

Reexamining Transport Poverty, Job Access, and Gender Issues in Central and Eastern Europe

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Abstract

Tirana, the Balkan capital examined in this study, displays patterns of gendered job search behavior and access, which are unique within contemporary Europe and even within post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe. Here, it is a rather spatially constricted job search range rather than transport poverty that prevents women living in first-ring suburbs from attaining satisfactory employment. Female commutes are extraordinarily short and most often on foot. While the city now has nearly one million inhabitants and a high car ownership rate, and is located in Europe, the employment and mobility choices and behaviors of its female residents resemble those in developing rather than developed countries, and in small rather than large cities. The reasons underpinning this situation have more to do with socio-cultural gender barriers and less with transport poverty or labor market weaknesses. This finding might apply to other Balkan capitals or cities outside Europe, which have recently experienced large waves of internal migration and where both existing residents and newcomers have not yet adjusted to 'big city' life.

Keywords: Tirana, Albania; Central and Eastern Europe (CEE); transport poverty; accessibility; gender issues; labor market; job search range.

Note: All accompanying tables and figures are the end of this manuscript.

Introduction

Social policies of the socialist era guaranteed employment for women, shelter for families, childcare for working mothers, and public transport services for all. In the last quarter century since the collapse of socialism, Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries have experienced profound changes in all aspects of life, including labor markets, family lifestyles, and urban space organization. In particular, women have found themselves at crossroads in terms of job access, financial independence, and work-life balance (Standing 1996). In conjunction, cities have experienced a large amount of sprawl of residential and commercial land-uses (Hirt 2013). Urban travel has shifted rapidly from mass transit to cars, with grave consequences in terms of accessibility (Pucher and Buehler 2005).

As a result of these transitions, gender differentiation has become severe in CEE labor markets (Pollert 2005). There is evidence that women, especially poorer and less educated ones who live in peripheral locations and cannot afford automobile travel and private childcare, have difficulty accessing and maintaining employment (Hirt 2008). Employed women are forced to travel long distances or work in underpaid positions near home thus diminishing their disposable income and/or foregoing much needed family and relaxation time. This condition, which has been labeled as 'transport poverty,' is evident in larger and wealthier CEE capitals (Eurostat 2015). Elsewhere in Western Europe, as well as in the U.S., transport poverty, especially of (poorer) women, is a standard feature. Because the literature is dominated by studies stemming from Western contexts, a general assumption exists that gender-based transport poverty is universal in larger cities (Hanson and Ibipo 1985; Pickup and Giuliano 2005; Kwan 1999; Lens 2014; Hine 2004; Kaufmann 2004; Lucas 2006; Matas et al. 2009; Wenglenski and Orfeuil 2004).

The authors *hypothesize* that the Balkans display a different pattern, which is more in line with employment and mobility choices and behaviors in developing rather than developed countries, and in small rather than large cities. In some developing cities, large and small, women, including poorer ones that desperately need an income, tend to only accept employment very close to home, commonly in semi-formal businesses in their neighborhood. Many of those who have a job might actually be underemployed due to constraints imposed by the narrow job search range. The commutes of employed women are short and often on foot (see, for example, Pojani and Stead 2017). The reasons underpinning this situation, at least in the Balkans, have more to do with gender and less with transport poverty or labor market weaknesses.

To date, the evidence to prove or disprove these hypotheses is only anecdotal, as transport patterns and phenomena as they relate to job access and gender have not been systematically studied. To close this research gap, the aforementioned *hypotheses* are quantitatively tested in a Balkan capital: Tirana (Albania).

Through a survey of approximately 500 women living in first-ring suburbs, the authors seek to answer the following *research questions*: (a) How do characteristics of the physical, social, and economic environment influence women's work choices? (b) To what extent is transport poverty in Tirana (whether real or perceived) a threat to employment accessibility for women? and (c) Are women's employment, mobility, and accessibility constraints primarily dependent on transport poverty or broader labor market and gender issues? In this article, the concept of 'accessibility' to work is interpreted as socio-cultural and economic, as well as physical access to the labor market. This is broader than the traditional - more narrow and technical - definition that is adopted in transport studies.

Tirana, a metropolis of just under one million inhabitants, is an interesting case study because in the post-socialist period it has undergone a complete physical, social, and economic transformation. While in some ways the transformation has been similar to that experienced in other post-socialist CEE capitals, it has been far more drastic, reflecting some of the unique Albanian circumstances. As a *case study*, this article produces concrete, in-depth, context-dependent knowledge rather than 'hard' theory (see Flyvbjerg 2006). However, Tirana's situation is likely to be similar to other capitals in the Balkans and other developing regions that have liberalized their markets in the 1990s and have experienced significant rural-urban migration.

The first part of this article provides an overview of gender, transport poverty, and labor market issues in CEE cities. The second part deals with the case study. It provides some context on gender barriers, mobility, and employment issues that women face in Tirana. The third part presents the study methodology while the fourth part discusses the findings from the surveys.

Literature Review: Post-Socialist CEE

This section discusses issues related to gender as well as the labor market and transport and mobility issues in post-socialist CEE from a gendered perspective.

Gender Issues

Many studies have been produced on gender issues in socialist/post-socialist CEE countries, especially in the first two decades of the transition. All studies emphasize the discrepancy between the representation of women by the socialist propaganda machine and the realities of women's daily lives. This dualistic approach has had profound repercussions on the status of women in society after the demise of socialism.

On paper, socialist states granted women many rights, including equal opportunity access to higher education, child allowances, state-sponsored childcare, and paid maternity leave (LaFont 2001). Female participation in the paid labor force was expected (or even mandated in some countries, such as Albania), and was considered as one of the pillars of gender identity (Pascall and Manning 2000; Metcalfe and Afanassieva 2005; Molyneux, cited in Pascall and Manning 2000). However, this expectation or requirement aggravated women's situation by imposing on them a double burden: maintaining public employment in addition to coping with traditional household chores, childrearing, and elderly care – all in the context of backward technology and a shortage of products at home and at work. In some CEE countries labor markets were gender-segregated while in others, including Albania, women were expected to work in the same types of jobs as men (Roman 2001; Pascall and Manning 2000; Saxonberg and Sirovatka 2006; Lobodzinska 1996; Fodor et al. 2002). Due to these factors, the reality was that many women faced more barriers to their career advancement than men (Lange 2008). Many resented, and were overwhelmed by, their dual roles as full-time workers and primary family caretakers (Pascall and Manning 2000).

