Making People and Communities Partners of the Authorities through the Assistance for Urban Rehabilitation and Housing

Tirana July 24, 2001
Introduction

This report describes the final results of the “Making People and Communities Partners of the Authorities through the assistance for Urban Rehabilitation and Housing”. About 350 meters of neighborhood roads were upgraded including upgrading of green recreational spaces, benefiting a total of 162 residents in a badly deteriorating inner city Tirana neighborhood. Community based actions formed the basis for this upgrading, in which communities and authorities became partners in development. The project served as a pilot action to show authorities and community a new approach on neighborhood upgrading.

The project was implemented by Co-Plan, with financial support of (i) NOVIB (58.4% contribution); (ii) the Project Implementation Unit in the Ministry of Public Works (HABITAT II) under UNDP funding (36.4% contribution); (iii) Co-PLAN (2% contribution); and (iv) the residents (2.2% contribution).

This report covers the period January 2000 to end of April 2001, which is the total project implementation period.

Co-Plan staff involved were:
Flamur Kuçi: Team Leader during the preparatory phase.
Project preparation; Social economic survey; Survey report, and community meetings.

Luan Deda: Team Leader during the implementation phase.
Design and investment management; Organize and establish community representation and community contributions; Coordination with all actors as municipality and Ministry.

Suela Muça: Team member.
Involved in interviews, technical design, community work and reporting.

Other Co-PLAN expertise:
Klaud Manahasa: Architect for the public space and infrastructure improvement.

ASSA Association of Social Services of Albania: Implementing partner for the social component of the project in regard to community work.

Main contacts:
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   2. A copy of the official letter of the Tirana Mayor for approving the project intervention in the area.
   3. List of heads of households involved in the project and their respective contributions.
   4. The first draft proposal for the follow up of the project.
   5. Copy of the agreement between Co-Plan and the Greenery Enterprise for the works in the area.
   6. A copy of the agreements of Co-Plan with community representatives for the implementation of the project.
I. **Background**

The last decade’s changes had a serious negative impact on housing, infrastructure and public space use and maintenance of Tirana’s neighborhoods. The quality of housing in the city deteriorated fast, particularly for the exterior\(^1\) faces. The old apartment blocks that have been privatized early 90’s are sub-standard to today’s norms, and individuals took informal initiatives to extend their apartments with extra rooms, garages or balconies.

Besides, much public space is informally occupied by garages, small shops, bakeries, new 12-storey apartment blocks etc. Parking space is nowadays getting a serious problem since more households have a car.

These new constructions have highly damaged the existing neighborhood infrastructure, resulting in less water, power cuts, overload of sewer systems, insufficient waste collection and complete neighborhood road destruction.

Occupation of public space means also creating ‘private’ gardens to ensure future extensions or create their own privacy. Besides, it is also a measure to prevent others from occupying this public space.

The selected site is a typical neighborhood of Tirana that lost much of its appreciated values as urban space and services after the 90’s. During the dictatorship the area was considered a good example of a harmonizing environment, with considerable recreational space and greenery.

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\(^1\) Development process in Albania is still on the stage where people invest on housing only in the interior while outside the door there is no body’s responsibility.
However, at this moment around 90% of the land is occupied by constructions or ‘private’ gardens, and only 5 to 10% remains for public use. So, the elderly people and particularly children have no place for recreation in the area left, unless they use road space (when the road is not completely damaged), or some of the few remaining open places.

The resident composition of the neighborhood has dramatically changed during the last ten years. About 60% of the households are new comers, mainly living in the new high-rise constructions. In general, the former residents remind the wonderful neighborhood atmosphere from before 90’, and are now blaming the new comers (constructions) for all their problems².

² Results come from the social-economic survey carried out in the preparation phase of the project. Attached to this report is a copy of this survey.
II. Pilot site selection.

An acceptable sized pilot site had to be selected in respect to available funds and example setting. Initially the Project Implementation Unit, in consultation with Co-Plan, selected site Nr.1 (see drawing) as appropriate for implementing the project. This site was about 0.5 hectares with about 100 households. The three blocks had a considerable open space between them, which was protected and maintained by the residents, and this fact served as an incentive to improve this space.

