



# Uncontrolled Urban Growth in Western Balkans Territories after the Communist Collapse—a Review from the Spatial Planning Perspective



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**Abstract:** With the fall of the Communist Regimen in the Western Balkans Region, governance politics regarding urban and spatial planning processes led to significant changes in several territorial aspects. In this regard, several scientific studies and researches have put forward significant regional differences in urban development between cities of the Balkans that have followed very similar trajectories after the collapse of the “communist empire,” considering their willingness and desire to meet European standards - Tirana, Podgorica, Sarajevo are just some examples. Between the several disparities, these territories represent compared to Central and North European regions, massive and uncontrolled urban growth has been verified – catalyzed by liberal governance politics and private companies, without planning experts, and jeopardizing the need to include public participation in the development processes. This situation has led to significant uncontrolled planning and, consequently, to several negative social-economic impacts driven by it. For this reason, the development of a detailed review study considering spatial planning perspectives in the Western Balkans Region is seen as pivotal to understanding the existing planning disparities that affect the sustainable development of this area. Through an exploratory methodology – using both case study approach methods and territorial impact assessment (TIA) - it will be possible to understand how these events occurred and evolved, enabling the development of specific tools and approaches which might help to minimize the cumulative impacts of these processes. Therefore, the outcomes will define guidelines regarding urban planning processes for the main actors responsible for developing new governance measures toward achieving European standards.

**Keywords:** Western Balkans territories; Governance; Spatial planning; Territorial management; Urban planning processes

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, several disparities between the Western Balkan territories and the rest of the EU and the most developed countries are a reality. Taking into account the significant number of inhabitants directly influenced by such disparities, studies that enables a better understanding of the Balkans issue are seen as critical to developing new methods and approaches regarding their governance principles [1-3].

In this regard, the present study aims to define the state-of-the-art of Westerns Balkans territories - from a spatial planning perspective; through the study of Balkans cities and how they have evolved since the Collapse of the Communist Empire.

Also, several questions are raised: *Have the governance strategies carried out after the Communist Collapse influenced directly for those disparities? Balkans' spatial planning strategies differ from those carried out in the most developed countries? Which are the main critical factors to consider to achieve territorial success in the Western Balkans region?*

Aiming to find a preliminary answer to those questions, a literature review that covers the actual Balkans situation in several spheres – demographic, geographical, and financial, among other fields and indicators – allied to a brief description of the conflicts lived by these territories – highlighting the Communist Collapse – followed by a Territorial Impact Assessment (TIA) applied to six Balkan cities, are seen as critical, not only to answer the exposed questions but also to enable the definition of some principles of governance and spatial planning procedures that may conduct Western Balkan territories closer to EU standards.

## **2. Balkans Territories: A Brief Description**

The Balkan Peninsula extends to Southern Central Europe along the Mediterranean Sea, including several countries such as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Kosovo, Slovenia, and a geographical/political sphere of European Turkey [4].

This peninsula comprises an area of 550.000 km<sup>2</sup> with 55 million inhabitants – almost the double of the Italian peninsula area 301.262 km<sup>2</sup> with 58 million inhabitants, and less than the Iberian Peninsula 596.767 km<sup>2</sup> with 51 million inhabitants.

One of the most expressive mountainous massifs of Balkans territories involves the Dinaric Alps that are along the coast of Dalmatia - from Northwest to Southeast - linking the Julian Alps, as well as the extreme west of Hungarian to Pindus mountains that cover the peninsula until the coast of Greece - Aegean Sea. Perpendicularly to these mountains and to the East, the Balkan massif extends from Eastern Serbia to the Bulgarian Black Sea coast [4, 5]. Also, the Carpathian Mountains act as a barrier of the pronounced Hungarian plain, preventing the arrival and the influence of polar winds that pass through Russian steppes in winter [5, 6].

Danube River, with its tributaries, constitute a huge watershed - the largest in Western and Central Europe - being noted that only this River runs over nine European countries, with direct or indirect impacts on 220 million people. Assuming relevance as in the case of transportation, connectivity and accessibility for the movement of people, goods, and services which enables and facilitates between Balkan countries and Central European territories [7-9].