Since the 1990s, gender gaps have only widened. The major problems which characterized labor markets in the early transition years - soaring unemployment, underemployment, and the rise of informal employment - affected women more than men (LaFont 2001; Fodor et al. 2002; Lelkes 2006). Women in leadership positions (such as former female prime ministers of Bulgaria, Lithuania, and Poland) are rare exceptions rather than the rule. Because CEE countries have tended to reject the tenets of state socialism wholesale, refuting the idea of imposed gender equality is seen by some

women as liberating. The rise of nationalist sentiments and the need to deal with falling fertility rates has led to more gender discrimination. Women are encouraged to return to traditional roles of devoted mothers and wives (LaFont 2001).

At the same time, it is now much harder for female workers to give in to these social pressures due to the partial retreat of the state from its traditional welfare role and the shrinkage of family and maternity benefits (Cerami 2008). If women decide to have children and then stay at home to take care of them, they risk spiraling into poverty and dependency. Women who would like to stop working only temporarily after having a child, are forced to remain in full employment fearing that a career break after motherhood might be detrimental to future work opportunities or might close employment doors forever (Fodor et al. 2002; Valentova, 2012).

While women's worker identities have changed for the worse, women's home identities have remained fairly patriarchal. Sexuality is still considered as libertinage, or inimical Western sophistication, while marriage is primarily seen as a means for motherhood. Abortion is still considered as a taboo. Poland recently proposed (but ultimately rejected) a bill for a near-total ban on abortion. Conjugal rape, beating, and incest are widespread. In Russia for instance, domestic violence has been recently decriminalized. Outside the family, violence against women is manifest in the form of public verbal aggression, sexual harassment in the workplace, and sex trafficking. Bombarded by controversial messages and feeling under attack, many women have internalized these views (Roman 2001).

Labor Markets

In terms of labor market, employment patterns for all genders were significantly affected by the transition. In the early post-socialist years, all CEE countries felt the effects of recession and industrial collapse. Although most were recovering by the new millennium, the gross domestic product in many countries was still below the 1990 level. Income disparities and social polarization had grown substantially by then (Pollert 2003, 2005).

Many countries experienced unprecedented levels of unemployment, which were shocking to populations accustomed to nearly universal employment for both men and women during socialism (Pollert 2003, 2005). Many of those who remained in employment saw their real wages fall. Former industrial workers had difficulty adjusting their skills to match jobs in an increasingly service-based economy. Government-led labor market and social net policies and programs were exceedingly difficult to finance in the face of severe fiscal constraints and political instability. Inevitably, these factors forced all genders into informal employment (Çuka et al. 2003).

Gender gaps (which had existed to a degree during socialism) soon became quite strong in post-socialist CEE labor markets. For example, in Albania, only 44% of women are employed vs. 64% of men. Possible explanations include the elimination of female intensive activities (state enterprises) and predominance of male intensive activities (trade and construction) (Instat 2004). Now women are working less than men and are obtaining different types of jobs (more 'pink-collar jobs'). There are smaller portions of women than men in top occupations (and fewer than in the West). Despite women's high and increasing levels of educational attainment, a gendered pay difference persists (about 35% in Albania). Unsurprisingly, job satisfaction is lower among women than men. As a result of discrimination in the labor market (as well as the social factors noted earlier), many women's financial position and independence has weakened (Pollert 2003; Lange 2008; Saxonberg and Sirovatka 2006; Valentova, 2012).

CEE women's own responses to this changed world - which matches Western Europe to some extent - have been varied and conflicting (Pollert 2003). This has to do with the inherent contradictions of the labor market and family lifestyle during socialism, noted earlier. While the diminished role of women in the labor market is unwelcome, many women do not seem to miss the past either (Pollert 2003, 2005). Some feel that having the choice to stay at home is empowering (LaFont 2001). Under these circumstances, a return to the (imperfect) equal opportunity of the past will likely be quite difficult. Transport and mobility issues in CEE, which are discussed next, make access to employment more complicated for women.

Transport Poverty

Most socialist CEE cities restricted car ownership and created extensive and multimodal public transport systems, encompassing metros, trams, and buses. Cycling was also safe and popular. Generally, inner cities were well-served by alternative transport modes. At the same time, unsustainable spatial structures developed, with massive high-rise apartment complexes at the peripheries of cities, sometimes around industrial plants. These peripheries were often ill-served with public transport and led to extremely long journeys to the city center (Pucher and Lefevre 1996). These land-use patterns remain a troublesome legacy.

At the end of socialism, the urban transport systems of CEE capitals were overwhelmed by two major developments: (1) the precipitous modal shifts from public transport and non-motorized modes to private automobiles, which produced a host of typical problems (congestion, pollution, accidents, etc.) and (2) the suburbanization of low-density housing and commercial activities beyond the compact built-up area created during socialism, which generates additional demand for car travel. Fortunately, the poor were not pushed out of the inner cities because they obtained their flats at nominal prices during the privatization (a policy that applied in Albania as well). However, in this relatively new 'car culture,' the car signifies not only a utilitarian transport mode, but also a powerful status symbol, and therefore cars are sometimes used even for relatively short trips (Suchorzewski 2005; Pucher and Buehler 2005; Dimitrov 2004; Suditu et al. 2010; Suchorzewski 2005).