Unfortunately, in this particular area there was a conflict between the residents and a construction company that pretended to improve the green space, but was actually trying to build a high-rise building instead. This conflict was only resolved after a direct confrontation of residents (mainly women) with the company. Although initially even the police was supporting the company, the persistent resistance of the women finally succeeded the company to stop building. So, the contacts between our project and the residents faced an extreme distrust from residents, who feared the same swindle. And after several discussions with the residents, we had to stop negotiations and start looking for another site with less conflict.

The final location, Site Nr.2, was identified after a request of the residents of a nearby neighborhood. This site is about 1.5 hectares and has 162 households. This new site is a mixture of old constructions and new ones, facing road, stormwater drainage and lack of recreational space problems.
III. The strategy for intervention

The primary objective of Co-PLAN, as stated on the approved project proposal, was to assist the community in self-help improvement actions. This could be achieved through joining them with the “Urban Renewal in Tirana” pilot program of the authorities, where the community helped to advance the project from detailed design to implementation.

Secondary objectives were:
(i) to assist the community in identifying its role in the upgrading process, and understanding the role of the municipalities and other authorities;
(ii) to assist the project team to develop appropriate standards that are technically and financially sustainable;
(iii) To contribute where needed to the transfer of this experience to other potential project areas, and support government in replicating the project to other areas.

In order to reach the above mentioned objectives, and based on other experiences in community participation, it was thought best to plan some physical improvements in order to attract the interest of people. Taking in consideration the priorities of residents and budget limitations it was decided by Co-PLAN to improve the roads, storm water drainage, green space, and some recreation appliances.

One of the conditions was that the community had to participate through contributing 20% of the improvement cost. This was to be done with the assistance of the residents’ representatives. At the same time the community would cooperate by opening the occupied public space for common use by all residents.

IV. Activities carried out

1. Community work

One of the main components of the project implementation was the involvement of residents in the project from the starting point.

Initially meetings were organized in every flats unit\(^3\) by informing them about the project and asking residents to elect one or two representatives for discussions and negotiations. 10 to 15 residents representative groups were established in the area.

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\(^3\) A flat unit are those apartments sharing the same entrance and stairway.
The first step in establishing contacts with the community was a social-economic survey, aiming at collecting base information about the area. This survey gave the possibility to have first contacts with residents and served as an introduction of the project.

The survey was carried out by students of the Civil Engineering Faculty of the Architecture and Urban Planning department, Polytechnic University of Tirana. 244 interviews were made with households living in the area, and computerized data processing and an analysis was carried out with the students. On basis of this a final decision was made on the project area.

The results of this survey (see attachment) were a good basis for preparing the area intervention strategy. Important conclusions on the main priorities for improvement were made. Parameters used were the different age groups, financial capacities for contribution based on affordability, as well as social and physical features of the area.

The findings were combined with focus group discussions in order to have a better and more complete picture of the situation.
The selected site has in total 16 units (entrances) with approximately 10 apartments per unit, and in each of them community meetings were organized. These discussions aimed to define the role and tasks for all parties by agreeing on a draft idea for a partnership agreement between the community and Co-Plan. This draft idea was further elaborated and distributed to every household for comments and suggestions, until all parties approved it.

The second step was signing the Partnership agreement for starting implementation based on the given neighborhood priorities. Actually 12 out of 16 units signed an agreement with Co-plan, while 4 units didn’t agree with the project and were left out. The main reason for this was a disagreement on residents’ contribution. Many of them pretended not to have possibilities to contribute neither financially nor by labor. At the same time they were never able to organize themselves to negotiate for the project, like the other units did. So, after many attempts from Co-PLAN it was decided to exclude them from the greenery, but include them in the asphalting. For the selected group, the main priorities were road improvement, than the green space and finally the creation of some recreational environment for children and elderly.

![Bar chart showing priorities for improvements]

![Pie chart showing income groups and average monthly amount]

*Final Report on “Making People and Communities Partners of the Authorities through the Assistance for Urban Rehabilitation and Housing”*
Approximately 90% of the households were directly contacted “door-to-door”, while about 15% of them have been actively involved in the project.