### **2.1 Western Balkans Sovereign States**

The Western Balkans are bordered by the Adriatic Sea, including the following countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro.

#### **2.1.1 Albania**

Albania is a small mountainous country on the Balkan Peninsula in southeastern Europe. It has a total area of 28.748 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of about 3 million. It is located on the Western edge of the Balkan Peninsula, bordering Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Greece. According to the 2011 census, about 53% of Albania's population lives in urban areas - around 25% in the capital Tirana - and 47% in rural areas [10].

Albania was a communist nation from World War II until 1992. However, Albania broke relations with the former Soviet Union in 1961 and allied itself with China. The break with the Soviet Union separated Albania from contacts with many other countries [4].

#### **2.1.2 Bosnia & Herzegovina**

The current Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of two regions - Bosnia, and Herzegovina. Bosnia and Herzegovina are limited to the North and West by Croatia and to the East by Serbia and Montenegro [11].

Bosnia presents a huge geographical contrast with Republic of Croatia plains - mountainous, wooded and well irrigated. The villages are located in catchment areas - which by definition are surrounded by mountains. Bosnia is a poor region, with restricted access- i.e. by road or rail. Regarding the humanized landscape, it denotes the constant presence of Islam - politically dominant through the Ottoman Empire for four centuries until 1878 - through the many minarets of mosques exist, even in the smallest villages. This reality expresses the number of faithful - Christians gather in a single Church, while Muslims are distributed by several small mosques, increasing the visibility in the cities landscape.

Regarding Herzegovina - with capital in Mostar-also presents a considerable terrain morphology (mountainous). In contrast to Bosnia, this region is not (so) green, has a Mediterranean climate, as well as the resulting cultures [4].

### 2.1.3 Kosovo

Located in the northeast of Albania, to the North of Macedonia, to the East of Montenegro, and the South and West of Serbia, Kosovo constitutes an autonomous province [11]. Nowadays, Kosovo is a territorial dispute between still an unrecognized state of the Republic of Kosovo and the Republic of Serbia.

Kosovo has a major watershed - communication axis connecting the Aegean Sea to Danube River. By roads, it is possible the link to Montenegro, to the Adriatic Sea and Sarajevo, by Sandzak. For this reason, this route is historically relevant-i.e. in the Ottoman period, the Germans intended to build a railroad through it, either because with their domain ensures the movement between those regions [4]; such statements denotes the privileged location of Kosovo.

### 2.1.4 Croatia

The current Republic of Croatia has a territory of 56.538 km<sup>2</sup> - starting in the East on the Danube, extending to the West through the capital Zagreb, and ending in Dubrovnik (in the South).

Along Sava River - South bordering with Bosnia - extends the railroad to Istanbul, where circled the Orient Express, as well as the important road Zagreb/Belgrade, with approximately 400 km - almost in a straight line. In fact, Serbia has been occupied (part of) Croatia territory, the reason why so many Serbian people live there - in a relative majority in the East and West boundaries. Within the limits of Istria Croatian region - inhabiting Slovenes, Serbs, and some Italians – there is Rijeka described as the most important commercial port of Yugoslavia, due to good transport links exist from it to the inside [11].

### 2.1.5 Serbia

The Republic of Serbia is situated at the crossroads of Central and Southeast Europe in the southern Pannonian Plain. Serbia bordering with 8 countries: Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Montenegro. Serbia numbers around 7 million residents; its capital, Belgrade, ranks among the oldest and largest cities in Southeastern Europe Office statistics of the Republic of Serbia. Serbia has very favorable natural conditions (land and climate) for varied agricultural production. It has 5.056.000 ha of agricultural land (0.7 ha per capita), out of which 3.294.000 ha is arable land (0.45 ha per capita) Agricultural production is most prominent in Vojvodina on the fertile Pannonian Plain [11]. The energy sector is one of the largest and most important sectors of the country's economy. Serbia has an abundance of coal and significant reserves of oil and gas. Serbia has a strategic transportation location since the country's backbone, Morava Valley, represents by far the easiest route of land travel from continental Europe to Asia Minor. Serbia has a developed inland water transport since there are 1.716 kilometers of navigable inland waterways, which are almost all located in the northern third of the country The most important inland waterway is the Danube (part of Pan-European Corridor VII) [8].