Wealthier CEE countries had to comply with environmental directives when they joined the European Union. Therefore, they are now taking steps to counter the automobile domination by upgrading urban public transport systems and pedestrianizing portions of city centers. The poorer countries in the region (i.e., Balkan states) lack adequate governance structures, funds, and political will to develop integrated and socially and environmentally sustainable transportation systems (see Boussauw 2012; Nientied 1998; Andrews 2005). Moreover, the attainment of social and environmental objectives in this region requires significant social and lifestyle changes - a difficult task in view of the psychological dimension of auto-ownership (REC 2008).

Studies on gender-based transport poverty in CEE countries have been poorly addressed in academic research. This research gap is partly explained by the region's past socialist tradition, which barred discussions of poverty, inequalities, and exclusion. By contrast, in the rest of Europe and other developed economies, inequalities and exclusions based on gender resulting from inadequate transportation have now become important issues. Studies have documented that transport poverty excludes women, especially socially-disadvantaged ones, from employment, social services, educational, and cultural opportunities (see Hanson 2010; GTZ 2007; Pickup and Giuliano 2005).

Among a few studies placed at the intersection of gender, urban space, and transport in post-socialist settings, one set in central Moscow showed that the quality of life for women residing there

has deteriorated due to gentrification and land-use restructuring, which has eliminated many low-cost services used by women, from kindergartens to grocery stores (Pavlovskaya and Hanson 2001). Two studies set in the newly formed suburbs of Prague and Sofia found that women, especially mothers, feel 'stuck' in their neighborhoods. They tend to experience greater challenges in accessing jobs and services and in maintaining their social and professional lives. Women's mobility is more restricted than men's (Novák and Sýkora 2007; Hirt 2008).

Theoretical Framework

In light of the foregoing review, transport poverty is expected to interact with shaky labor markets and socio-cultural gender barriers to produce a disadvantageous situation for Balkan women in terms of employment outcomes. This *conceptualization* is graphically represented in Figure 1 and guided the research. As noted, the authors' hypothesis is that gender issues, broadly defined, are primarily responsible for placing women at a disadvantage vis-à-vis men, while transport poverty and labor market weaknesses are secondary factors.

Case Study: Tirana

The following sections discuss issues related to gender barriers, as well as the labor market, planning, and mobility in Tirana from a gendered perspective. In many ways, Tirana's situation is similar to that of other CEE capitals. Therefore, rather than reiterate points made earlier, the following sections focus on highlighting the ways in which Tirana differs from its counterparts in CEE, due to its unique local circumstances.

Gender Issues

Albania differs from the rest of CEE due to its particular pre-socialist history, which is shared, to an extent, with some Balkan neighbors but not with countries such as Poland, Hungary, or Czechia. For centuries, Albanian women have been subjected to very strong community controls, which derive from a combination of a patrilineal and patriarchal society governed by feudal laws (up until the 13th century) and later, during Ottoman rule, the Islamic religion. Entirely subordinated to men, women were relegated to the home and played almost no role in public life (Calloni 2002; Falkingham and Gjonça 2001; Vullnetari and King 2016).

Despite its brutal nature, the socialist dictatorship in Albania radically improved the position of women in the workplace (Falkingham and Gjonça 2001). However, the rigid patriarchal order in the private sphere and in the political hierarchy were not reversed (Calloni 2002). Together with double burden noted earlier, the position of women within the couple and family was shaped by local factors. Very tightly controlled internal migration forced some women to marry undesirable partners living in urban areas in order to escape rural backwardness. In addition, the prevalence of arranged marriages, a lack of basic commodities, and a restricted social life after marriage further contributed to the repression of women (Vullnetari and King 2016). The notions of 'shame,' 'face saving,' and 'family reputation' (all reified forms of patriarchal power), were particularly strong in Albania compared to less traditional north-eastern European countries, and sanctioned the monitoring of women's behavior at all times while males were permitted considerably more freedom (Nixon 2009). Socialist laws and policies failed to protect women against male violence and sexual harassment, while at home or at work (Woodcock and Ikonomi 2014).

After the demise of socialism, women had to accept 'neo-traditional' and 'neo-patriarchal' forms of subjection to men both in the workplace and in the family. Gender gaps widened across social classes (Calloni 2002; Nixon 2009). Moreover, studies have estimated that at least one-third of women and girls are subject to physical or emotional abuse within the family (Nixon 2009; Burazeri et al. 2005). Domestic violence is partly due to the increased financial pressure on men, together with increased life insecurity and higher alcohol consumption - the latter a rarity in earlier times (Calloni 2002). Educated and professional women are more likely than others to suffer the consequences - probably due to their partners' feelings of failure for being unable to provide for the family, or their higher likelihood of resisting patriarchy than uneducated women in blue collar jobs (Burazeri et al. 2005).

On the positive side, social developments, such as massive rural-urban migration and international emigration at a much larger scale than in the rest of CEE, have contributed to female emancipation (Burazeri et al. 2005; Vullnetari and King 2016; Çaro et al. 2012). However, migration has also made gender disparities (formerly hidden in remote villages) more visible in cities, including Tirana. Gender struggles are taking place in the context of Albania's major economic struggles to adjust to the dynamics of the new market economy.

Labor Market

Labor market and employment patterns were affected not only by the change of the political system, but also due to some features of the local economy during socialism. Albania was an exceptional case, having cut nearly all relationships with the rest of CEE (and the rest of the world) since 1978. Its local form of dictatorship, independent of the Soviet Union, was much more brutal than elsewhere.

In the early transition years, besides the unemployment, underemployment, 'pink collar' employment, and informal employment issues experienced by other CEE countries, another major problem characterized the Albanian labor market: mass emigration of the male population. Massive (but unreported) remittances from emigrants distorted the labor market. The cost of living being lower than in the West and some other parts of CEE, many people felt less pressure to work if they had relatives abroad who would send home small amounts of money each month. Overall unemployment persisted throughout the transition, pointing to other deep structural factors (Çuka et al. 2003).