One of the points in the partnership agreement is that the community contributes 20% of the investment cost. In this case, every household had to pay about 20 US$, divided in two installments. In the attachment there is a list of households that paid their contribution with the respective amounts.

Principally, the community representatives were responsible to collect this contribution for their unit, and then submit this to the financial administration of Co-plan. There were also cases where representatives were not doing this, and the team was required to collect the contributions. (see picture)

The infrastructure works started with those apartments that contributed first for the project. In general residents were positive about contributing for their own benefit, but in some cases this was not the case, since they either had not the money, or just simply did not want to pay. Therefore, it required a lot of effort to convince people to participate by making them understand the importance of their contribution in this partnership process.

The total amount of cash contribution collected by residents was about 1572 US$ out of 121 households. This amount counts as about 6% of the investments done in the area. This because 69% of households have paid for the implementation of the project. Only 52% of households paid the full contribution of approximately 20 US$ while the rest paid only the first rate of approximately 15 US$.

This was mainly because many households saw the investments done after they paid the first rate and decided to not give the second one. Another reason was that some residents were not satisfied with the quality of works related to their expectations. In fact, different people perceive differently the standard of works. Especially people which are well off pretended high standard while willing to pay more without taking in consideration that this standard was unaffordable for others. So that many of them preferred not to pay for such standard.

The main reason for not contributing is related to the considerable number of households that have only retired people. This group has hardly any capacity to contribute since it would mean half of their pension.

From a rapid assessment of the team it came out that about 32% of households in the area were unable to give their contribution for the following reasons:

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4 Initially there were 162 households included in the project but one building of 41 apartments didn’t participate at all in the project.
1. Elderly people in retirement without any support from relatives;  
2. Physically handicapped without any social assistance;  
3. Rental households having no interest for area improvement while the owners were mainly abroad.

There were also a small number of households in good economic situation that did not pay for the project because their “parking” space was converted to green space or other irrelevant reasons.

Another part of the work with community was the discussions with the residents for releasing the occupied green space in order to make it available for all. This process was difficult and it required the support of the municipality. Nevertheless some of the residents agreed with the idea as long as they are sure that these spaces will be protected in the future from other constructions.

2. Physical improvements
The team started with the design for physical interventions, based on community priorities. This plan was distributed to every house, and later discussed with the community representatives. It was redesigned for those parts where there was no agreement with the residents.

The approved area plan

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5 The actual pension in Albania is between 30 to 50 US$ per month per person.
The final draft of the plan was submitted to the Municipality of Tirana for approval in the Technical Territory Adjustment Council. The drainage improvement plan was presented to the Tirana sewerage enterprise for advise, information and approval. These steps gave the project the official implementation status and at the same time, it was the initial involving of the authorities in the process.

The drainage system for all roads was completed. The waste collection points were systemized and improved. All the roads within the area have curbs aside for a clear division with the green space, while roads were cleaned from mud and prepared with the first layer of gravel, after which the asphalt works were completed. The free space in front of the apartments was cleaned and the Municipal Greenery Enterprise planted decorative trees and bushes. Some sitting places were made for elderly people to play their cards and domino.

The physical improvements include:
In total, it is improved with several layers and asphalt 1650 m2 of road within the area.
It is implemented a complete new system of storm water drainage for all the new roads in order to protect them from deterioration.

Road improvements

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<th>After improvements</th>
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Co-Plan, Centre for Habitat Development

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Five waste collection points are constructed and made available for placing the garbage bins. But as it is shown in the picture the collection system in the city is not working and the result is that the garbage points are not properly used.

On the request of residents there were provided 9 sitting places in the gardens mainly for elderly people.

800 m² of green space is worked out and planted. All the greenery works are implemented by the Municipal enterprise for greenery in Tirana.

A playground for children is constructed for playing basketball. As shown in the picture children use to play in very primitive places and basically on the road space.

