

Fragments as methodology / an overview of OMB's research

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The idea of this International workshop organized for the 32nd cycle PhD students in the frame of the IDAUP joint International PhD program between POLIS University, in Albania, and University of Ferrara, in Italy, needs to be introduced through several points linked with some of the most important overall research objectives addressed by the Observatory of the Mediterranean Basin (OMB). Such points must be intended as the first achievements of a very young unit within the applied research department at POLIS University, and as guidelines for the readers in order to better understand the methodology and the approach of this book and its future developments¹.

The first topic that must be stressed is the importance of this fourth edition in relation to the applied research concept, always connecting practice to academia. Since its foundation in 2015, one of the main objectives of the OMB is to engage, within a specific research agenda, professional design contracts at National or, as in this case, Regional scale. The city of Shkoder and the surrounding region have been studied from the 32nd cycle PhD students for more than one year, through urban and landscape projects, with the aim of elaborating further some of the topics addressed by the plan developed between 2015 and 2017 by POLIS University in cooperation with a research group from Arizona State University, and supported by the Municipality of Shkoder. As a result of this research the PhD students elaborated an overview of practical tools linked to theoretical aspects. All the projects

emphasize the specificity of the Shkoder region and take into consideration most of the problems between lake, river, and sea. The design projects provided by the students are strongly connected to the idea of creating open debates for future acupunctural interventions.

The second, equally important, topic is aligned with one of the main concepts of the International PhD POLIS/Ferrara, and it pertains the value of working through interdisciplinary skills. The PhD students contribute to the project depending on their background and research field. Moreover, interdisciplinary exchanges allow the PhD students to enrich their capacity to interact and exchange knowledge about a very specific project with different disciplines and fields of expertise. In the specific case of Shkoder, during the workshop there were many instances where students presented their proposals in front of a commission of experts coming from the municipality as well as from Architecture, Urban Design, Planning and Landscape Architecture professional practices.

The third topic that should be highlighted is the concept behind the OMB book series, which must be seen as an ongoing project. In order to understand the book series as an in-progress project, the transversal relation that each publication has with the activities developed within the OMB needs to be considered. Therefore, each topic, apart from being dealt with through practice and research activities within the Department, also stimulates design speculations that are later developed at



Fig1 / Projecting Shkoder" workshop progress, working with fragments
source / the author

the Bachelors, Masters and Professional Masters level, through Designs Studios and Laboratories. Depending of the complexity of the topic, the Graduate students are engaged in a comprehensive design process and give their contribution in terms of design strategies and concepts, while gaining, at the same time, design experience.

Starting with the "Durana" (Vv.Aa., 2015) book and following with the publications "Albanian Riviera" (Vv.Aa., 2016) and "When the river Flows" (Vv.Aa., 2018), this book about Shkoder is the fourth book of a sequence of projects that share the same basic concept. "Projecting Shkoder" is the continuation of previous experiences where the topic concerning the relationship between water and land is the driving subject for research activities aimed at addressing the criticalities of the Albanian landscape. At the departmental level each subtopic became an occasion to compare the Albanian condition with the international environment.

The enigma of Fragments

The first time that the topic of "city fragments" was addressed within the Department of Applied Research at POLIS was September 2014, during an

international workshop entitled "Tirana Interrupted"². The aim of the five day workshop was to present a fragmented map of Tirana which embedded the urban scale in the architectural one, stimulating a public debate on the topic. The idea of the above mentioned workshop was clearly inspired by one of the most important experiments made during the 70' in Italy, entitled "Roma Interrotta". Following this research initiative the concept of interrupted city became a manifesto for future generations of architects and urban designers³.

The main objective of the international PhD workshop "Projecting Shkoder" was to highlight the importance of the above mentioned research method to enrich the architecture discipline through multidisciplinary approaches, capable of dealing with different scales of intervention and fields of knowledge (territorial planning, landscape and city scale).

To better focalize the attention on the importance of this method and on why it is so relevant for our studies, we must investigate the definition of fragment as enigma. In most cases the "fragment" is defined as: "a part broken off, detached,

1 / This is the first number of a book series developed under the Observatory of the Mediterranean Basin (OMB) unit

2 / The workshop was organized in the framework of Tirana Architecture Week 2014. For more info see: Rossi, L., 2015. *Tirana Interrupted*. FORUM A+P 16, pp. 78-87. Following this workshop further research activities and scientific papers were developed (for more info see the reference in bibliography).

3 / There are several articles written about the "Roma Interrotta" exhibition (for more information see the bibliography). The most important books to mention are: Piero Sartogo, Costantino Dardi, Antoine Grumbach, James Stirling, Paolo Portoghesi, Romaldo Giurgola, Robert Venturi, Colin Rowe, Michael Graves, Leon Krier, Aldo Rossi, Robert Krier, 2014. *Roma Interrotta, Twelve interventions on the Nolli's plan of Rome in the Maxxi architettura collections*. Monza: Johan & Levi Edition; Pippo Ciorra, Francesco Garofalo, Piero Ostilio Rossi, 2015. *ROMA 20-25. New Life Cycles for the Metropolis*. Rome: Quodlibet.