Male emigration mitigated male unemployment but it did not lead to female labor substitution. Indeed, the gender gap in employment is the highest in the CEE, with young women and mothers being the most disadvantaged (Instat 2004; Instat 2014b). Having household members currently living abroad and sending remittances home - a common scenario in Albania but not in the rest of CEE - lowers the probability of women engaging in paid employment (Mendola and Carletto 2009; Çuka et al. 2003; Mendola and Carletto 2009; Instat 2014b; UNDP 2007). The Albanian Institute of Statistics (Instat) also cites transport poverty among the factors that limits women's access to labor markets (Instat 2004; Instat 2014a).

Transport Poverty

Since 1990, the removal of restrictions on population movement within Albania led to an enormous wave of migration into the capital, as noted. Tirana's population exploded from less than 300,000 inhabitants in 1990 to about 700,000 inhabitants today. The metropolitan area has nearly one million inhabitants (almost one third of the national population). This level of migration and demographic concentration has been unique in CEE. Tirana is now dense, compact, and vibrant, with strongly

intertwined commercial and residential land-use. The distribution of economic activities is shown in Fig. 2. Despite the strain that internal migration placed on urban infrastructure, the urban economy improved at a fast pace, due to substantial remittances from emigrants abroad (Pojani 2009). However, the public sector obtains only meager revenues due to the fact that much of the income within the country is earned through remittances and informal channels and is therefore not taxable (Pojani 2010b).

Most of the capital's growth was accommodated within its pre-existing boundaries. Although considerably densified, the inner city remained the most desirable place to live. In contrast to other CEE cities, in Tirana no middle class suburbs developed (Pojani 2010a). While the central city is very compact, the metropolitan area sprawls beyond the Tirana city boundary, which consists largely of informal suburbs built by the poorest portions of the new migrants from the countryside. While encompassing mostly single-family homes, these peri-urban settlements also have relatively high densities (Pojani 2010b). Informal peri-urbanization has been typical in the Western Balkans but not in the rest of CEE.

In terms of mobility, the modal shift from public transport to private cars was more extreme than elsewhere because private car ownership was entirely prohibited during socialism (Pojani 2010a). Now, more than half of the city's households own a car. Very dense and chaotic traffic and unruly driving (resembling less developed regions rather than CEE) are the norm. Cycling is treacherous – although efforts to create a few segregated bicycle lanes and pedestrian areas are ongoing (Pojani 2011b). Unlike other socialist cities, Tirana did not create an extensive and multimodal public transport system. The current system includes only buses (there are no trams or metros). While the service frequency is high and the quality of the vehicles is decent, the network does not cover the entire built-up area, speeds are often slow, and buses overcrowded (Pojani 2010a).

In terms of work-related commutes, the latest Census (2011) reported the following modal split: 37% walking or cycling; 34% motorized public transport (buses and vans); and 29% motorized private transport (mainly cars). Clearly, active transport (especially walking) remains high despite growing car ownership. Apart from personal reasons (such as health and financial concerns), this behavior is explained by the fact that commuting distances are rather small. In addition, 14% of employed individuals work from home. Home-based workers tend to be male, older, and less educated than others (Instat 2014a).

Some data on gender are available from partial surveys conducted by NGOs and academics. Reports based on these data confirm the presence of gender-based transport poverty in Tirana. In combination, they show that women, both in the inner city and the peri-urban settlements, are less car-dependent than men. A higher portion of women than men commute by public transportation and on foot, and many women never use a car. Bicycle usage, on the other hand, is much lower for women compared to men. When making transportation choices, women are more concerned about saving money, while men focus on comfort and speed. Commuting times are similar for men and women - less than 30 minutes for the majority, but women spend less money on transport than men. Some women who do not drive but live in car-owning households, do not obtain driver's licenses because they believe driving is a man's activity. Others think that they are incapable of learning how to navigate Tirana's hectic traffic and deal with aggressive, mostly male, drivers. Often husbands discourage their wives from driving. At the same time, many women consider driving a remarkable sign of emancipation (Pojani 2004, 2011a; Co-Plan 2007).

Methodology

This study is based on primary data collected in winter 2013-2014. A group of 20 surveyors conducted face-to-face surveys in four selected neighborhoods in Tirana. Questionnaires (556 in total) were randomly distributed to respondents during the weekends. A random selection was achieved by numbering the buildings (and units) in a neighborhood (on a map) and then selecting a random number for inclusion in the study. Only women of working age were surveyed. In the end, 484 completed questionnaires were obtained, with a response rate of 87%.

The selected neighborhoods, 'Qyteti Studenti,' 'Lapraka,' 'Kinostudio,' and 'Selita,' were positioned near the four corners of the city (Figure 3). They were selected for this study because they are located in contrasting settings in terms of neighborhood age, accessibility, and public transport access. 'Qyteti Studenti' and 'Selita' are fairly new neighborhoods, created after communism. They include houses built informally by migrants from other parts of Albania. 'Lapraka' and 'Kinostudio' are older neighborhoods, created during socialism. They comprise a mix of socialist- and post-socialist-era apartment buildings.

The questionnaire inquired about work-related and transport-related issues from a gender perspective - drawing on the theoretical concepts of this study. The survey was in two parts. The first part included questions on work experience, employment status, demographic and socio-economic profile, willingness/desire/need to work, availability of different transport modes, and travel modes to and from work. The second part collected respondents' opinion and perceptions on Tirana's labor market dynamics. Variables measured by the survey are listed in Tables 1 and 2. They are aligned with the research questions set forth at the outset.

Initially, the survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The following information was gauged. The average age of the respondents in the four neighborhoods is similar. Respondents in Qyteti Studenti are slightly younger, likely because a large university campus is located nearby, which spills over in the residential neighborhood. Nearly eight out of ten respondents live with a partner, while less than a third have completed university. The indicator 'job ranking' was constructed based on a qualitative evaluation of the status of the respondents' jobs, where: 0 = unemployed, housewife, or student; 1 = low status job; 2 = medium status job; 3 = high status job. About a third of the respondents do not have a job, but only 10% refer to themselves as unemployed, while 19% define themselves as housewives and 3% are students. The average household size is 4.4 persons, including 2.2 children and 1.7 working members.

