's grip on power. The cultivation of nationalism in Albania was very effective: the population remained loyal to the regime because of the sense of unity. Conducting traditions was therefore equivalent to honoring the communist regime. In this way nationality was intertwined with communism (Bani, 2023).

Not only was there a constant fear of foreign invasion among the people, but there was also internal fear within the country. The Sigurimi, the intelligence and secret police force, was established to spy on the population. Secret microphones were placed in many locations and telephone conversations were monitored to trace anti-communist sentiments. Those who were arrested were placed into labor camps under the guise of re-education, which primarily involved forced labor (Bani, 2023).

The above evidence unequivocally indicates the desire of the state and Enver Hoxha to maintain control, indicating a totalitarian regime. Enver Hoxha's autocratic rule further solidifies his status as a dictator, as he holds complete authority. The presence of a personality cult is evident, with Hoxha's image and influence permeating various aspects of society, from tangible portraits to intangible feelings of fear instilled by his regime. The next chapter will reveal that the portraits are removed after the regime change, but his invisible presence will be felt through the fear he has created.

1.2 Positive aspects of his regime

Despite his tyranny, Hoxha's policies did have some positive aspects. Under his rule, Albania had access to necessary resources and there were job opportunities. Although there were shortages, the population did not face hunger and the state provided housing and free health-care. Hoxha aimed to modernize the country by increasing agricultural and industrial production. In addition, the country had achieved a literacy rate of almost 100% in his era (Bani, 2023).

Although there was no freedom of expression in communist Albania, the population acquired more rights during this regime. Before the Second World War, women did not have access to education or jobs, nor did they have the right to vote. During Hoxha's era, women did have access and the occupancy rate was therefore well represented (Bani, 2023). While there was no freedom of expression, these improvements were reasons why many remained loyal to the regime.

While today we view him as a dictator, it is important to consider that the experience for the Albanian people may have been different. During his time, he was one of the most decent leaders as his predecessors had not made a significant impact on the country. Additionally, due to the isolation of the country, the Albanian people did not have the opportunity to compare their regime with others abroad.

1.3 Design of the Enver Hoxha Pyramid

Hoxha died in 1985 and was buried in the National Martyrs Cemetery of Albania and was honored annually. He was depicted as a leader of the Albanian people and *'the most beloved teacher'* (Sretenovic et al, 2004).

After his death, the communist party remained in power and because Hoxha is a symbol of the battle and victory of communism, the aim was not to forget him. One way to honor and reinforce his legacy and ideology is to install a tangible architectural product. This is reflected in many former communist countries, such as the Soviet Union. After the death of the first communist leader Vladimir Lenin, a mausoleum was built for him, despite his authoritarian regime and harsh repression of political opponents. Building a mausoleum therefore serves to venerate communism and strengthen the support.

The Enver Hoxha Museum opened in 1988 and is not only a memorial for Enver Hoxha, but also a museum to view his heritage. Albania had few architectural icons at that time, partly because many historic buildings were demolished during the communist regime. The museum has a remarkable shape, which makes it one of the few architectural icons in Albania at the time of its construction. The building stands out for its unique design and the surface area of the Pyramid, and its surrounding park is 17,000 m² (Nientied & Janku 2019).



Figure 1.1: The Enver Hoxha Pyramid (Martchan 2010).

Although referred to as the Pyramid, this structure does not fit the traditional definition of a pyramid. True pyramids have a rectangular base with tapering side surfaces that converge at a single point. This building does not have a rectangular base and part of the facade is not sloping.

Its octagonal shape resembles a concrete 'umbrella' with sleek slopes that culminate in a flat circle at the apex, all encased in marble (Iacono & Këllici, 2016). The marble originating from Italy, known as Carrare marble, is known for its internal gloss and reflecting light (Miho et al, 2018). The elongated sloping windows provide a visually striking contrast against the marble exterior.

From the inside, the building has a majestic appearance with a marble statue of Enver Hoxha serving as the focal point (Figure 1.2). Notably, the museum lacks a traditional entrance or lobby, as visitors are immediately greeted by the impressive sight of Hoxha upon stepping inside the space (Iacono & Këllici, 2016). So, several methods have been used to make visitors feel submissive to Enver Hoxha.

1.4 Relationship with Brutalist architecture

The term "brutalism" was introduced by Le Corbusier and originates from the French phrase "béton brut," which translates to raw concrete.

One defining characteristic of brutalist architecture is the use of concrete as the primary building material (Gathley & King, 2017). What makes brutalism particularly fascinating is how it was embraced by both capitalist Western Europe and communist Eastern Europe in the post-World War II era. In both contexts, brutalist structures came to represent a powerful state that prioritized societal well-being through initiatives like social housing and cultural spaces and showing a new era of urban planning.

