Transhumances

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Abstract

IDAUP students contributed to preliminary analyses for a regional plan led by SeaLine and Metropolis. The plan proposes a scenario of cultural valorization and economic development along the breathtaking Southern Albanian coast from Vlora to Saranda, framed in the transnational space planning of the Balkan coast. The cultural, ethnical and religious diversity of the surviving enclaves have been grounded by century-long territorialization processes engaging the Balkans, Greece, Corfu Island and Otranto across the strait. The landscape mosaic of tangible and intangible layers collapses into the seasonal settlements of transhumant pre-Ottoman shepherds: a pattern of pebble-stone wells shadowed by fig-tree woods along the shore. The text elaborates on the compatibility of geopolitical aspirations with the prerogatives of an architectural territorial vision and on the practical viability of combining principles from contradictory theoretical models of territorial development to deploy an effective plan.

'Albanian Riviera' Bid

The Re-Active Riviera is a joint project by Sealine and Metro-Polis developed upon invitation for the 'Albanian Riviera' consultation organized by Atelier Albania. Atelier Albania is an organization with a mandate from the Ministry for Urban Development and Tourism and the Office of the Prime Minister, with the institutional aim of exploring the possible future of the Albanian territory by means of 'research-by-design' initiatives. Numerous ideas and design competitions and conferences, attracting relevant international practitioners to collaborate with solid national design structures, have been promoted by Atelier Albania in the last years. The scope of the 'Albanian Riviera' consultation was that of composing an overall scenario, made up of different projects, for the cultural and economic development of the Albanian coast spanning from Vlora to Saranda. In order to come up with a collective final vision, the coast was subdivided in three lots and each lot assigned as a design site to a couple of competing design teams. Although the primary aim of the initiative is set out by the promoter as "learning and perusing the existing peculiarities of the area", the competition bid seems to restrict this investigative perspective within a conventional preliminary analysis. Right away, the competition documents yield the practical request of scenarios for a mundane economic development of the area. In fact, the objective of the competition is introduced as the "improvement of the public space in the southern coast strip" in order to enhance the national and international tourist industry so it can be the "generator of the economy of the whole region". Local communities are described as the direct beneficiaries of the proposed improvement of the "urban condition", achieved through the intensification of the use of the coastal areas for tourist purposes in conjunction with the connection between coastal and mountain

Fig1 / Adriatic Ionian Blue Corridor
source / AKTP National Territorial Planning Agency

centers, both existing and new. It is clear that the general idea under-arching the consultation pointed towards a traditional model of territorial development, pivoting on economic considerations and aiming to implant a substantially conventional tourist industry in the southern Albanian Riviera. The bid questionably identifies the proposed concept of improvement of 'public space' and 'urban condition' with a plane? economic development of the region according to western models of unlimited growth, in spite of their having recently undergone a disruptive crisis and their presently being thoroughly reconsidered under disparate perspectives. Some alternatives to the unlimited growth model applied to territorial development scenarios, such as the 'territorialist' model and the 'grounding metabolist' perspective, are described and compared in Section II.

Blue Corridor

During an intensive design workshop at Polis University, the IDAUP doctoral students were asked to contribute to the preliminary analysis phase of Sealine's and Metropolis' project for the central lot around Himara, spanning from Palase to Kakome. The project was based on a capillary reading of the territory and its multiple characters, in accord with the suggested peruse, as well as on a broader, exceptionally articulate, geopolitical vision. I am here using the term 'geopolitical' in its most colloquial meaning: say, pertaining to the interaction of political powers over a geographic distribution. Interpreting the role of the southern Albanian coast in the Balkan area and furthermore within the wider framework of the European space planning, the Re-Active Riviera project definitely feeds geopolitical space planning aspirations. The project is carefully framed within the 'Adriatic Ionian Blue Corridor', also referred to as 'Blue Highway', recently presented as a joint initiative of the governments of Croatia, Bosnia, Montenegro and Albania, under