In a second step, an exploratory Pearson's correlation matrix was applied to identify possible relationships between variables and explore which statistically significant correlations fit with the theoretical framework. Given the relatively small sample, the low response rate for some questions, some redundancy among variables, and low variance among some variables, not all associations are sufficiently meaningful. However, the findings certainly shed light on Tirana's urban dynamics.

Starting from statistically significant Pearson's correlations, a number of models were built to gain more insight on gendered job search behavior and the constraints that women face during this process. Depending on the binary or continuous nature of the dependent variable, models were logistic or linear (ordinary least squares - OLS). The selected variables were based on the corresponding significance thresholds, the surveyed literature, and our insights on the urban fabric of Tirana and the travel patterns of its inhabitants. The results of the OLS regressions are represented by regression coefficients (B and Beta), p-values, and R^2 . The results of the logistic regressions are represented by $\exp(B)$ (odds ratios) and three goodness-of-fit metrics (-2 Log likelihood, Cox and Snell

R², and Nagelkerke R²). Coefficients, p-values, and approximations with explanatory value are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Additionally, eleven key variables - (1) distance to the center, (2) educational level, (3) job status, (4) family size, (5) presence of young children in the household, (6) household income, (7) walking time to work, (8) car ownership, and (9) being a driver, (10) a bus passenger, or (11) a pedestrian - were included in a two-step cluster analysis, which resulted in a logical distinction between only two clusters. As such, the contribution of this additional analysis was limited.

After the field work, surveyors were asked to report their observations, including characteristics of the respondents' behavior and of the survey environment (i.e., the respondents' home and neighborhood), which might not have been immediately obvious by analyzing the surveys. Their reports helped interpret the survey results.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1 summarizes the variables measured in the first part of the survey and the respective descriptive statistics. The distance from the residence of the respondent to the city center is also reported. For each variable, an overall figure is provided, as well as figures for each of the four surveyed neighborhoods. Given the non-normal distribution of the data, both the median and the mean are provided for distance-related variables. For other continuous variables only the mean is provided. Binary variables are reported using percentages.

Nearly all respondents report being obliged to work to make ends meet: the reported monthly income per household is only 65,200 Lek on average (470 Euro). This finding is consistent with the literature review, which uncovered economic strain and even dire poverty in the CEE region. However, survey responses about income are often unreliable. Also, surveyors' reports suggest that the financial circumstances of the respondents are likely higher than reported given the size and quality of their houses. On average, respondents work 21.6 hours per week. Again, this finding tallies with the literature which reports underemployment for CEE women. Only 1% of the respondents work from home while the rest commute. However, particularly striking (and unusual in CEE) are the extremely short commuting distances of the respondents: the median distance to work is only 900 meters.

Typically, families have either no car or only one car. The car ownership rate is 0.6 cars per household. In other words, slightly more than half of the households have at least one car. But only 26% of the respondents have actual access to a car, i.e., the family car is available to them rather than to their partners. A similar portion (28%) have a driver's license. A small minority (17%) indicate that they have both a license and access to a car. These findings are corroborated by the reported modal split: only 11% of the respondents travel to work by car and only 5% drive themselves. This is in stark contrast to the commuting figures for Tirana as a whole, where 29% commute by car. Clearly, most car commuters are men. Also, this finding is surprising given that car ownership is considerable in this sample. Virtually no one uses taxis or transport offered by an employer.

Bicycles are rarely used as well - although about one third of the respondents state that they would be willing to cycle to work, if infrastructure was provided for this purpose. This finding hints at the high status associated with cars in CEE (noted earlier) and the relegation of cycling to a low status mode for the poor.

On the other hand, walking rates are very high. Half of the respondents walk to work, which is remarkable compared to Western European and other CEE cities. But this figure is obviously due to

the exceptionally short commutes of the respondents. Typically, respondents report being physically able to walk up to an hour but are prepared to walk only up to half an hour to their workplace (median figure). Again, this finding suggests that the job search range of the respondents is relatively constricted. Public transport use is also high: 36% of the respondents commute by bus. On average, commuters are just a 6 minute walk from a bus stop, and also their workplace is no more than a 5 minute walk from their destination bus stop (median figures).

Beyond averages, two clusters exist among survey participants. Cluster 1 is characterized by a higher family income combined with car ownership and a greater distance to work while women in Cluster 2 have lower family incomes, are carless, and work closer to home. Taken together, these findings suggest that transport poverty is not a principal cause of unemployment or underemployment, and a constricted job search range, likely stemming from broader gender barriers, plays a larger role.

Table 2 summarizes the findings from the second part of the survey. This part dug deeper into the possible reasons which prevent non-working respondents from finding a job. The variables were measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 4. The weight of 16 potential obstacles was measured. The higher the score, the more difficult to overcome the obstacle. The results indicate that, notably, only obstacles such as a weak personal network, corruption, or the general lack of (supposedly nearby) jobs score high. These findings indicate that a weak labor market is a factor that prevents women from accessing (desirable) employment. The surveyors' qualitative reports support this finding.

Childcare during work – a major, and usually gendered, impediment elsewhere - was not reported as a problem. This is likely because public and private nurseries for children as old as one month are available in Tirana at reasonable cost and extended family members are often involved in childcare.

Again, transport poverty is not evidenced as a major problem. This might be due to a sense of resignation or low expectations in terms of transport options. But it might also be due to the fact that, for many respondents, it is unconceivable to look for a job far from home, although they might urgently need or want to work. The surveyed neighborhoods likely contain a substantial number of post-socialist rural-urban migrants. Perhaps these new urbanites are less familiar with the city or retain some of their earlier small-town mentality in terms of job search range. Similarly, longtime residents have not yet adjusted to the fact that they now live in a metropolis of nearly one million inhabitants rather than a medium sized city of 300,000.