Utilizing an architectural style is a way to communicate an ideology and political position. For communist states, the emphasis was placed on showcasing the identity of the working class and a centralized power structure. The architectural style of Brutalism incorporated the communist ideology, focusing on industry, simplicity and functionality. Brutalist buildings were constructed using industrial materials like steel and concrete. Albania advocated for a '*national in form and socialist in content*' approach to architecture (Ndreçka & Nepravishta, 2014). This dictates that the architecture should embody Albanian culture while also hinting at a communist ideology.

It is no surprise that the mausoleum for Enver Hoxha was constructed in the Brutalist style, reflecting his political beliefs. However, the design is not basic like that of social housing. The reason for this is because the building must be unique and represent the former leader.



Figure 1.2: Interior of the Enver Hoxha Museum (Unkown, 1988).

1.5 Concept of the Pyramid

The memorial was designed by a group of four, including Klement Kolaneci and Pranveca Hoxha, the son-in-law and daughter of Enver Hoxha. Part of a residential area had to be demolished to make way for the Pyramid and its surroundings on Tirana's main boulevard. The location of the building is contradictory to its purpose: it was the most modern building when it opened on the boulevard, but at the same time it represented the old-fashioned repression of the previous regime in the heart of the capital. The post-Hoxha regime aimed to modernize Albania by developing its main boulevard with new and prominent buildings; the most prominent building of those buildings was the Pyramid (Iacono & Këlliçi, 2016).

The architects initially planned for a design that was not a pyramid, but the Pyramid was completed as a symbol with three motifs. The first motif is an ode to Albania's history, because there are many important graves situated in Albania. Although Enver Hoxha is not buried within the Pyramid, it is dedicated to his memory. The second motif draws inspiration from Mount Dajti, a mountain near the capital city of Tirana, which can be seen from the entrance of the Pyramid. The main motif behind the design of the Pyramid was to showcase Albania's advancement through a futuristic building for that time (Demiraj et al, 2018). While it may have looked dilapidated in recent years, the brutalist building represented a progressive design for its time.

The national symbol of Albania is the double-headed black eagle, representing courage, pride, and freedom. The two heads symbolize unity and strength. Upon closer analysis, the Pyramid's shape mirrors that of the double-headed eagle due to some essential similar elements (Figure 1.3 & 1.4). The building consists of concrete blocks with tapering sides, forming a shape reminiscent of the eagle when viewed from above. The entrance creates the illusion of two heads and a thickening of the concrete blocks in the middle represents the wings. Because of this, the building shows signs of being the national symbol of Albania. On the one hand, the eagle is a correct representation of the Hoxha's regime, because he tried to create unity with his harsh regime, the symbol of the two heads. On the other hand, the eagle represents freedom and in Hoxha's period there was no freedom at all.

For many Albanians, the structure is a symbol of a dark and oppressive period in their country's

history. It represents the control and repression that they endured under Hoxha's rule. The building is not a building for all, but for one person. On the other hand, some may view the Pyramid as a reminder of Albania's communist past and the need to confront and acknowledge that history.

1.6 Conclusion

The individual for whom the Pyramid was constructed ruled Albania with an iron fist for forty years, instilling fear through his authoritarian regime. He fostered a culture of isolation and established a cult of personality in which he is glorified. As such, constructing a memorial and museum in his honor is a sensitive matter. Originally conceived as a tribute to him, the Enver Hoxha Pyramid served this purpose for a limited time, transitioning in functionality following the collapse of communism.



Figure 1.3: Albanian Eagle.(Unknown, n.d.)



Figure 1.4: Comparison with the eagle (van Duivenbode, 2023).

Chapter 2

As the previous chapter showed, the Pyramid had an unknown future after the communist era. The Communist Party deemed it essential to honor Enver Hoxha by constructing a memorial and museum dedicated to his life and legacy. However, the following regimes had difficulty repurposing the building, because the shape of the building had become a symbol of communism, making it difficult to transform the building to fit the new democratic regime. Several attempts were made to demolish the building. For example, one plan was to build a new parliament building in its place. After years of not being able to decide, the Pyramid was in a poor condition and was abandoned for years (Iacono & Këllici, 2016). This chapter examines the significance of the Pyramid after the fall of communism. The arguments for demolition or preservation will be discussed, including the temporary functions that the building had. In addition, a survey will also be analyzed to discuss the social impact of the Pyramid.