the auspices of European Union observers, to create a motor mobility corridor along the Balkan coast. What in the institutional programs is mainly envisioned as a highway of European standards reconnecting Trieste in the North to Patras/Kalamata in the South (Fig1), has been presented as a possible extension of the Pan-European Transport Corridors, planned by Central and Eastern European countries, as well as of the European Union's Trans-European Transport Network (Fig2/3). The implementation of the Blue Corridor, defined by Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama as a "prerequisite for economic and democratic development", is presently trudging very slowly. The Albanian segment of the Blue Corridor is planned as a 350 km four-lane highway. Several tracks of the northern leg from Skoder through Tirana-Durres to Fier are completed, while the southern leg from Fier to Gjirokaster/Ioannina is totally untouched. Once Fier is passed, in Vlora, the planned route diverts inland detaching from the coast line and reaches the Greek border behind the first mountain range. The Re-Active Riviera project by Sealine and Metropolis is actually constructed as a geopolitically aware reinterpretation of the southern leg of the Albanian portion of the Blue Corridor. The original simplistic idea of a contained highway is turned into an articulated mobility bundle. The bundle is composed of three North-to-South axes: the Fier-Ioannina/Igoumenitsa inland axis, the Vlora-Ciflik intermediate axis, and the Fier-Igoumenitsa coastal axis, modulating mobility on, respectively, a fast speed North-South Corridor, a median speed Bypass Corridor and a slow speed Panoramic Corridor. The longitudinal axes are then interconnected through several transversal paths crossing the coastal mountain range. The overall bundle is deployed over an area of geographic scale, simultaneously embodying the analytical reading of a territorial entity while proposing a possible scenario for its evolution (Fig4).

Re-Activity

In its structure, the Re-Active Riviera project is conceived as a long-term phased program of interventions falling under four different categories according to their level of environmental impact. In this scheme, the discriminant factor is an idea of sustainability distinguishing among (quoting from the project's report and boards): "totally safeguarded areas", where interventions are limited to "solutions for improving accessibility and understanding of cultural and environmental heritage";

"low impact" intervention areas, subjected to policies favoring the regeneration of existing villages and structures; "seafront line" areas, devoted to the development of tourist facilities related to sea and land mobility; "urban areas", where new structural and infrastructural projects are strategically located on already anthropically impacted land. At the basis of the project and across all of the categories of decreasing protection levels into which the territory is subdivided, the enhancement of accessibility is a common character, deployed as an indispensable strategy. It is also explicitly regarded as a non-environmentally-impacting action. The idea of enhanced accessibility as the key factor to spark the expected territorial regeneration is explicitly conjugated in the chronological phasing of the interventions, where infrastructural interventions on land, water and air connectivity, calling in 'logistics', 'connections', 'paths', 'mobility', 'roads', 'airport', 'docking', 'wharfs', constitute the most substantial trunk of the vision in short, medium and long term perspectives. Much in line with contemporary practice, the Re-Active Riviera project shifts its emphasis from the material manipulation of the site to the programming of activities, marking an approach in favor of the intangible over tangible measures. Acting on the intangible fluxes of energy crossing a site, rather than on its material configuration, is adopted as a more efficient strategy to change the spatial quality of the place. The primary objective is in fact identified with the definition of the events and program of attractions for the area, to be combined with the secondary objective of the redesign of receptive structures in the service of tourism. Within the project, 'local communities' are regarded as a fundamental 'capital' to be activated and the central motor operating the overall apparatus and eventually the transformation. The centrality of this intangible social component is though prevailingly oriented towards the economic exploitation of the territorial resources, rather than towards the enhancement of the cultural self-awareness of the communities. The enhancement of an "aesthetic sensitivity on public space" is attached to the project's "development approach" as a collateral and quite super-structural character. In fact, the action strategies remain bound to practical perspectives of economic development, such as: improving accessibility, developing interstitial gaps in urbanized areas, diversifying the tourist offer, building up marketing and promotion plans.