The actual commute patterns are, to some extent, indicative of the job search behavior of unemployed or underemployed women. In Western European and North American agglomerations, women's work commutes are much longer than in Tirana. Meanwhile, the labor supply in most western cities is more abundant than in Tirana. In theory, in a 'thicker' labor market, the probability of finding a job close to home is greater. However, this study reveals a reverse relationship: in Tirana's relatively weak and unspecialized labor market, women work extremely close to home. A limited daily mobility suggests that many potential workers do not find their way to the kind of employment that matches their profile. A short home-to-work distance is probably an indicator that women have an excessively narrow geographical scope while exploring Tirana's labor market. This precludes an efficient match between job demand and supply.

The findings from the regression analysis shed additional light on Tirana's urban dynamics (see Tables 3 and 4 for details). For example, living closer to the city center appears to increase the chances of obtaining a (better) job. This is in line with traditional mono-centric urban economics theories.

Interestingly, in many heavily car-dependent European and American cities, this mechanism seems no longer present (see Boussauw et al. 2012).

Women's job status depends on their level of education, their having a driver's license and owning a car, and distance of their home to the city center (living closer to the center means increased access to higher ranking jobs). The level of household income is explained by level of education of its adult members, the availability of a car, and the distance of the home from the workplace (of the woman). Living farther from the center is associated with a lower income, which actually contrasts with many urban regions in Europe.

Frequency of having a driver's license and access to a car is correlated with the woman's level of education, her husband's level of education, and having young children (i.e., being in the young parent age range). Being able to commute by car (both as a driver and as a passenger) depends on having a license and access to a car, as well as on the woman's job status. A (theoretical) willingness to cycle to work is explained by having a license and a car available (the intervening variable here is likely to be a more athletic and courageous personality, careless of gender stereotypes), by distance to the city center (the closer to the center is one's home, the more cycling is seen as an alternative to the car, pointing to transport poverty), and by a younger age.

If the educational level of a woman is treated as an independent variable, the analysis reveals that it has a statistically significant and even strong impact in four of the seven regression models that are applied. The level of education has a strong impact on job status, family income, and the likelihood of a woman having a driving license and access to a car. On the other hand, there seems to be no clear link between the level of education and the way in which women travel to work.

Conclusion

Tirana, the Balkan capital examined in this study, displays patterns of gendered job search behavior and access, which are unique within contemporary Europe and even within post-socialist CEE. Here, it is a rather spatially constricted job search range based on gendered constraints - more than transport poverty and labor market weaknesses - that prevents women living in first-ring suburbs from attaining satisfactory employment. Many women in these settings, including poorer ones that desperately need an income and wealthier ones who can afford car travel, tend to only accept employment very close to home. Female commutes are extraordinarily short. While Tirana's public transport network is not very advanced, suburban women do not consider a lack of transport options as a real problem - partly because they do not foresee having to rely on public transport. While the city now has nearly one million inhabitants and is located in Europe, the employment and mobility choices and behaviors of its female residents resemble those in developing rather than developed countries, and in small rather than large cities.

Based on these findings and analysis, the answers to the research questions set forth at the outset are the following:

- a) Tirana's specific socio-economic and spatial context strongly determines women's job choice behavior. Women work extremely close to home, which can be explained by a highly confined personal view of the urban economy, but also by the highly monocentric and compact structure of the city.
- b) Based on Western standards, transport poverty is present among women in Tirana's first-ring suburbs: only 17% have access to a car as a driver, and many have no access at all to destinations that are beyond walking distance. However, women do not perceive

their lack of transport options as an important obstacle to accessing jobs, certainly not when compared with the weak structure of the labor market itself.

- c) Women's access to jobs is largely determined by a very narrow scope of the city's geography. This is perhaps driven by a cultural preference for a daily life heavily centered on the family and immediate community. Since the political changes of the 90s, gender roles have reverted to the traditional ones, with a measurable negative impact on the level of access to the labor market for women. Clearly, transport poverty is a secondary concern compared to gender equality issues.

With regard to the research hypotheses that drove this study, the authors conclude that the specific cultural and historical context of this Balkan city implies a unique labor market structure and associated commuting patterns that are not comparable to the Western cities in which similar research is usually conducted. Women in Tirana show different commuting patterns than men. The traditional focus of women on their family and neighborhood is reflected in a heavily confined perspective of the urban economy and the availability of jobs. The structurally weak labor market does not explain this gender bias, nor is transport poverty the main cause of it.

These findings might apply to other Balkan capitals, which have not been studied in detail to date. It might also apply to cities outside Europe, which have recently experienced large waves of internal migration and in which both existing residents and newcomers have not yet adjusted to 'big city' life. Finally, while transport poverty is not perceived as an issue in first-ring suburbs, it might be a massive problem in exurban informal settlements, which are present in most Balkan capitals. Further research is needed in these settings.

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Tables

Table 1: Variables measured by the survey and descriptive statistics.