### 2.1.6 Montenegro

The Republic of Montenegro, with 13.812 Km<sup>2</sup>, is the smallest of the six Yugoslav Federations. Montenegro is located in the North of Albania, Southeast of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in the West of Serbia and Kosovo [12]. The country presents impoverished agriculture and scarce natural resources - due to being extraordinarily mountainous and located in a complex orographic system. Thus, it is considered a poor region, without industries and few communication lines - relatively recent, the railroad connecting Bar to the Serbian capital Belgrade, thus allowing the exit to the sea.

Like in Albania, Montenegro has particularly felt an extreme sense of belonging – i.e., in the governance and politics of human communities. Montenegro began to exist only confined to the mountains without access to the sea - after the Russian-Turkish war in 1878 - and by Berlin Congress (annexed territory). However, it was mainly with the first Balkan war in 1912 - again at Turkey's expense- that the new annexation nearly doubled its size. Expanded again to the high mountains of Montenegrin Sandzac, it gets border in common with Serbian brothers. On the coast is the single and tiny port of Bar, serving the interior of the country, pointing out the great importance in the context of their relationship with Serbia due to their concern about the access to the sea that (directly) Montenegro does not have [4].

## 2.2 Balkans Conflicts Background

### 2.2.1 The First World War

The Yugoslav unification in the post-war period was considered the new European order of fundamental geopolitical importance, especially for the winning powers, France and the United Kingdom [6, 13]. Yugoslavia would represent a natural barrier against the expansion of German influence and would be one of the elements of a sanitary cordon built to stop Soviet Russia's access to the Mediterranean [4, 6, 14].

On the other hand, because it was a multi-ethnic and religious policy, construction eliminated the risk of possibly lifting a Large-Serbia [6, 14]. Thus, after the First World War would be formed the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and

Slovenes - was denominated by Yugoslavia Kingdom [15].

### 2.2.2 Bosnia and Herzegovina conflict

Bosnia and Herzegovina were proclaimed in 1992, having the same been recognized by European countries on April 6, 1992, and the next day, the US acted identically and concurrently recognized Croatia and Slovenia [4, 6]. The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was the immediate consequence of the proclamation of independence; according to the alerts, a lot was being made by various political leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina Serbs and Serbia. Concerned that if Yugoslavia had separated Bosnia, regions populated by Serbs would be separated [4, 6, 16]. The exact date of the beginning of the war and the first victim is the subject of a dispute between Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs. The Croatian - Muslim paramilitary forces from Bosanski Brod took on March 3 Bosanski Brod.

Then the intimidation of the Serbian population began in this place and the surrounding villages, which in the coming months turned into an open persecution of Serbs. Villages of Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Muslims were destroyed, too, as well as destroyed numerous Catholic churches and all the mosques - leading to several crimes against Humanity [4, 6]. Conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina began with attacks by the Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia during March 1992, attacks on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the regions of Bosanski Brod, Kupres and the Neretva Valley. New massacre on both sides has started a major armed conflict in the SR Bosnia and Herzegovina. Serbian paramilitaries led by Arkan captured Bijeljina on April 1, an important traffic junction in the northeastern SR of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and killed more civilians. On April 4, president of Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Alija Izetbegovic declared general mobilization. The Bosnian Serbs, supported by the Serbian government and the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), mobilized their forces inside Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to secure ethnic Serb territory, then war soon spread across the country, accompanied by ethnic cleansing. The conflict was initially between the Yugoslav Army units in Bosnia which later transformed into the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) on the one side, and the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH) which was largely composed of Bosniaks, and the Croat forces in the Croatian Defence Council (HVO) on the other side. Tensions between Croats and Bosniaks increased throughout late 1992, resulting in the Croat-Bosniak War that escalated in early 1993 [4, 6].