The fact is that Municipality did not release the proper place for this activity because of the election campaign. So in this situation based on the plan approved by the Municipality and on the request of people a place was identified with the residents and particularly children. A small part of public spaces remained occupied and no investment has been done on that by the project.
3. Working with authorities

One of the most important factors for achieving the long-term success of the project is the involvement of authorities in the process. The initial contacts with the authorities started in the early phases of the project through the former Administrative Unit (AU) Nr.5, now Sub-municipality 5 (after the local elections of 2000.) The former head of AU5 was informed about the project idea and main objectives. The discussions were very positive and he offered the support for negotiating with residents (he was also a resident of the neighborhood). It soon became obvious that the discussions were very politically biased, for both residents as well as authorities. It was also a message that it was not the right moment for this cooperation, as it was creating negative reactions from the politically sensitive residents.

For this reason it was decided to continue working with the residents only, and leaving out the authorities for the moment, until the elections were finished and the situation had calmed down. After the elections, residents started to give more trust to us since they saw that the project was continuing and was independent from political developments. Meetings were organised with the newly elected local authorities, specifically with the Chief of Urban Planing Department in Tirana. The design for the intervention plan was approved by the Municipal Technical Territory Adjustment Council, and stated as a good initiative of interventions in the city.

During these discussions, the Municipality expressed its interest to join the project, not only in supporting the greenery, but also by financing some additional works like street lighting and public garbage bins along the streets. As a result, Co-Plan made an agreement with the Municipal Greenery Enterprise. Based on this agreement workers and machinery were offered counting on about 60% of the total cost or equal to about 3300 US$ for greenery works, while Co-Plan financially supported the cost for materials and transport.

The Municipality of Tirana was supposed to support the project by opening public space through removing informal occupiers. However, this has not been done, for the following reasons: firstly, for a considerable period of time the Municipality and Construction Police was highly involved in a huge demolition of informal buildings in the center of Tirana. Therefore it was not possible for them to give attention to these minor interventions in our area. Secondly, the parliamentary election (24 June) campaign was in full swing and such interventions were “not done” in that political reality.

As a result, the investments could cover only 70% of the area, thereby excluding the occupied places. This situation shows that such projects can only be fully successful if local authorities support these initiatives. That means, a better formula for acquiring ownership on the improvements should be better developed.

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6 These discussions were taking place during the electoral campaigns for the local October elections.
This can be explained by several reasons: in the first place authorities’ ‘mind sets’ are not yet fully directed towards public-private partnerships; and secondly, a framework of co-operation between authorities, civil society groups and residents needs to be developed to guide such processes. Important is that the last phase of the project (greenery and street furniture) is almost completely transferred to authorities. Co-PLAN finalised the payments for the materials of the greenery project to the municipal greenery enterprise.

The approach of improving the neighborhood’s environment through partnerships between authorities and residents is becoming an attractive one. In order to reach more residents of Tirana, a TV transmission was organized that showed the project and its concrete achievements. Also, electronic and written media paid attention to this project as one of the first examples of a serious cooperation for improving the city. We can mention that as a result already three other neighborhoods have organized themselves and requested Co-PLAN to apply the same project methodology in their areas, including an agreement on resident’s contribution.

In order to attract attention to such kind of initiatives, Co-Plan has tried to bring the model of the project in different professional levels. Actually one of the team members which was a student of the Urban Planning school, prepared her thesis with the same subject as the project. In this way it is reached a wide target group of new professionals for changing the mentality of planning and design into a more realistic and practical. This thesis is estimated as one of the best from the graduated group.

V. **Main constraints encountered during the project**

The project is one of the first initiatives of this kind in the Inner City of Tirana, and in this respect there have been some peculiar difficulties during the process of execution. First of all the inability to reach an agreement on the first selected site, delayed the project implementation for two months. Secondly, the local elections created a politicized atmosphere that directly influenced the community participation activities. Cooperation with authorities was almost impossible without being involved in political campaigns of the political parties. Also, unfair promises of politicians caused unrealistic expectations to residents. At the same time residents from the area could hardly believe that such initiatives could be serious and politically independent, based on their experience of the last decade.