2.1 Developments of architecture in Tirana since the transition

After the fall of communism in Eastern Europe many artifacts were not demolished but remained in use. However, buildings with political or oppressive significance were at the center of debate, including the Pyramid in Tirana (Rocker, 2017). This structure has acquired a negative connotation because it symbolizes Enver Hoxha and indirectly his tyranny. It embodies the negative legacy of communism in the city's evolving urban landscape.

The years during the transition of Albania are marked a crisis period for Albanian architecture, as the country was searching for a new identity that would give rise to a more modern architectural style. In the communist era, buildings were characterized by rigid and standardized typologies. From the transition period, architecture began to break free from the constraints of politics, allowing greater creativity and expression in architecture (Nepravishta, 2016). Tirana aimed to transform into a modern capital and embrace a new identity, while the Pyramid remains a reminder of the past as the city looks to the future.

The search for a new identity and mass migration to urban centers in Albania have brought about significant architectural developments in

Tirana during the transition period. As a result, the city's urban landscape is undergoing a transformation. While the transition initially led to uncontrolled construction in the city, efforts from 2001 onwards have focused on the renewal and modernization of Tirana, in terms of architecture and urbanism. In a short span of time, Tirana has evolved into a city of art, characterized by contemporary architecture and impressive skyscrapers. The city is shedding its image as a monotonous communist city and embracing a more dynamic and diverse architectural style. For example, the Tirana Master Plan 2013 was introduced and outlines ambitious plans for the city, including the construction of numerous new buildings (Nepravishta, 2016).

Upon closer inspection of the Pyramid's location in the Master Plan (Figure 2.1), it becomes evident that its layout is still intact. As outlined in the Master Plan, the decision was made to preserve Hoxha's monument and leave it untouched. This shows the challenges faced in repurposing this historical structure during the transition period.

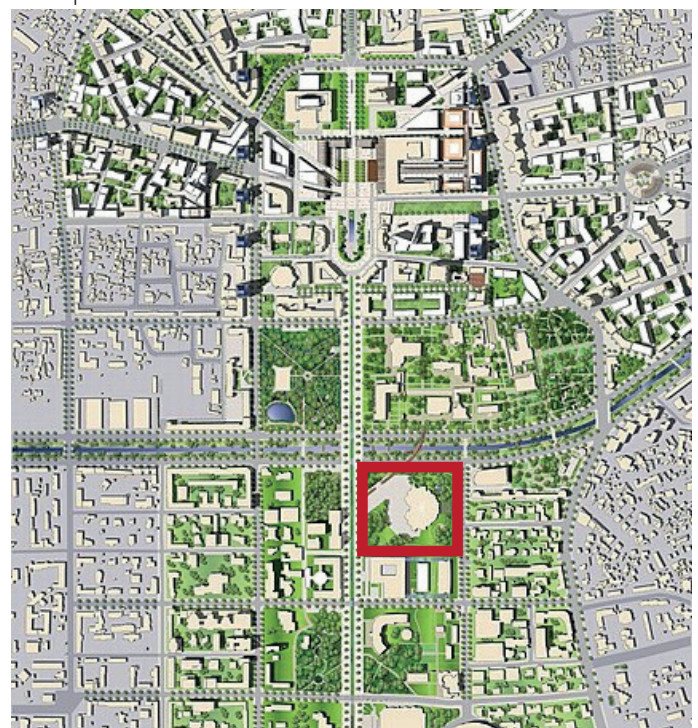


Figure 2.1: Tirana Masterplan 2013 (Architecture-Studio, 2011).

2.2 Discussions regarding communist memorials

After the regime change, the public sentiment became evident. The strategic placement of monuments, bunkers, portraits, and slogans of Hoxha and his party throughout Albania was an effort to establish a totalitarian regime and indoctrinate the population. For many Albanians, these communist memorials evoke painful emotions as they serve as reminders of oppression and the suffering of their imprisoned family members. While the presence of these memorials causes pain, their demolition would erase the memories of those who suffered (Eaton, 2011).

Following the collapse of communism in 1991, the memorial dedicated to Hoxha, and his legacy underwent a transformation. The Pyramid only served as a memorial for three years, because there was no urge to commemorate and honor a dictator of a previous regime anymore. The objects of the museum were removed, and it was renamed the Pyramid of Tirana, marking the end of commemorating a controversial figure in Albanian history (Nientied & Janku 2019).

The repurposing of memorials can be placed in two frames. The first is demolishing the building to erase the history and the second form of repurposing is re-interpreting the memorials, which removes the negative load and helps process the trauma (Eaton, 2011). It can therefore be concluded that the communist memorials cannot be integrated into daily lives in post-communist Albania. At the same time, the demolition of these structures poses a challenge as it would mean erasing a significant part of Albania's history and disregarding the deep wounds of its people.