Fig2 / Example of tactical selections operated in the framework of different workshops: "Tirana Interrupted, Urban Vision to inspire the Future" - Workshop MAD Center POLIS University Tirana, 2014 source / Eranda Janku

incomplete or unfinished". In the past there have been several concepts developed around the word "fragment", especially considering its property of being "incomplete or unfinished"⁴. In the framework of this investigation the word "fragment" is stressed mainly in its significance as something that "is unfinished" or even not definable, which allows us to shift the concept of fragment in a sort of paradox, in the attempt of finding a possible relationship between a whole system and its micro diversifications. In our case, a micro diversification is the smallest element selected in a vast area, such as the territorial, landscape, or city scale.

Working with unfinished fragments means also looking at Architecture as an additive discipline, capable of borrowing and assimilating information from other disciplines. What happens if we associate other points of view, like the one of the city, planning, or landscape scale to Architecture? During the 50's and 60's we can identify several examples whereby the architectural scale has been associated with different scales of intervention, in the attempt of exploring how the architectural world can work through interdisciplinary processes. This is the case of some of the experiments elaborated by Alison and Peter Smithson, whereby the architectural scale is always recognizable as small elements within an overall structure.

To better guide the reader through the purpose of our investigation it seems appropriate to quote Bruno Zevi. In his

book: "Saper vedere la Città", Zevi describes Biagio Rossetti's⁵ strategic approach for the expansion of Ferrara, introducing the concept of "un-finished urbatectonic"⁶:

"[...] – non-finito urbatettonico. Questo è forse l'aspetto culminante, la lezione di fondo. Tutti ormai lo ripetono: una serie di stanze, anche se ciascuna bellissima in sé, non forma una casa; una serie di edifici, sia pure splendidi singolarmente, non configura una città. Occorre un legame di interdipendenza, il continuum. Ma, per concretarlo, ogni elemento, palazzo chiesa viale piazza, deve rimandare a quelli adiacenti, cioè rinunciare alla propria autonomia. Ciò significa: poetica del non-finito, livello urbano in cui Biagio Rossetti assume la statura del genio." (Zevi, 2018, pp. 48-49)

According to Bruno Zevi's definition of "non-finito urbatettonico", the term is referred to an inner system composed by a seriality of micro elements, always related with the whole: a sequence of rooms in relation to the house, a sequence of buildings in relation to the city. What Bruno Zevi wants to stress is the importance of a single element, in its peculiarity of being an "unfinished fragment", capable of establishing an interdependence with the other elements. In other words, for Zevi each element can become operative only if it's considered as an un-finished object and if it's not considered autonomous. The other relevant operation carried by Zevi by fusing together the words "urbano" and "architettonico", and devising the new term "urbatettonico", is to provide a clear idea of the concept of urban scale



Fig3 / Example of tactical selections operated in the framework of different workshops: "Tirana Interrupted, Urban Vision to inspire the Future" - Workshop MAD Center POLIS University Tirana, 2014
source / Anduena Dragovi

4 / Most of these concepts come from the art world, and they evolve around the idea to work on unfinished processes. See also Marc Augé's point of view in: Augé, Marc, *L'enigma della continuità*, in AUGÉ, M. & MENEGUZZO, M., (Edited by) 2013. *Non-finito, Infinito*. Sculture di Paolo Delle Monache film di Benoit Felici, catalogo della mostra. Milano: Electa, pp.9-13.

5 / The book "Saper vedere la città" is an extraordinary narration of the city of Ferrara planned by Biagio Rossetti (1447 – 1516). In order to have a more complete knowledge about it, see also previous publications by Bruno Zevi, such as: "Saper vedere l'urbanistica. Ferrara di Biagio Rossetti, la prima città moderna europea", published by Einaudi in 1960.

6 / The term "urbatectonic" is a direct translation of the word "urbatettonico" or "urbatettura" introduced by Bruno Zevi. In this context it reinforces our statement on working with architecture and its additionality.

7 / Translation: "[...] – un-finished urbatectonic. This is maybe the culminating aspect, the main lesson. Everybody repeats it: a series of rooms, even if each one is very beautiful in itself, don't make a house; a series of buildings, even if singularly splendid, don't configure a city. A link of interdependence is needed, the continuum. But, to put it into action, each element, palace, church, boulevard, square, needs to refer to the neighboring elements, that is, renouncing to its own autonomy. This means: poetic of the un-finished, urban level in which Biagio Rossetti acquires the stature of genius."



Fig4 / Example of tactical selections operated in the framework of different workshops: "Tirana Interrupted International Workshop" - Department of Architecture and Urban Design School of Arts and Architecture University of California Los Angeles UCLA, 2015
source / the author



Fig5 / Example of tactical selections operated in the framework of different workshops: "Future Epigraphs" – International Workshop - MEF University, Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture Istanbul (TR), 2018 / source: the author

embodied in the architectural one and vice versa. Moreover, by associating and linking the words "urbano" and "architettonico" – which denote very different scales of intervention and a material and conceptual distance – Zevi's conceptual elaboration suggests that in spite of this distance, the gap itself can become an operative tool, linking the city scale to the building scale. What happens if we decide to transfer the above mentioned interdependence between urban and architectural scale to the planning, and the landscape project scale? What if we consider and link territory and architecture, or landscape and architecture? And in the above hypotheses, what would be the suitable methods and tools to operate in such fields of action?