	1. Laprakë neighbourhood	2. Kinostudio neighbourhood	3. Qytet Studenti neighbourhood	4. Selitë neighbourhood	Overall
distance to city center (meters) (mean)	2870	2498	2498	3486	2931
age (mean)	42.9	41.3	38.5	42.5	41.3
living with partner	89%	75%	71%	83%	79%
higher education	15%	36%	48%	25%	31%
higher education partner	12%	28%	31%	20%	22%
job ranking (scale 0-3)	1.29	1.51	1.31	1.22	1.33
no job	27%	24%	38%	37%	32%
low status job	28%	18%	9%	14%	17%
medium status job	33%	40%	38%	39%	38%
high status job	12%	17%	15%	10%	14%
housewife	19%	16%	18%	21%	19%
unemployed	7%	5%	14%	13%	10%
student	3%	5%	1%	3%	3%
years of work experience (mean)	11.6	9.6	9.7	11.8	10.7
household size (mean)	4.5	4.3	4.3	4.6	4.4
number of children (mean)	2.3	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2
family with young children (0-12)	52%	34%	51%	39%	44%
hours of work per week (mean)	24.7	21.8	17.6	17.6	21.6
household members employed (mean)	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.9	1.7
needs income from work	95%	97%	95%	96%	96%
mean monthly income (Lek) (mean) [€1 = 137 Lek]	45,600	61,100	64,500	84,300	65,200
wants to find work	91%	91%	95%	88%	91%
years looking for work (mean)	4.9	4.0	3.5	4.5	4.2
kilometers to work (median mean)	0.3 1.6	1.0 1.7	1.0 8.9	1.0 1.0	0.9 3.5
walking minutes to work (median mean)	15 32	15 20	23 52	30 33	20 34
cars in household: (median mean)	0 0.5	1 0.5	1 0.7	1 0.7	1 0.6
at least one car in the household	43%	52%	57%	57%	53%
has car access when desired	20%	28%	32%	22%	26%
can drive	27%	31%	27%	27%	28%
has car access and can drive	15%	17%	18%	16%	17%
commute mode: car (as driver)	5%	7%	7%	-	5%
commute mode: car (as passenger)	-	12%	7%	4%	6%
commute mode: employer's vehicle	3%	-	-	-	1%
commute mode: taxi	-	-	-	4%	1%
commute mode: bus	31%	29%	37%	44%	36%
commute mode: walking	62%	50%	46%	48%	51%
works at home	-	2%	2%	-	1%
acceptable walking time to work (min. median mean)	30 44	33 42	30 47	30 44	30 44
walking minutes to closest bus stop (median mean)	10 9	5 7	5 7	10 9	6 8
walking minutes from bus to work (median mean)	8 7	4 6	3 5	5 7	5 6
ability to walk (minutes, median mean)	60 70	60 71	60 70	60 68	60 70
willing to cycle to work	28%	39%	44%	25%	34%

Table 2: Appreciation of possible obstacles to the job market.

Variable (Likert scale 1-4)	1. Laprakë neighbourhood	2. Kinostudio neighbourhood	3. Qytet Studenti neighbourhood	4. Selitë neighbourhood	Overall
child care access	1.8	1.4	1.7	2.0	1.7
transport availability	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.6	1.3
disapproving husband	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.4	1.3
health issues	1.9	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.5
weak personal network	3.1	3.2	2.9	3.0	3.0
inadequate education	2.7	2.4	2.1	2.5	2.4
lack of experience	2.6	2.5	2.3	2.3	2.4
remote home location	1.9	1.9	1.8	2.3	2.0
job status expectation	1.9	2.1	2.4	2.0	2.1
part-time search only	1.9	1.7	1.8	2.1	1.9
corruption	2.6	3.2	2.5	3.1	2.8
skill mismatch	1.9	2.5	2.5	2.4	2.3
older age	1.6	1.7	1.5	1.5	1.5
gender discrimination	1.6	1.5	1.3	1.5	1.5
lack of jobs in Tirana	3.5	2.9	3.0	3.0	3.1
insufficient search intensity	2.2	1.8	2.3	2.6	2.3

Table 3: Selection of OLS regression estimates.

dependent variable: job status of the respondent	R ² 0.231		
independent variables	B	Beta	p-value
constant	1.626		0.000
respondent's level of education	0.851	0.372	0.000
respondent has driver's license and car access	0.382	0.134	0.007
dependent variable: household income	R ² 0.442		
independent variables	B	Beta	p-value
constant	36910.245		0.000
respondent's level of education	48095.284	0.645	0.000
availability of a car	29298.213	0.379	0.019
respondent's trip length to work (km)	-2046.088	-0.503	0.006

Table 4: Selection of logistic regression estimates.

dependent variable: respondent has driver's license	-2 Log llh	Cox&Snell	Nagelkerke
	172.337	0.150	0.222
independent variables	B	exp(B)	p-value
Constant	-2.249	0.106	0.000
respondent's level of education	1.744	5.722	0.000
respondent has young children	0.970	2.638	0.012
dependent variable: respondent has driver's license and car access	-2 Log llh	Cox&Snell	Nagelkerke
	187.049	0.125	0.222
independent variables	B	exp(B)	p-value
Constant	-3.067	0.047	0.000
respondent's level of education	0.931	2.538	0.051
respondent's husband's level of education	1.353	3.870	0.005
respondent has young children	0.947	2.577	0.015
dependent variable: respondent drives a car to work	-2 Log llh	Cox&Snell	Nagelkerke
	49.455	0.085	0.267
independent variables	B	exp(B)	p-value
Constant	-7.384	0.001	0.000
the respondent having driver's license and having a car available	1.921	6.828	0.028
job status of the respondent	1.508	4.515	0.043
dependent variable: respondent rides a car to work	-2 Log llh	Cox&Snell	Nagelkerke
	59.420	0.093	0.257
independent variables	B	exp(B)	p-value
Constant	-6.938	0.001	0.000
respondent has driver's license and car access	1.704	5.495	0.023
job status of respondent	1.497	4.469	0.023
dependent variable: respondent's willingness to cycle to work	-2 Log llh	Cox&Snell	Nagelkerke
	425.167	0.105	0.146
independent variables	B	exp(B)	p-value
Constant	3.067	21.471	0.000
respondent has driver's license and car access	0.622	1.862	0.037
distance between home and city center	-0.001	0.999	0.005
respondent's age	-0.049	0.953	0.000

Figures

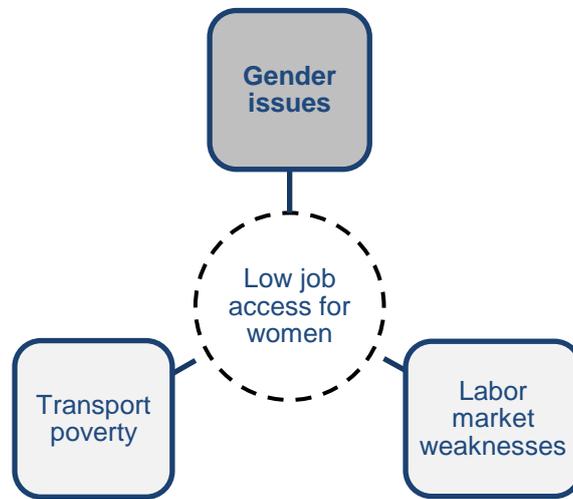


Figure 1. Conceptualization of study.