Another important constraint during the project was the indifference of residents towards active involvement and participation in the project as a result of a long process of loosing confidence to authorities and other organizations. (Our team expected easier cooperation with the city center residents, compared to the informal areas where people lack basic living conditions.) People were highly concentrated on their personal constraints and absolutely indifferent in regard to (public) problems in the neighborhood.
Communication with big groups through meetings was very difficult. Therefore our main mode of communication was through (i) community representatives; (ii) written information distributed to each household; and (iii) direct communication with every household door-to-door.

Full resident participation was hindered also by the limited financial possibilities of some specific social groups in the area. Obviously, Co-PLAN was very flexible in this respect by supporting those groups that nevertheless tried to find a way of contribution. At the same time, we excluded certain apartment-groups that could not agree on their representatives or were not serious in negotiation. This selection created a situation in the neighborhood where substantial improvements could be found around certain apartments, while others were not improved. This is considered an important message to residents that ‘no improvements come without cooperation and participation’ and this is now clearly received and supported by all apartments.

A clear constraint was also the slow and rather inactive position of authorities, mainly caused by their involvement in demolition of informal constructions in the city center, and the political electoral campaign.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

There were initially difficulties in starting the project, and particularly in implementing it in the required time. Much energy went into introducing the new methodology of reaching improvements through community participation. Nevertheless, the results indicate that the approach is certainly successful.

The project has considerably contributed on changing the mentality of residents, by showing that there are realistic possibilities to improve the living environment if communities are active and able to attract potential stakeholders in the process. Showing to people that with a limited budget, with cooperation and joining forces something can be done, breaks the “apathy” of the last decade where people forgot about the public space maintenance. The main conclusion so far is that people’s major concern is not the lack of money, but finding serious and trustable partners to work with. In this respect, the project model gives a great opportunity to new alternatives for inner city improvements, which is shown by the interest raised by three other neighborhoods to apply the same project methodology.

Follow up

As regard the proposal for a plan of action there are some points to be considered: In the first place, the project requires an immediate follow up of actions on a bigger scale in Tirana. To reach this, a demand driven process can be designed in such way that different communities when fulfilling certain criteria - have equal chances to neighborhood improvements. This approach has also sufficient complementary initiatives, like the

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7 In some specific households this is actually a concern, particularly the retirements and others but in general people can afford to pay certain amount of contribution for improvements.
Urban Land Management project, which is mainly focused on infrastructure improvement.

Secondly, it is important to regularize the approach uniformly so that authorities have a strategy guideline as well as a basis for action. This will help with a better involvement of authorities. So far, the municipality has shown interest and will for collaboration, which can even be expected to increase if a clear framework for cooperation exists. Directly connected to this is the urgent need to improve the condominium Law in Albania. Few people know about this law and nobody applies, still it needs considerable revision to adequately provide for the present situation. So, one of the interventions proposed for the follow up project is to further develop this law and really make it work for housing rehabilitation and maintenance.

Finally, financial and organizational support will be needed. It is still too early to expect from authorities to independently organize and finance community based improvement initiatives. An intermediary process of concrete actions will be required where finances are coming from external sources, but local organizations organize the process with assistance of local and international expertise.

A complete draft idea for a possible follow up project is attached to this report.

VII. Financial report

This project is financed by Novib (58%), UNDP (36%), Community (3%) and Co-PLAN (2%). The agreed amount with Novib was NLG 69,046.96 (equivalent in USD 28,077) but because of exchange rate differences Co-PLAN received from Novib USD 29,859 which is USD 1,782 more than planned. Because of the need for investment funds, there has been transferred also an amount of USD 1117 from Roma project (no.: ALB-037-00-004 Novib and P0003-00 Co-PLAN) to this project. In total, Novib funds available for this project were USD 30,976.

Co-PLAN and UNDP had an agreement for USD 19,300 from which Co-PLAN has received so far only USD 13,510 and the rest is advanced to the project by Co-PLAN. The remaining of USD 5,790 should be transferred from UNDP to Co-PLAN within 2001.

The community contribution for this project has been USD 1,572 and Co-PLAN contribution USD 1,152.

Total funds available for the project were USD 53,000 which have all been spent.

There has been overspending only for the investment in Community development (a1) and Physical improvements (a2). The reason for that is the fact of a big need from the community for improvement and extra funds available to the project.