The Bosnian War was characterized by bitter fighting, indiscriminate shelling of cities and towns, ethnic cleansing and systematic mass rape, on all sides. Aiming to put an end to the conflict, several resolutions of the United Nations Security Council were approved, however, unsuccessful [16].

To Serbia were imposed economic sanctions that severely weakened, still, that was not enough. In fact, Western Governments, particularly those of Europe refrain from intervening militarily - maybe that's why, Western diplomats sought, for about three years, to reconcile the positions of the contenders, while the massacres all over Bosnia and Herzegovina would happening [16].

In the face of these two irreconcilable positions, defended by the international society, was seeking the possible compromise through the defense of federalism [6, 16].

This war was increasing in intensity and bloodshed, developed mainly in southern Herzegovina, having suffered bombing Croats in Mostar for about a year, as well as a radical ethnic cleansing in areas the Croatian controlled [16]. This city suffered still slighting, for Croats, the beautiful medieval bridge over the river Neretva, which served as a link between the city's West and the East and that would only be rebuilt in 2010.

### 2.2.3 Kosovo conflict

During Tito's regime, political considerations had prevented references, public or interpersonal in media Organs, about the true ethnic cleansing suffered by Serbs in Kosovo, situation that feria indelibly the heart of the Serbian nation, because they considered the Kosovo their crib [17]. The Serbia of Milosevic reduced in March 1989 the autonomy that the Constitution of 1974 their autonomous provinces - Kosovo and Vojvodina - held, in order to change the relationship of existing forces in federal agencies. This change was essential, especially Presidencia Collegial, in addition, to allow more effective away from Kosovo of a centrifugal movement intended by supporters of connection with Albania, existing on both sides of your border with this [17]. Faced with the growing intensity of physical pressure, political and economic in order to compel Kosovo Serbs to leave this province, thousands of them abandoned, what constitutes a real ethnic cleansing [18].

After the extinction of the Socialist Republic and the Republic of Yugoslavia in September 1991 and even before the establishment of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; the Albanian/Kosovo proclaimed the independence and also elected the President of the Republic - Ibrahim Rugova - an advocate of non-violence [4].

Since then, the Albanians without violence opposed to what they called Serbian oppression in Kosovo, a reason that justifies this reality few have realized, because, for the war, he was fighting in Croatia and then in Bosnia and Herzegovina, converged all the attention [4, 18]. However, thanks to the popular support and especially the resources transferred by diaspora Kosovo-Albanians, were being created Albanian language schools and hospitals in the province, raising gradually their institutions.

It is possible to say that Kosovo was the reason for the increased support the Serbian nation to Milosevic, as your leader, politician why has positioned itself to provide the answer taken as needed by the Serbs, faced with the

burdensome situation that lived the population [17].

The political power of Serbia sought to reverse the serious demographic problem that exists in Kosovo - favorable to Albanians - due to your relative major birth rate and the repeated verse of Serbs, encouraged the immigration of refugees especially Serbs of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Truly, the Serbian Government was not very happy at the result of the policies implemented for that purpose, in view of the unattractive image of the Kosovo province that the hypothetical interested Serbs was marked by poverty, by overcrowding and unrest existing social [4, 17].

### 3. Methodological Framework

Several scientific methods have been used to perform the research, including indirect and direct methods and tools. In this regard, a significant amount of time and attention to developing a proper methodological framework and formulating the central questions for the research hypothesis mentioned above have been carried out.

In the scope of the research, a total of six case studies regarding Western Balkans territories (Figures 1 and 2) were selected by applying a study method similar to the one used by Castanho et al. [19-21].



**Figure 1.** Location of Balkan territories, in the European context  
Note: This figure was prepared by the authors.



**Figure 2.** Location of the case studies, in the Balkan territories context:  
(a) Belgrade; (b) Podgorica; (c) Zagreb; (d) Tirana; (e) Skopje; (f) Sarajevo  
Note: This figure was prepared by the authors.