Deciding to preserve the communist buildings is the same as deciding to preserve the national identity. The buildings reflect the socio-political and cultural atmosphere at the time of construction (Nepravishhta, 2016). During the transition period, the communist dictatorship was seen as a burden that had to be forgotten as quickly as possible, while new ideals had to be strived for and embraced. These structures emphasize the strict regime, which has caused a collective form of fear.

Research of Iacono & Këllici (2016) shows that buildings can incite a certain fear of the past. An example in Albania are the bunkers that Enver Hoxha had built throughout Albania. These bunkers still created fear after the fall of communism. By transforming these bunkers into

a specific function and painting the structures, collective fear is reduced. Yet a certain fear will always exist, because it represents the strict control of the state. On the other hand, these structures became part of the identity and preserving the buildings are a method of trauma healing from the negative past.

Similarly, the Pyramid can undergo a physical transformation but that does not guarantee that the underlying tension will dissipate. Even after changes in appearance, there remains a risk that the building could still be associated with communism.

2.3 Faith of the Pyramid

After the transition in Albania, the name of the Enver Hoxha Museum was changed, and the name of the former dictator was no longer used. The new name from then on is the Pyramid of Tirana (Nientied & Janku 2019). As previously shown, in the beginning of the post-communist era the building remained intact, but Hoxha's statue and portraits inside the building disappeared

Those in favor of the Pyramid's demolition claim that this will allow Albania to put history behind it and move forward by demolishing the most visible reminder of dictator Hoxha in the center of Tirana. For example, a Parliament Member once said that he cannot preserve a place where the ghost of a former dictator rests. Opponents of the demolition claim that the demolition will result in the loss of an important architectural heritage of Albania and that the demolition will not overcome the communist legacy. The demolition also costs a lot, while that money could be better spent on other purposes, considering the economic problems in the country (Eaton, 2011).

2.4 Functions

Over the years, the Pyramid has been a versatile space, adapting to the needs of the times. Its modern architecture and spacious design have made it suitable for a wide range of uses. From hosting art exhibitions and cultural events to transforming into a popular night club. One of the most unique uses of the Pyramid was during the Kosovo War in 1999 when it became a temporary NATO base. Its strategic location and sturdy construction made it an ideal spot for military operations. Since then, the Pyramid has continued to evolve, and even hosted a TV broadcasting station in the building (Nientied

& Janku 2019). The building's diverse functions demonstrate its resilience and adaptability. By serving a variety of purposes, it has shielded itself from potential demolition and seamlessly integrated into Tirana's cultural landscape.

One unforeseen outcome of the building was its transformation into a popular gathering spot for youth. They would frequent the area, hanging out and even climbing the Pyramid due to its accessible slopes ((Nientied & Janku 2019). As a result, the building seamlessly integrated into the public space of Tirana, with its roof becoming an extension of the surrounding park (Figure 2.2).

2.5 Survey Enver Hoxha

It is essential to explore the perspectives of the general population, in addition to the ongoing discussions about the preservation of Hoxha's legacy. Research from 2016 reveals that the people of Albania view communism as a good idea, but believe it was poorly executed. According to the study, 42% of the population believe that Enver Hoxha had a negative impact on the country's history, while 45% believe his influence was positive. The result varies per region. For example, 51% of the central region, including Tirana, viewing Hoxha negatively, compared to 33% who see his impact as positive. Conversely, in South Albania, where Hoxha's influence was less severe, the majority appreciates his lea-

dership, particularly among the Tosk population (OSCE, 2016). This is also since he favored the Tosks over the Ghegs, the Albanian population in Northern Albania and Kosovo (Blumi, 1997).

In 2016, the platform Quora asked Albanians for their current opinions on Enver Hoxha, prompting a diverse range of responses. While these views may not fully represent the entire population, they offer insight into the differing perspectives on the former leader. Some respondents noted widespread dislike for Hoxha but acknowledged a nostalgic minority. This sentiment is partly attributed to ongoing societal challenges and due to dissatisfaction with the current non-functioning policies. Conversely, another individual in Albania portrayed Hoxha as a heroic figure during his lifetime but explained that the leader is demonized after the collapse of communism. One respondent stood out by praising Hoxha for rebuilding a war-torn Albania, citing achievements such as low crime rates and accessible healthcare. They argue that without Hoxha, Albania as a nation may not have survived (Quora, 2016). This range of opinions underscores the complex legacy of Enver Hoxha and highlights the ongoing debate within Albanian society.