Fig2 / European Union's Trans-European Transport Network / source internet

Fig3 / Pan-European Transport Corridors /source internet

Fig4 / Re-Active Riviera, articulation of the Blue Corridor
source / Re-Active Riviera competition panels

Disseminated Bits of Structure

Practically conjugated into a multitude of networking strategic projects like disseminated bits of structure, the proposal is characterized by logistic and access improvement in Dhrale Beach, a Sea Plaza in Dhermi, an Event Catalyst facility in Vuno-Jale, a more complex regeneration in Himara, a Hosting Bay in Porto Palermo, a Wellness Park in Borsh-Qeparo, and sustainable mobility networks in Piqeras-Lukove. The aforementioned key actions are allocated along the coastline in five fundamental compounds spreading the tourist offer over an array of specialized themes ('cultural' in Palase-Dhermi, 'alternative' in Vuno-Jale, 'city' in Himara, 'family' in Qeparo-Borsh, 'ecologic'in Qeparo-Shenvasil-Kakome) with the programmatic goal of reforming the seasonal character of tourist activity so it extends over the entire year (Fig5).

The Geopolitical Burden of Region-Envisioning

The Re-Active Riviera project is framed within a series of extraordinary diagrams, exhibiting a crystal-clear reading of the Albanian territory, originally elaborated by Besnik Aliaj and Eranda Janku (Fig6) in order to illustrate the text Albania 2030 Manifesto (Aliaj B., Janku E., Allkja L., Sotir D., Polis University 2015). While the manifesto constitutes a platform aimed at prefiguring a broader scenario of territorial governance for the country, the geopolitical framing of the Re-Active Riviera project certainly exceeds the usual extent for a masterplan or a design proposal. This very approach certainly makes the territorial reading of the region extremely sharp and articulated, but results unusually expanded in geographical terms and unusually 'political' for an entry in response to an architecture competition. When it comes to the very large scale, architects bring their spatial planning visions over a geopolitical field. But the geopolitical field is one where politics invites architectural prefiguration as nothing but vehicles for its loftier and cannier maneuvers.

The definition of any planning program of regional scale certainly needs a strong technical support, but actually represents a collective act that pertains to political precincts and involves a society and its institutionally representative agencies. The relevance of such a measure depends not only on its content, but at least in equal measure on the quality and comprehensiveness of the process of negotiation of which it is the culmination, involving institutions, stakeholders and groups: that is its capacity of being representative of the community dwelling in the region.

Heavily framing a regional design proposal into an autonomously generated geopolitical planning vision, which does not derive from any collective negotiation, runs the risk of paying a relevant toll. An autonomously generated geopolitical vision can be unbearable burden for an architectural plan.

A Quest for Territorial Development

A crucial theme to consider while analyzing the Re-Active Riviera project is the idea of territorial development and its possible
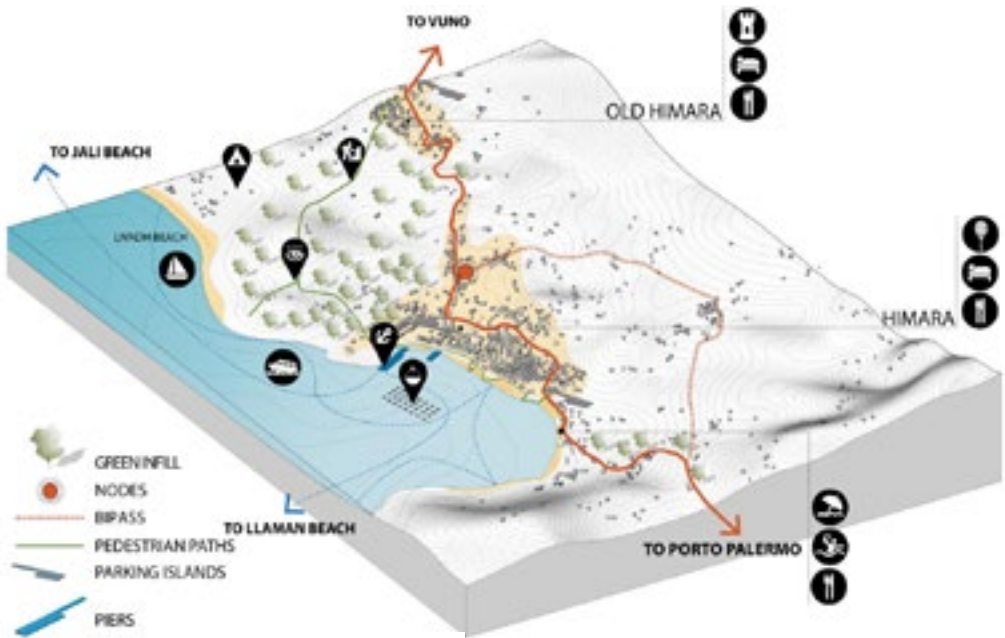
Fig5 / Re-Active Riviera detail from strategic interventions plan
source / Re-Active Riviera competition panels