Seeking a robust analysis and assessment of the case studies, a Territorial Impact Assessment (TIA) principle - based on the information/data available and the existing literature - was developed, evaluating the policies and strategies implemented in the selected case studies. Thus, enabling the analysis of territorial governance and spatial governance issues [22-24].

After, will be confronted the case studies with 14 critical factors to achieve territorial success previously identified by Castanho et al. [19], aimed to identify which factors should be considered to develop new spatial planning principles and approaches towards sustainable development and territorial success for Western Balkan territories.

## 4. Case Study Analysis

### 4.1 Belgrade

Belgrade is the capital of the Republic of Serbia (RS). It is located in Southeast European at the confluence of the Sava and Danube Rivers. Furthermore, it stands on the edge of the plain Pannonica with the Balkan Peninsula with a surface covering 3222.68 km<sup>2</sup> - representing 7.4% of Serbian territory.

The city has an important geostrategic position, once it is located at the convergence of three relevant travel routes among Europe and Balkans: (1) East-West route along the Valley of the river Danube; (2) Westward route along the Valley of the Sava River towards Trieste and the North of Italy; (3) Southeast route along the valleys of the rivers Morava and Vardar to the Aegean Sea. In fact, Belgrade has often been a border town between East and West - known as "Balkans Gates" or "Middle Europe Doors".

Additionally, Belgrade's population is equivalent to a quarter of the RS population. Mainly due to migration from Serbia's rural areas due to the industrialization period – post-second world war. Belgrade's population is estimated at 1.682.934 inhabitants. Also, it is estimated that GDP/per capita in 2014 will be 8.552.928€ [10].

At the beginning of the 20th century, Belgrade witnessed several military and political conflicts. Since 1921, Belgrade has been the capital of three successive Yugoslav States - including the rump Yugoslavia from World War II. It should be highlighted that Yugoslavia ran as a Communist Federation. However, with the fall of the Berlin wall and the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia entered a civil war that dismembered Yugoslavia. In fact, Serbia was one of the countries that appeared after the Yugoslav wars. As a result, Belgrade becomes the capital of the Republic of a post-Communist Serbia.

Thus, four main stages represent the city evolution which has (re)shaped its character and basically design: (1) the post-ottoman capital; (2) the capital of a United Yugoslav State; (3) the Communist capital; (4) the post-socialist capital. The above-mentioned war conflicts, consequently have shaped Belgrade's urban structure. Subsequently, the need for Belgrade to develop as a European metropolis in accordance with European standards reveals the political and intellectual elite need to keep this city in a State of overall development that leaves enough space for political and ideological manipulation, as well as national and social experiments particularly in the Communist period and post-Communist [25].

Nowadays, a discontinuous growth of Belgrade is visible through its several "incomplete" urban spaces, which are the direct result of several instability periods. It is also possible to verify that Belgrade's urban development has already entered the current neo-liberal trends. However, such development is not consistent with the provisions of planning principles - according to Vukmirovic [26]: "*Given that the current plans are mainly aimed at solving problems arising in the previous period, it could lead to the situation that, in turn, Belgrade would generate the identity which is partially controlled, and which could give rise to an inconsistent image of the city as well as its competitive identity.*"

### 4.2 Podgorica

Podgorica is one of Montenegro capital's, once the country consists of two capitals (Podgorica and Cetinje) - according to article 5 of the Montenegro Constitution. In fact, Podgorica is the most populous, and Cetinje is the monarchist and historical capital. Podgorica is located in the Northern Zeta plain, at the confluence of the Ribnica and Morača rivers, occupying 10.4% of Montenegro's territory.

The city has 150.977 inhabitants [10]. Nevertheless, these population dynamics is low if compared to other European capitals. It also should be highlighted that the resident population in this city is equivalent to the 29.9 percent of the total of the country.