These are some of the questions that the OMB in general, and this publication in particular, are attempting to address. Through the activities carried by the OMB since 2015, the aforementioned concepts have been at the base of speculative investigative approaches – at different design scales and in different contexts – that attempt to identify the interdependence between the smallest elements of a system and the whole. In the case of Shkoder, the choice to start from a masterplan scale, is justified by the need to deal with a vast territory. Such territory is seen as a sum of very complex and diverse fragments, and following Zevi's

inspiration about the relationship between buildings and city in Biagio Rossetti's Ferrara, in Shkoder each fragment is linked with the others through the identification of the underlying un-finished processes embedded in the fragment itself.

In the international PhD workshop "Projecting Shkodra" operative fragments between lake, river, and sea mark the end of the above investigation and, at the same time, the beginning of new possible strategies, always connecting the world of architecture with other fields of knowledge.

Considering the above introduction, we will now attempt to list possible tools that make this method operative and try to demonstrate how a small element, that belongs to a bigger whole, can generate new objectives within the different scales of the project: territorial, landscape and city. It's also fundamental to specify that this method doesn't aim at achieving a specific result, but rather at identifying a repeatable process. To make a fragment operative we adopt three key actions: Gridding, Selecting, Projecting and showing.

Gridding – the key action of gridding is fundamental in order to classify the scale and typology of intervention. In this case there are two possible approaches. The first is an abstract grid with regular



Fig6 / Example of projecting and showing operations in the framework of different workshops: "Tirana Interrupted, Urban Vision to inspire the Future" exhibition, MAD Centre POLIS University Tirana, 2014
source / Eranda Janku



Fig7 / Example of projecting and showing operations in the framework of different workshops: "Tirana Interrupted" exhibition, UCLA Los Angeles, 2015 / source: the author

quadrants and constant dimensions. The second is a grid with irregular quadrants, normally as a consequence of a specific requirement, i.e. a regulatory plan or a focal area of interest (this is the case of Shkoder). In both cases the grid must be considered like a very flexible device that overlaps an existing topographic map: territorial, regional or city scale. The grid also has the capacity to multiply itself infinitely. After the subdivision of the topographic map in different quadrants each quadrant can be detached from its original position. This operation of detaching a quadrant from a specific origin can have a dual outcome: on one hand the quadrant can work as an unfinished object, having the capacity to include or exclude the whole structure of the grid; on the other, it can work autonomously, like an island in a sea of signs. This action of including/excluding specific parts of a whole is synthesizable in the operation of plug-in and plug-out. In terms of project work progress, the above mentioned operation is a very useful step because it makes the idea of working in a multidisciplinary group immediately operative and, at the same time, it allows for the possibility of figuring out, step by step, the map variations.

Selecting, or tactical selection - before explaining the operative meaning of this key action, it is necessary to underline the importance of the cognitive aspects of an analytical approach. The above mentioned actions must be considered as tools that don't exclude the importance of knowing the area in all its morphological and anthropological components.

Therefore, the key action named tactical selection⁸ is a tool able to identify hidden characteristics that belong to a series of complex elements within each specific quadrant. This type of investigation enables us to trace unfinished elements at the territorial, landscape and urban scale. It's like highlighting a word in a book; by giving importance to the meaning of a specific word in a book, we open new creative paths for future narrations.

Projecting and showing - in order to introduce this last key action, it's necessary to specify the point of view of this investigation in terms of results and in relation with its future developments. In this frame of work, both "projecting" and "showing" have the same roots: working with open processes. The idea to identify and select unfinished fragments within each specific quadrant enables the students to work with acupunctural projects capable of restoring the interdependence mentioned by Bruno Zevi, in which the idea of a smallest fragment can recreate a new continuity at the territorial, landscape, or city scale. As a concluding key action, the exhibition is a key step of the entire process, whereby all the fragments are joined in a system, they are open to different interpretations, and can stimulate discussions with the local authority. In this case the exhibition can be considered a design strategy engaging multidisciplinary skills in a new configuration of the city. The key action of "showing" is very powerful if considered as a tool to generate new knowledge and initiate new research paths.



Fig8 / Example of projecting and showing operations in the framework of different workshops: "Projecting Shkoder" exhibition, MAD Centre POLIS University Tirana (AL), 2017 / source: the author

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The three above mentioned key actions can be considered as tools aimed at defining a practical approach, exploring the capacity of architecture to deconstruct complexity at the territorial, landscape, and urban scale. Hopefully this brief introduction can act as practical guide to read and interpret the work elaborated by the PhD students, and as a useful device for future applied research activities, always attempting to connect the Architectural experience with other fields, through a multidisciplinary approach.

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Fig9 / Example of projecting and showing operations in the framework of different workshops: Future Epigraphs" exhibition MEF University Istanbul (TR), 2018 / source: the author

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