The 'Territorialist' Alternative

In order to forge a more specific, articulate and adaptive paradigm, it is worth examining a couple of possible alternative models of territorial development in relation to the idea of sustainability with special attention paid to the management of accessibility. Alberto Magnaghi formulates a groundbreaking explication of Giacomo Becattini's concept of 'awareness of place', that lies at the basis of the work of the 'scuola territorialista' on the territory. The formulation refers to the "acknowledgement by the dwelling community of the value of the territorial heritage in the production of long-term wealth" (Magnaghi 2010: 299). As Luisa Bonesio notes from Magnaghi (Il progetto locale, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2000, p. 233 [translation from Italian by the author]), his 'awareness of place' model tends to "overthrow the economistic perspective" (Bonesio 2002: 6) in favor of its replacement with "development styles based on the acknowledgement of sociocultural peculiarities, the care and valorization of local resources, and on inter-supportive non-hierarchical exchange networks between local communities".

The "value of existence" replaces the "value of use and trade" (Magnaghi 2010: 96). Although the Re-Active Riviera project is syntonic to the acknowledgement of territorial peculiarities, the type of diffuse accessibility improvement that it proposes is clearly an alternative to the 'territorialist' model. In fact, on one hand, the project shows a prevalently extroverted character, with infrastructural micro-interventions located at the perimeter of the territorial units to facilitate short-term entrance and to attract and capture economic resources from the outside. Such a model is built in clear opposition to the introverted valorization of local resources meant to function through the inter-local feeding of activities inside of the territorial unit. On the other hand, the Re-Active Riviera project is built on a clear multi-level infrastructural model, sharply framed, as we said, within a geopolitical vision of continental level, which constitutes again a clear opposition to the non-hierarchical exchange networks of the 'territorialist' model. In fact, the opposition between the two described models of territorial development revolves around the issue of accessibility and the different interpretations of the concept of sustainability. In the 'territorialist' vision, enhancing the degree of accessibility to a territorial unit attracting economic activity from the outside in the form of substantial tourism, means breaking the century-long 'structural invariants' and the consistent evolution of the territorial heritage. What has been regarded in conventional planning as a respectful economic valorization of the territorial resources, in the 'territorialist' vision is interpreted as both the depredation of the territorial heritage, as well as its simultaneous museification and congealment. The 'scuola territorialista' has been accused of building on regressive Heideggerian principles, such as those of 'tellus', 'territorial belonging by birth', insurmountable parochialisms, ethnic and even racist juxtapositions. Magnaghi, though, has always described the

Legend:
- INTERNATIONAL HUB
- REGIONAL GATEWAY
- NATIONAL-REGIONAL NETWORK
- URBAN CONCENTRATION
- CITY/TOWN
- BORDER AREA (ALBANIAN)
- BORDER AREA (NEIGHBOURING COUNTRY)
- AIRPORT (EXISTING)
- AIRPORT (POTENTIAL)
- INDUSTRIAL PARK (ECONOMIC AREA)
- MAIN PORTS
- MAIN CORRIDORS
  MAIN ROADS

'territorialist' model as a fundamentally open model regarding the care-taking of a territory: "in a territory inhabited by many cultures, by plural citizenships, it is the self-acknowledgement by part of the individuals who relate and associate for the care of the places that constitute the foundational act of elements of community (Magnaghi, 2006c); that is, the community is an opportunity, not an historical datum reserved for autochthonous inhabitants" (Magnaghi 2010: 134). It is certainly tightly connected to the idea of the dwelling of a community in a place, but that community is open to options of 'elective belonging' for non-native individuals who decide to become, permanently or temporarily, part of the local community-place unity.