The urban development of Podgorica, have witnessed a remarkable form of this phenomenon in the last 20 - represented with blocks of flats where inhabitants live in poverty and new blocks of flats where the "medium" class lives. The city is socially heterogeneous from the village, so all forms of social differentiation are settled in urban areas. On the emerging urban planning of Podgorica, the process of social stratification in the Mercantile and monetary economy, is mainly reflected in the urban area through segregation phenomenon [27].

In this regard, in several physical plans, buildable areas were planned independently of morphological features of the area or the actual needs and conditions. As a result of such negligence, there are numerous building areas in

the vicinity of valuable elements of natural identity [28]. In fact, there is a population tendency to be near of open spaces and the environment - due to stress, noise, pollution, among many other factors [29].

Currently, the construction of new bridges allowing a properly preservation of the rivers and their surroundings, Podgorica reveals new approaches of architectural planning intending to integrate sustainability concepts.

### 4.3 Zagreb

Zagreb is the capital of the Republic of Croatia and is also the largest city in the country. The city is located on the slopes of Medvednica, with the Hill to the North and the Sava River floodplains to the South [11]. The city has 792.875 inhabitants [30, 31]. Additionally, Zagreb is composed by a separate administrative and territorial unit - reason is why it is regulated by the law of the city of Zagreb [32-34]. Among the cities network in Croatia, Zagreb occupies the first place in infrastructures [34]. Also ranks first in terms of GDP/per capita - higher than 17.908 € in 2014 [31].

Zagreb have been target of several attacks during the centuries – i.e. Turkish attacks on Europe, this city was under constant threat as important border fortress. The threat of the Ottoman Turks in the mid-17th century, should be considered, once from now on the city began to develop (in a newest way), demolishing old houses and building new palaces, monasteries and churches. Back in 1850, the cities of Gradec and Kaptol and their surrounding settlements became a single administrative unit. Later, in the 19th century, the population multiplied by ten. Being the 20th century marked by the development of the industry and social wealth [35].

Thus, Zagreb has undergone major changes caused by the passage of the socialism to capitalism, aligned with the trends of globalization leading to the "disappearance" of urban planning, on the city. Precisely, in the post-socialist era, Zagreb is a city in transition faced by several changes in the social and spatial structure. Such transition to neoliberal capitalism, acquires features of "wild capitalism", since the economic actors driven by materialistic values instigate a construction not planned, random, while the professionals and civilian actors lose power [35].

In fact, Zagreb is not envisioning plans of revitalization and urban renewal in the short term. In recent years, there has been a lot of construction in the city urban core and their outskirts, which is not well integrated into the existing urban structure. There are also major issues regarding inadequate primary and secondary infrastructure in the new developments. The current state of Zagreb's planning process is characterized by conflict and lack of balance between the powerful political and economic actors, and less powerful professional and civil actors. In this regard, experts of several fields affirm that ignoring the planning process means irreparable harm in the long term in the space by inconsistent changes that show the absence of a comprehensive urban planning in Zagreb [36].

### 4.4 Tirana

The capital of Albania has located 27 km to the East of the coast of the Adriatic Sea [11]. Historically, the city gradually became a shopping center at a junction of roads and paths of Caravan - by its privileged location.

After, under the communism regimen (1944 to 1990), its population increased from 60.000 to 300.000 inhabitants. During this period, Tirana was relatively attractive, clean, quiet, and compact, with considerable free space (now significantly reduced) [37]. However, under an exceptionally down Communist dictatorship, the population had virtually no wealth and possessed few consumer goods [37, 38].

Since 1990, the removing of restrictions on the movement of the population in Albania, lead to a massive migration flux to this city. The population grew then of less than 300.000 inhabitants in 1990, to 610.050 inhabitants [39]. The metropolitan area has almost a million inhabitants - almost one-third of the national population. Such demographic migration and concentration level have been unique in central Europe and Eastern [40].

Subsequently, this city in the post-socialist period has experienced a complete physical, social and economic transformation. But somehow the transformation has been similar to that experienced in other East European capitals post-socialists – here much more drastic [41]. However, the GDP/per capita is one of the lowest in Europe reaching 700€ [39], indicating that the life standards are still low.