Figure 2.2: People climbing the Pyramid of Tirana (Janku, 2015)

2.6 Survey Pyramid of Tirana

A survey was conducted between December 2013 and February 2014 in which the role of communism was asked to civilians in Tirana. A questionnaire had already been held in 2010 in which it emerged that the residents of Tirana do not immediately associate the building with Enver Hoxha, but rather see it as a prominent landmark that serves as a compass in the city (Pojani, 2010). A total of 360 correspondents responded to the 2013-2014 survey. For example, this survey included whether it is important that the communist past should be commemorated, whether they feel connected to the remaining monuments of the communist regime, should the state actively preserve and maintain the monuments, etcetera. The last four of the fourteen questions were about the Pyramid and people were asked whether the Pyramid should be demolished or preserved (Iacono & Këllici, 2016).

The survey took place six months after the national elections. Prior to the survey, the researchers had a few hypotheses. One was that the outcomes would be very polarized because during the election the two leaders had opposing views on communism. The second hypothesis is that the older generation would feel more involved with elements of Hoxha's regime because they experienced his regime (Iacono & Këllici, 2016).

However, the survey shows that the hypotheses are incorrect. Many respondents indicated that they absolutely do not like the idea of demolishing the Pyramid. It turned out that there was no big difference between the younger and older generation (Figure 2.3). The reasons why the Pyramid should be preserved were also different. Iacono and Këllici (2016) argue that the reason not to demolish a building with a negative charge is because the building was only built in the late 1980s, which means that the older generation cannot build a relationship with the monument. After opening as a museum for only four years, it also took on other important functions. As a result, the Pyramid is not directly associated with communism and Enver Hoxha, but as part of Tirana. In my opinion, by hosting cultural events, the Pyramid has distanced itself from its association with Enver Hoxha.

It looks like that the group that associates the Pyramid with Enver Hoxha is much higher in the age category over sixty than the younger generation (Figure 2.4). That is because this generation has spent most of their lives in an era

when Enver Hoxha was glorified. They associate the Pyramid with Tirana to a much lesser extent than the generation between 20 and 59 years old (Iacono and Këllici 2016).

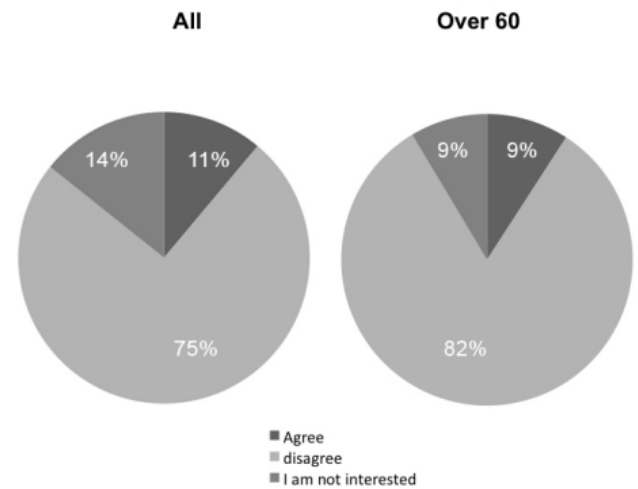


Figure 2.3: Results survey about demolition (Iacono & Këllici, 2016).

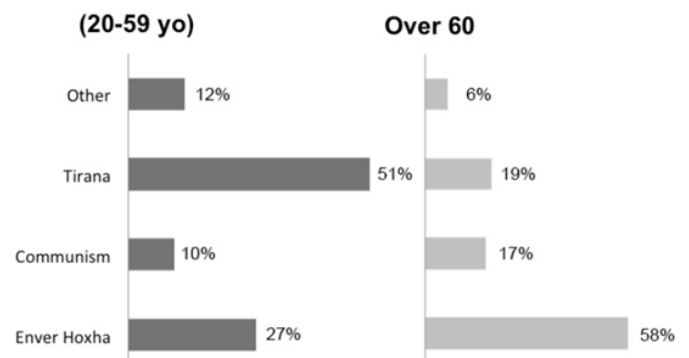


Figure 2.4: Results survey about Enver Hoxha (Iacono & Këllici, 2016).

2.7 Conclusion

It can be deduced that the Pyramid in Tirana only functioned as a museum for a few years before its use became uncertain. Over the past three decades, there have been debates regarding whether to demolish or preserve the building. Despite its communist origins, most people do not associate the Pyramid with Enver Hoxha or communism, but rather with the city itself and its resilience. The majority of Tirana's residents oppose the demolition of the Pyramid, as it has become a symbol of the city's strength. This sentiment is understandable, considering the building only served as a museum for three out of its 35 years of existence. The Pyramid has undoubtedly become an integral part of Tirana's identity.