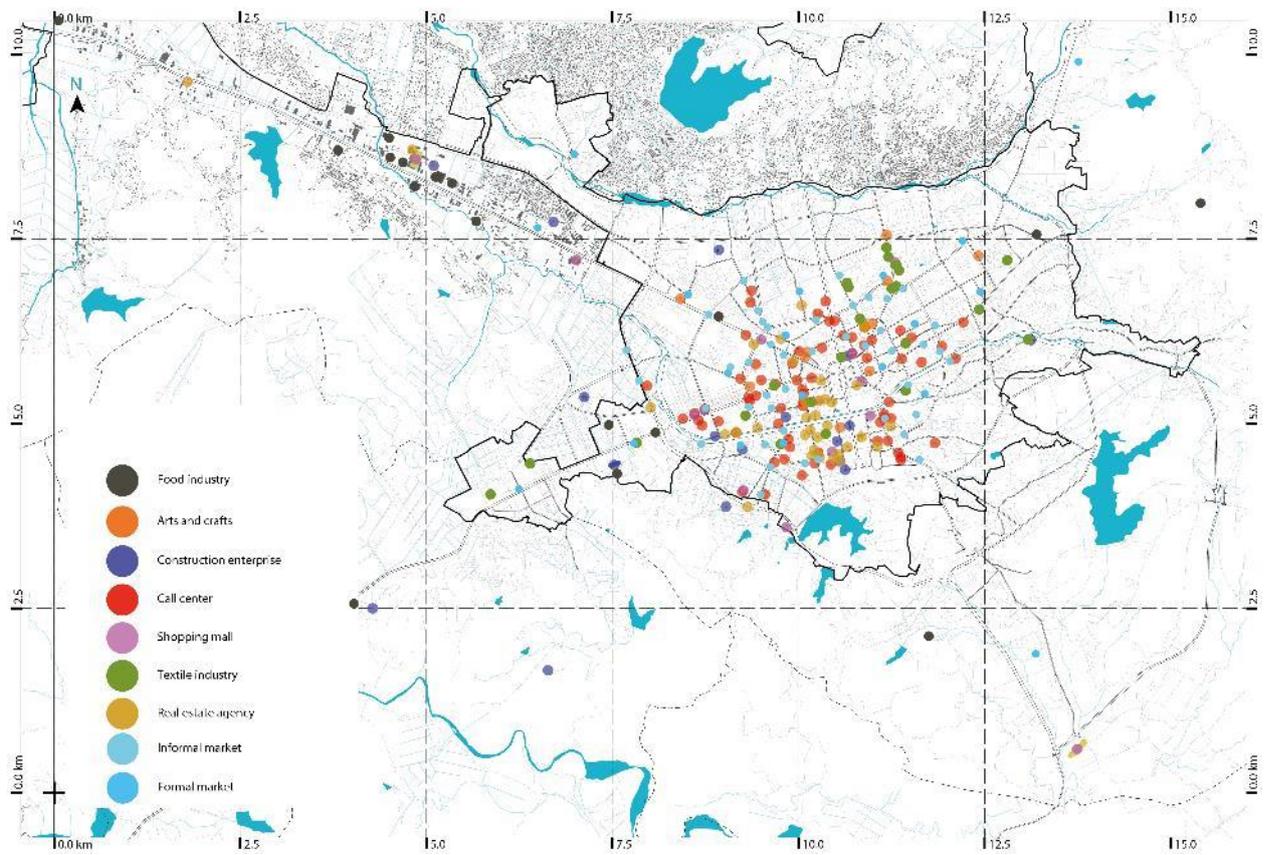


Figure 2. Distribution of economic activities in Tirana. Map courtesy of the City of Tirana.

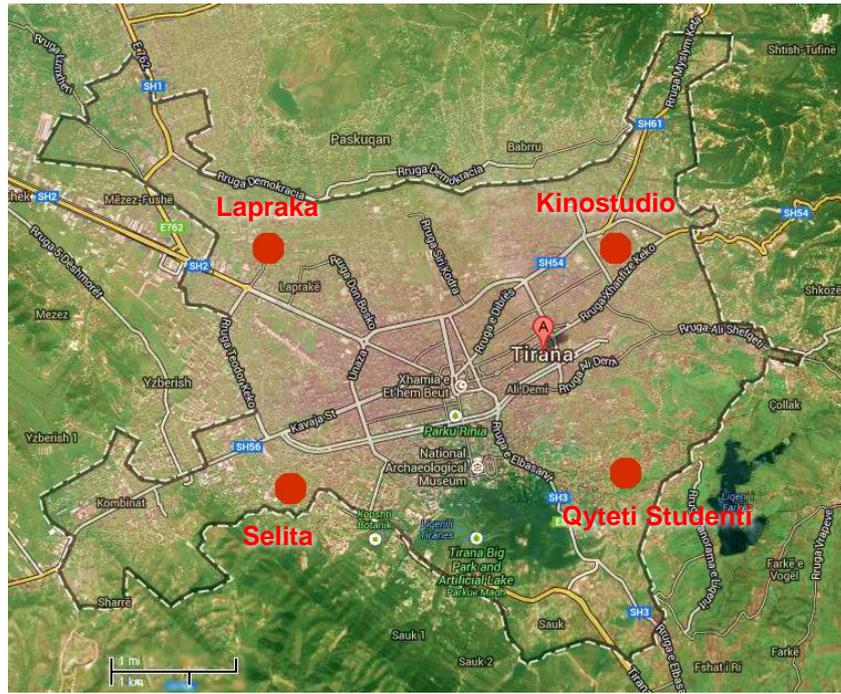


Figure 3. Location of case study neighborhoods (based on Google Maps).