That is undoubtedly different from the idea of implanting a tourist industry, even in spite of the evocation of some kind of sustainability which lies in the identification of some areas with progressive levels of protection, but allows, at the end of the day, the concentration of heavy constructions in the remaining parts. The more radical idea of sustainability that can be attributed to the 'territorialist' model is simply integral. It does not advocate the fixing of the territory in a determinate present state, but rather the identification of the 'permanent formal matrixes' of a place in the flux of the "unceasing adaptation and transformation process of the territory". The 'awareness of place' paradigm pursues actions of 'reterritorialization' prevalently through promotion of knowledge and self-awareness of the local communities (Magnaghi 2010).

The 'Grounding Metabolism'

A very different perspective on the theme is introduced by the recent publication curated by Daniel Ibañez and Nikos Katsikis Grounding Metabolism (Harvard 2014), issue 6 of the New Geography magazine. In fact, the idea of contemporary geographic configurations as traces of the action of anthropic forces has become the focus of PhD research on landscape and urbanism at Harvard since the debate on 'region formation' was started in the 'New Geographies' course taught by Hashim Sarkis first in 2006 (Sarkis 2011: 108). The conventional notion of territory is identified with a prevalently intangible system of fluxes, flows of energy and dynamic activities, regarded as a metabolism: "in a condition of socio-environmental transformation ... urban metabolism ... [suggests] an analytical basis for gauging the continuous flows of energy, material, and population exchange within and between cities and their extensive operational landscapes" (Ibañez and Katsikis 2014: 3). The 'grounding metabolism' perspective explores the material configuration of the space as a "geographical imprint" (Ibañez and Katsikis 2014: 3) of those intangible "metabolic processes" (Ibañez and Katsikis 2014: 3), but away from any "metabolic determinism in which conditions on the ground are seen as a mere reflection of metabolic processes" (Ibañez and Katsikis 2014: 6) it "interprets design as a geographic agent ... [and is] focused on the physical configuration of human occupation on the ground" (Ibañez and Katsikis 2014: 6). The 'grounding metabolism' perspective
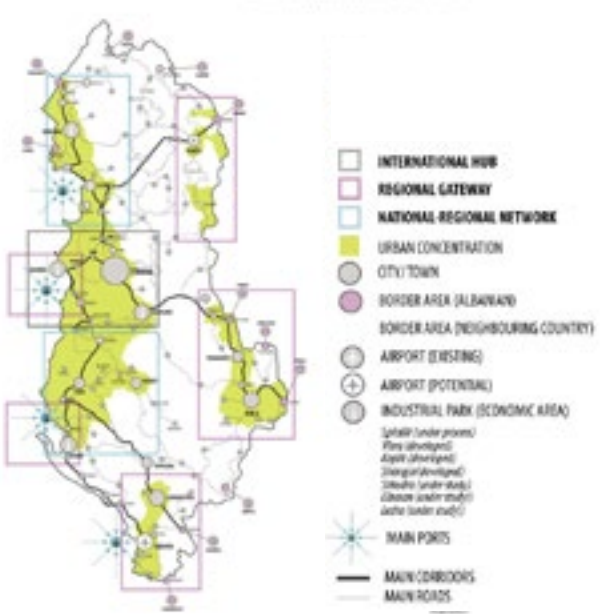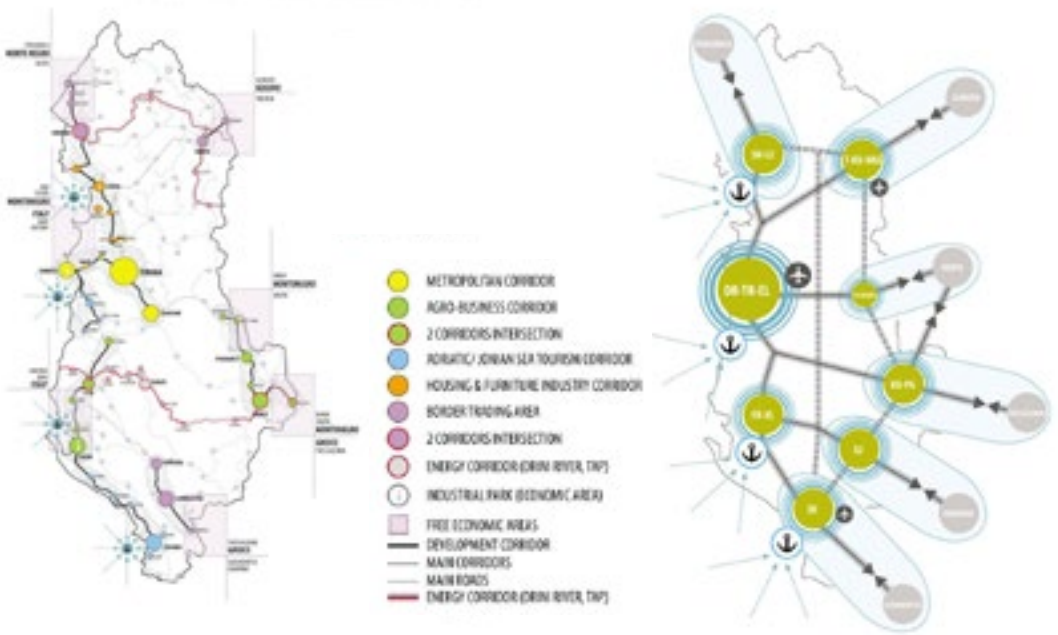