Chapter 3

After leading an aimless and uncertain existence for more than thirty years, the Pyramid opened to the public in 2023 after a thorough renovation. The renovation plan was devised by the Dutch architectural firm MVRDV and is described by MVRDV as an open sculpture in a new park. Several colorful boxes are spread throughout the complex: the boxes with mixed functions are places inside the Pyramid, on the roof of the Pyramid and in the surrounding park. The 11,800 m2 monument is transformed into a multifunctional technology education center for the youth. This chapter explains the renovation in more detail, including the reasons for MVRDV's design decisions. In addition, the significance of the renovated Pyramid for the residents of Tirana is also investigated. Because the renovation was recently conducted and no survey has yet taken place, this research is based on analyzing comments on posts about the renovation on social media and a newsarticle.

3.1 Inauguration

The renovated Pyramid of Albania was inaugurated on October 16, 2023. Remarkably, the inauguration date is the same as the birth date of former dictator Enver Hoxha. Historically, this date was marked by grand parades celebrating his birthday, as detailed in chapter 1. However, in 2023, a significant shift occurred as his birthday became a day of transition, symbolized by the transformation of his memorial into a public space accessible to all residents of Tirana.

So, the inauguration serves as a symbol, signifying not only the preservation of the structure itself, but also a shift in its significance and purpose. While during the communist era the Pyramid served as a tool for promoting Hoxha's legacy and ideology, post-renovation it now serves as a space for education and inspiration for the youth, with a focus on shaping a brighter future. Chapter 2 showed an unexpected outcome of the building's abandonment: it became a popular meeting spot for youth. What is fascinating is that this gathering place was intentionally incorporated into the renovation plans, demonstrating that MVRDV carefully considered and embraced this aspect of the building's history.

The evolution of the Pyramid from a monument of the past to a symbol of hope for the future is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of the city and its people. The shift in the Pyramid's

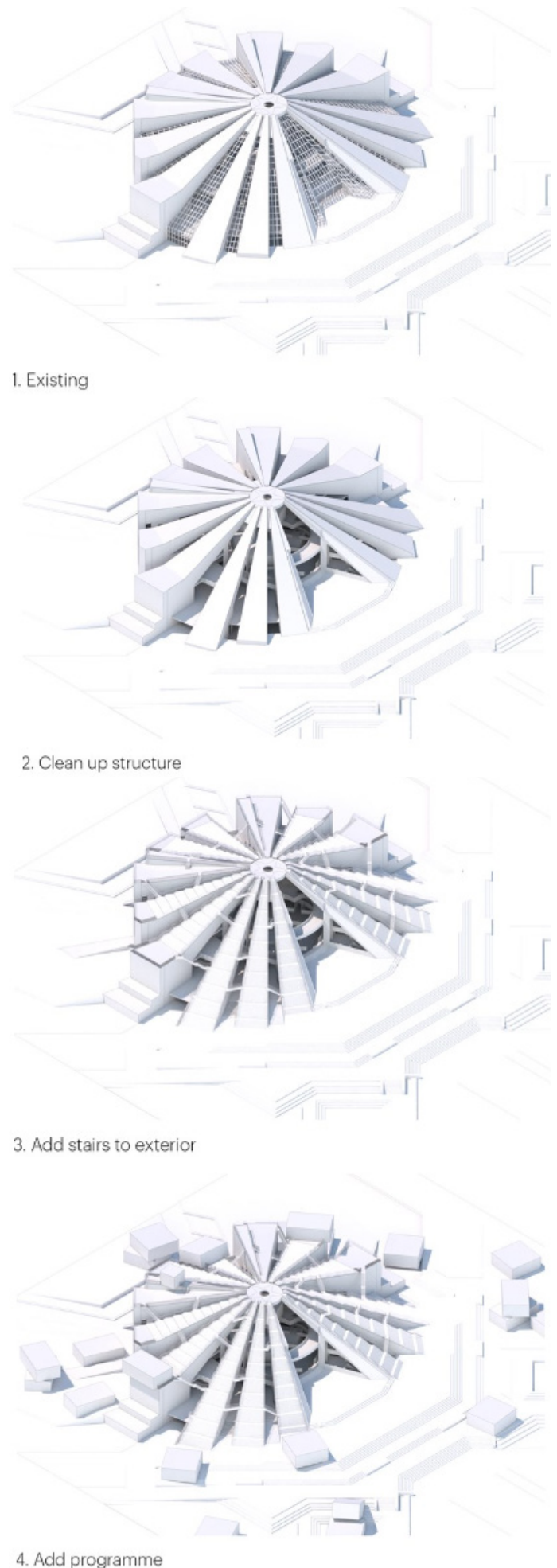


Figure 3.1: Concept of the renovation (MVRDV, 2023)

meaning reflects a broader cultural shift towards embracing progress and inclusivity, marking a new chapter in Tirana's history.