The Communist Government increased residential density and adopted a standardized aesthetics of apartment buildings of the low height of several sections (2 to 5 floors), some of them prefabricated. The choice of such typology of urban growth was mainly due to the minimization of the construction costs [42]. Likewise, the city became mono-functional where only there were buildings used for administrative and cultural activities without commercial activities. However, constraints on public resources inevitably hindered the overall achievement of ambitious visions of planning, which resulted in the practice of patchy and erratic, projects, many of which were unfinished [43].

Subsequently, the city produced architectural dynamism and urban development during economic and social transformation, continuously changing the city landscape. The main effects are the densification of the inner city and a considerable increase in construction. This anger of changes reflects the efforts toward modern architecture, new forms, materials, concepts, and approaches [44].

Then, between 1997 and 2001, urban growth collapsed and there was the occupation of many open spaces and green areas. So, Tirana is filled with many people and grows without rules to the limit of its possibilities [45].

Since 2000, the city's development focused on the rehabilitation and renewal process. However, the spatial voracity has had a significant effect in the urban context [46]. Currently, the city is a reflection of the old communism, since it is composed of monuments. It is also a reflection of a new identity, once in the city there are also innovative architectural works. Additionally, the city growth is occurring through suburbs, many of these constructions carried out illegally - in a way that is very difficult to distinguish legal or illegal buildings.

#### 4.5 Skopje

Skopje is the capital and principal city of Macedonia. Located on the banks of the Vardar River, Skopje occupies 25.713 km<sup>2</sup> and has 668.518 inhabitants. Due to its privileged location, Skopje concentrates much of the national economy - Skopje and its neighboring municipalities produce 45.5% of the national GDP. The GDP/per capita reached 5567.12€ [47].

Skopje is a good example of the reshaping of a privatized space (feudal) or a space interpreted along sacred lines, as "God Land", in a public space and public property to be shared with the citizens and/or exercise control over the nation, since the capital becomes the main center of the State to control the nation. Also, the gradual rise of separatist movements among the conquered Nations led to an increase in the relevance of local urban centers. In fact, Skopje was the capital of Kosovo Vilayet after 1864 - was an important strategic city but did not play a particularly prominent role and their influence diminished. In that period Skopje was not the Centre of the national movement of Macedonian, reaching that status only after the Second World War [48].

Currently, there is an increase in the population, an intensive construction activity; the guidelines of urban plan developed in the second half of the 20th century for the provision and the increase of urban green areas are not being fully performed - once there is a severe decline in the existence of public green spaces [49].

#### 4.6 Sarajevo

Sarajevo is the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This urban settlement is located in the Sarajevo valley in the Bosnian region, at the eastern end of a flat alluvial valley with mountainous terrain to the North and the South, as the Dinaric Alps surround it and around the Miljacka river. It is also the most populated city in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with 395.133 inhabitants [50]. Regarding the socio-economic sphere, the GDP/per capita reaches 8.463.040€ and continues to increase [51].

Back in 1995, Sarajevo has experienced a severe War, imprinting several impacts and transformations on the city and in the Bosnian populations. In fact, the main social, economic and political issues still remain after the Yugoslav Guerra. Sarajevo represents an important case of a city in transition with its process of reconstruction of the post-1995 renewal mixed with remains of buildings scattered through the city landscape as silent reminders of the war. While the urban morphology of the city is a product of the past, there have been significant changes as a result of the development of a shopping center that has extended the business away from the center of the oldest city [52].

Additionally, there have been new urban agglomerations in the surrounding hills by rural migrants. Such uncontrolled development has reshaped the city landscape and in some areas has caused environmental problems – i.e. deforestation or loss of vegetation [53].

The reasons for these settlements were to avoid taxes and associated cost regarding the obtaining of permits for planning and construction and also the lack of urban land planned and repaired have played a major role for such "urban chaos". The authorities have been concerned about these improper settlements regarding the legislation in order to be able to provide basic services [54].

Along with the war aftermath (1995-2000), the attention was focused on the redevelopment and repair of blocks of residential flats [52]. However, the most significant change in Sarajevo's urban morphology is the development of commercial activities - new shopping centers.