tries to reformulate three notions that not accidentally have to do with our critique of the Re-Active Riviera, but are, generally, rather central issues in the novel reconsideration of the geographical scale as the expanded field of architecture: sustainability, nature/society relationship, the geophilosophical. In fact, the 'grounding metabolism' perspective starts from "the recent paradigm of sustainable development [embodied by] the standardization of models and indicators, such as material flow analysis and urban footprint, [which] has contributed to an unprecedented statistical profiling of the metabolism of cities and regions" in an attempt to amend it of its blindness "to the underlying socioeconomic tensions associated with their geographical embeddedness" (Ibañez and Katsikis 2014: 5). The environmental determinism of flows and footprint analysis is thus merged with approaches deriving from "neo-Marxian urban geography and political economy" (Ibañez and Katsikis 2014: 5), instrumental in "reintroducing geography and overcoming the society-nature divide" (Ibañez and Katsikis 2014: 5), although "reluctant to supersede inherited territorial categories such as that of the city" (Ibañez and Katsikis 2014: 5). Therefore, while refusing any "morphological fetishizing of metabolism … [and any] metaphoric interpretation of fluidity and organic forms", the 'grounding metabolism' model aims to reveal the "thick, heavy, lengthy process of metabolic reorganization of the earth's surface" (Ibañez and Katsikis 2014: 5): that is, it does away with the conceptual relics of the urban age, the obsolete perimetration dividing urban and non-urban spheres. The 'grounding metabolism' perspective is thus proposing a socio-environmental notion of sustainability which qualifies, at the same time, as post-Marxian (incorporating society and nature in a hybrid system) and post-geophilosophical (demising the positional constructs of the urban age in favor of a new planetary spatiality). In landscape aesthetics terms, this perspective is thus both anti-cognitivist (in reference to environmental determinism) and anti-formalist, while identifying in the aware as well as unaware design activity the agent which is responsible not only for the reading of space but also for the symmetrical shape-giving activity (research-by-design and design-by-research, we could say) on a geographic scale. The 'grounding metabolism' model, though, pays tribute with its own name to Peter Baccini's Metabolism of the Athroposphere (Baccini and Brunner 2012), who is also one of the significant contributors of the publication. The idea of being able to calculate exchanges of matter and energy over a complex field through a quantitative engineering calculus is inherent to the concept of 'metabolism' and inherently drifts towards determinism. But installing design, to any extent, atop a functionalist/determinist apparatus cannot avoid formalism. Therefore and in consideration of the summoning character of Ibañez and Katsikis' formulations, both their anti-cognitivist and anti-formalist claims conform more to an ideological manifesto, rather than to tested trajectories.