3.2 Elements of the renovation

MVRDV's goal was to renovate the building without drastically changing its appearance. The original structure of the building was carefully preserved during the renovation, maintaining its original shape. MVRDV's goal was to honor the building's character and history, evident in the concept drawings (Figure 3.1) which show the conservation of the structure and only removing certain elements like window frames. Additionally, stairs were added to the sloping roof along with multifunctional cubes to enhance the building's functionality. The final touch involved linking the surrounding park to the Pyramid (MVRDV, 2023). Looking at the concept drawings, it can be concluded that necessary adjustments have been made to preserve the original integrity of the building: the stairs ensure that everyone can climb the pyramid and the added cubes give the environment a new function and provide dynamics.

The boxes have different functions, such as cafes, studios, workshops, offices and classrooms. It therefore mainly functions as a mix of education, retail and culture. In addition, MVRDV

(2023) indicates that stairs have been added to the sloping facades of the Pyramid, so that the Albanians can walk on the former mausoleum of the dictator. Prior to the renovation, mainly the younger generation climbed the building, but this was a dangerous experience. By adding stairs, MVRDV gives more people the possibility to climb it. An elevator has even been added, so that everyone can stand on the structure.

The first chapter revealed that the interior design of the space was originally focused on Enver Hoxha, with his statue at the center. For a long time, there was no object in the center of space. However, following last year's renovation, the cubes filled the original space of Hoxha's statue. Despite the prominent placement of the cubes, the space does not create a subordinate feeling. This may be due to the size of the cubes disrupting the overall spaciousness of the interior. Additionally, the lack of order and hierarchy, as well as the random stacking and bright colors of the cubes, contribute to a dynamic and less strict atmosphere. The cubes' various functions prevent any one part from dominating attention, unlike the previous focus on Enver Hoxha. MVRDV's aim of giving the building back to the public has been successful, as visitors no longer feel subordinate upon entering the space.



Figure 3.2: Interior after the renovation (van Duivenbode, 2023).

3.3 Meaning of the renovation

According to Winy Maas, the founding partner of MVRDV, all symbols that glorify Enver Hoxha and his regime have been removed, but a few details have been retained so that visitors do not forget the history (MVRDV, 2023).

However, the previous chapter already showed that only most of the generation over 60 years old in 2014 directly associates the building with Enver Hoxha. From an outsider's perspective, it seems as if the Pyramid was an eyesore before the renovation because it is a remainder of a fearsome regime. MVRDV probably designed the Pyramid from that exit point to return the building to the people. It has been reclaimed, because the building was abandoned for years and is now open to the public again. However, one may wonder whether the building has also been reclaimed from Enver Hoxha and the communist regime, because many residents of Tirana do not directly associate the building with Enver Hoxha but see it more as a landmark of the city itself. The Pyramid symbolizes the victory over the communist regime, even before the renovation. MVRDV took its inspiration from this idea, that the people reclaimed the building from the former dictator.

3.4 Comments on MVRDV's social media post

On November 8, 2023, MVRDV posted the renovation of the Pyramid on their Instagram account. By March 2024, the post had reached 7,481 likes and twenty-two comments. The reactions are mixed, with a resident of Tirana expressing disappointment in the new design, seeing the cubes as a reminder of the communist era due to poor quality materials and fading colors. Two other residents also criticized the materials used. One commenter questioned the concept, feeling the connection to Tirana and its history was unclear and found the design lacking in aesthetics (Figure 3.3). While some comments were positive, it is worth noting that they came from individuals outside of Albania, offering outsider perspectives on the renovation.

In addition, opposing views can also be heard in the newspaper. For example, the following is said in the *Architectural Record* by Luarasi (2024): *MVRDV's rash of colored boxes effectively anesthetizes the compositional density of the Pyramid by ignoring its eurhythmic enclosure and by squatting in the interior void. If there ever were a spatial symbol of democracy, it would be the empty center, or rather the conscious act of not*



Figure 3.3: Relationship with Tirana (van Duivenbode, 2023)

occupying it, of letting it be a void. From the author's point of view, the boxes have nothing to do with the construction and the placement of the boxes disrupts the space. The author is not wrong. The goal was to return the building to the people. So, the renovation should represent the new democratic Albania. This could best be achieved by emptying the space and creating a space for all without allowing any object to dominate.