#### 4.7 Results Summary

In Table 1, it is possible to analyze the results summarized obtained by the analysis methods applied to the above-studied cities.

In Table 2, it is possible to verify the identified critical factors for territorial success in Western Balkan territories, where: (X) – Major influence; (0) – Minor influence.

(1) Connectivity-Movement between cities; (2) Strong territorial strategy; (3) Avoid duplication of infrastructure; (4) Sense of belonging; (5) Diverse infrastructural offer-Euro Citizenship; (6) Access to European funds; (7) Stronger economy; (8) Better life's quality standards; (9) Young and talented people magnet; (10) Common objectives and master plans; (11) Stronger political commitment; (12) Citizen involvement; (13) Political transparency and commitment; (14) Euro-city marketing and advertisement.



**Table 1.** Summary of the analyzed topics in each case study

Case Study	Urban growth typology	GDP/per capita (Euro)	Population	Currency	Territorial development strategy
<b>Belgrade</b>	Discontinuous	8.552.930	1.682.934	Serbian dinar (RSD)	Neoliberal Trends
<b>Podgorica</b>	Segregation	140.780	150.977	Euro	Neoliberal Trends
<b>Zagreb</b>	Urban chaos	17.908	792.875	Kuna	Neoliberal Trend
<b>Tirana</b>	Growth through illegal construction	3.700	610.05	Lek	Neoliberal Trend
<b>Skopje</b>	Excessive growth with little control	5.567.120	668.518	Denar	Neoliberal Trend
<b>Sarajevo</b>	Growth through illegal construction	8.463.040	395.133	Convertible mark	Neoliberal Trend

**Table 2.** Identified critical factors for territorial success

Case Study	Critical Factors													
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
<b>Belgrade</b>	X	X		X		X		0	0					X
<b>Podgorica</b>	X	X	0	X		X	X		0	X	0	X		
<b>Zagreb</b>				X	X	X		0	0					X
<b>Tirana</b>	X	X		X		X	X	X	0	0		X	X	
<b>Skopje</b>			0	0		X		X	0	0				
<b>Sarajevo</b>	X	X	0	X		X	0		0		X			X

## 5. Discussions and Conclusions

Although there are differences in urban development between the cities of the Balkans, they all show common patterns and trends of development. The dominant pattern is a neoliberal territorial growth that pretends to be the icon of a new socioeconomic development model, open to capitalism and reducing consumption limitations.

However, this new model causes huge impacts over the territory. The analyzed cities present a lack of adequate planning, which in the coming years may cause serious social and environmental issues. Thus, it would be advisable that urban planning be stricter both in the pursuit of long-term objectives, and compliance with regulations for the uncontrolled construction.

Adequate urban regulation will avoid enormous environmental and landscape problems as soon as a sustainable urbanization process is achieved. Likewise, in cities where there are still several pieces of land possible to urbanize, urban growth would be continuous throughout the city and not discontinuously, avoiding terrain vague in emblematic cities.

Nevertheless, in those cases where, contrarily, there was no land left possible to urbanize due to a construction vortex that could have been previously produced, it would be pivotal to avoid the urban chaos - of the illegal constructions; if so, it is possible to achieve a more equitable society.

It also should be considering an expertise opinion—by urban planners - and less the reticence's of politicians/decision-makers to favor other types of planning—once in several cases it can hide a new form of political order, favoring the most enriched social classes and harming to those poorer social classes.

## Author Contributions

“Conceptualization, R.A.C. and L.L.; methodology, R.A.C.; software, J.M.N.G.; validation, J.C., L.L. and J.M.N.G.; formal analysis, S.L.; investigation, J.M.N.G.; resources, J.C.; data curation, S.L.; writing—original draft preparation, R.A.C.; writing-review and editing, J.M.N.G.; visualization, L.L.; supervision, J.C.; project administration, R.A.C.; funding acquisition, J.C. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.”

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## Data Availability

The data used to support the research findings are available from the corresponding author upon request.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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