Diverse Ideas of Sustainability

In terms of what is sustainable, the 'territorialist' and the 'grounding metabolism' models seem to pin the antipodes of the concept of sustainability. If we view the evolution of a landscape as a trajectory in space, the former restricts the legitimate induced deviations to a corridor interpolating its historical evolution, while the latter, without any prejudices, orchestrates the sustainable balance of heterogeneous outer and inner forces. Both models though, as antithetical as they can be, find a common ground in a novel constructivist condition.

When Foucault asserts that if the XIX century was the epoch of time, the XX century was the epoch of space, he identifies time with 'history' (or the "long life developing across time") and space with 'juxtaposition' (or positioning, or "network that connects points", that is structuralism).

It results quite linear to then associate the latter (space/positioning) to the 'grounding metabolism' perspective, while the former (time/history) to the 'territorialist' model. But the 'territorialist' model performs its interpolation of the historical trajectory of the site, while incorporating substantial constructivist characters, enough to qualify as a product of the XX century. Without any doubt, it constitutes an "effort to establish, between elements that could have been connected on a temporal axis, an ensemble of relations that makes them appear as juxtaposed, set off against one another, implicated by each other - that makes them appear, in short, as a sort of configuration" (Foucault 1984).

Transhumances / Dozing Under the Shadow of Fig-Trees

One day while working on the territorial analysis for the 'Albanian Riviera' project, Sotir Dhamo told me a poetic story of transhumant shepherds communities still bound to pantheistic beliefs pre-dating the Ottoman era.

They used to descend from the mountains to camp in seasonal settlements on the coast and he would see them, up until about a decade ago, dozing under the shadow of fig-tree woods herding their cattle along the shore around Dhermi, Borsh, or Piqeras (Dhamo 2014). Those recurrent migrations have created patterns of pebble-stone wells disseminated amid the maquis and the orchards.

Since the introduction of the first tourist activities on the coast, those territorial patterns have been deserted by the groups who had created them across the centuries.

The wells survive now as archeological traces of a possibly extinct past. I don't know if the shepherds moved their grazes uphill to higher plateaus or if some of them abandoned their nomadic status to integrate in the new tourist economy. Certainly, from a 'territorialist' perspective this cannot be regarded as a sustainable form of territorial development. In the face of heightened diffused expectations for material improvement of people's life, the point is to discern if a westernized life-style of European standards is an indispensable prospect for the southern Albanian coast today or if the integrity of a certainly non-rich territorial heritage is a more desirable objective.

In favor of the Multifaceted Solutions

In our liquid time, none of the described models of sustainability can claim a primacy over the other ones, but all of them offer valuable aspects: the practical accountability of the conventional 'footprint' model, the cultural sensitivity of the 'territorialist' model, and the economic efficiency of the 'grounding metabolism' perspective. It is hard to imagine how disparate principles, proceeding from different sources and oriented towards different goals, might combine to orchestrate one novel theoretic paradigm. Even such heterogeneous principles, though, can be instrumentally used in conjunction for the practical resolution of a design problem. What appears impossible in the theory is often viable in practice. An unprejudiced approach to a multifold territorial design case could conjure up a multifaceted solution, dealing with the different parts in play using split-view perspectives. That is what an effective research-by-design is supposed to explore. If, for understandable political considerations, a novel model of territorial development beneficial for the future of Albania cannot prescind from equally and imperatively prefiguring the economic improvement of living conditions of local communities, it must also foreground the conditions for the return of the transhumant shepherds dozing under the shadow of the fig-trees along the shore.

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