Luarasi (2024) indicates that the 'colony of colored boxes' pose a problem and that the two best alternatives are demolition and constructing a new building or keeping the building with as few adjustments as possible. He calls the first alternative a more honest choice than the renovation, because the renovation aimed to erase the symbolism. According to him, there is no point in preserving the building if you try to erase his past. He also calls the stairs a historical forgery, because it now seems as if the stairs have always been there, while they were only added after the renovation. It is important to voice dissenting opinions, as projects are often met with praise during the design and inauguration phases, causing potential negatives to be overlooked.

3.5 Questioning the renovation

One might question whether the transformation of the Pyramid of Tirana truly qualifies as a renovation that retains the original elements. While the supporting structure remains intact, and the silhouette of the building has been preserved, the Pyramid's unique characteristics, such as its gray color and sleek brutalist facades, disappeared. The addition of stairs, balconies, and a new white color has dramatically altered its appearance.

Figures 3.4 and 3.5 show that the changes of the renovation have significantly shifted the building's character. Chapter 2 showed that the Pyramid is associated with Tirana and despite its original purpose and brutalist style, the association with Enver Hoxha is gradually disappearing. It appears that MVRDV's primary focus was on removing the communist elements from the Pyramid, despite the fact that it has not been associated with communism for quite some time. Unfortunately, in doing so, they also inadvertently erased elements that were connected to Tirana.

While the renovation itself may be well-executed, the disregard for the opinions of Tirana's residents is concerning. The drastic alterations

to the Pyramid risk erasing the memories and sentiments associated with it. The building that once stood as a symbol of the city for over three decades now looks almost unrecognizable. In my opinion, this could hinder the process of moving on from the past and can explain the negative voices from social media.

3.6 Conclusion

From the above, it is evident that the renovation has created a new discussion. The renovation certainly has positive aspects and the concept has been well executed. On one hand, the building has been repurposed successfully and demolition has been prevented. On the other hand, it is apparent that certain aspects of the renovation may have been excessive, altering its original purpose and significance. The transformation, while visually striking, may diminish the building's cultural and historical value in the eyes of the local community.



Figure 3.4: Pyramid before the renovation (sai-ko3p, 2014)



Figure 3.5: Pyramid after the renovation (van Duivenbode, 2023)

Conclusion

Overall, the significance of the Enver Hoxha Pyramid can be understood in three distinct phases. Firstly, during the communist era, the Pyramid served as a museum honoring Enver Hoxha and exhibit. After the fall of communism, the period is characterized by a purposeless existence of the Pyramid, losing its function as a museum dedicated to the former dictator and without a new identity. However, following its renovation, a new chapter began, with the Pyramid being embraced and reclaimed by the population.

Based on the data after the end of communism, the population did not favor the building when it operated as a museum. During the communist era, the population held the building in high regard, with parades being held in honor of Enver Hoxha. However, it became evident after communism that the population was dissatisfied with the building, leading to a change in its function. The meaning of the building for the population was therefore a result of government oppression during that time.

In the years that followed, people were able to openly express their opinions about Enver Hoxha and his regime, allowing for conflicting views to be heard. Research suggests that most of the Tirana's population no longer associates the building solely with Enver Hoxha. This shift is attributed to the building serving as a museum for only a limited time, while later playing crucial roles for Albanians, such as serving as a head-quarter during the Kosovo war in 1999. Additionally, the building's long periods of vacancy have helped diminish its association with Enver Hoxha. It is the older generation, who lived through Hoxha's harsh regime, that still strongly associates the building with him.

Despite the envy of the population towards the building, people were against its demolition. The building has become part of Tirana and its past. In addition, the people who associate the building with Enver Hoxha felt that it is important to maintain the building so that the suffering during the regime will not be forgotten. In my view, the renovation of the building and its repurposing are commendable. By saving it from demolition and giving it a fresh look, the building now represents a new era and serves a new function.

At the same time, certain aspects of the renovation, like the color change and the addition of the stairs, were drastic, resulting in the old ver-

sion becoming unrecognizable. This could potentially cause the residents of Tirana to lose their emotional connection to the Pyramid of Tirana.

This paper focused on the following main question: *'How has the changing social and political context in Albania shaped the interpretation of the Enver Hoxha Pyramid in Tirana?'* It is difficult to give an answer to this, but it is clear that the changing social and political context does influence the interpretation. In the beginning Enver Hoxha and the museum were honored and immediately after the transition his statues were replaced from the Pyramid. The resentment that the population harbored towards the Pyramid disappeared over time, because the association with Enver Hoxha gradually disappeared. How the renovation will change the interpretation will become visible in the coming years.

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