

## RIVIERA PANORAMIC CORRIDOR a Gateway towards the South Albania Landscape

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Traveling through the Southern Albanian Riviera is a journey full of contradictory feelings. An impressive juxtaposition of massively urbanized areas and small traditional villages, exploited beaches and unspoiled natural landscapes. Many scars as unfinished buildings, illegal dumps and quarries mark the urban and the natural environment.

In this contrasted territory between high mountains and the sea, we can find various topographic conditions that deeply influenced the position and development of the human settlements. Some coastal areas present a strong declivity, preventing urbanization and offering a sparse maquis vegetation while along the bays and the affluent rivers, some astonishing natural peculiarities can be found, such as canyons, waterfalls and underwater springs.

This incredible array of different landscapes lacks accessibility, preventing visitors to enjoy the region and its local qualities. Tourists are faced with interrupted paths, absence of signs and signals, scarcity of pit stops and other amenities expected from the region by western visitors.

In this scenario, the existing panoramic road that from Llogara touches all the beautiful sites of the Riviera, ending in Saranda, has the potential to become a backbone that can bring together this territory in its whole structure, where the different elements can intertwine with each other creating a unique system of recreational and natural amenities.

This scenic route can constitute a comprehensive body that takes maximum

advantages of the existing qualities of the site, while becoming a carrier of the new sustainable development.

The article will explore the possibility of a sequence of site-specific interventions along the Riviera's Panoramic Corridor, as important focal points for different programs and activities, and devices for orientation and introduction to the surrounding landscape. Each intervention should have its own identity offering opportunities for tourism and local economies and reinforcing the connection between the inland traditional villages and the sea.

The argument is inserted in a more strategic vision of the south Albania region that take into consideration a different system of accessibility and distribution of services related to a global rethinking of the infrastructural network and the ways in which people approach and move through the site. This system is primarily constituted by three distinct and complementing corridors: the North-South corridor, connecting Durrës-Tirana to Gjirokastra and Ioannina; the bypass corridor which, starting from Vlora, goes to the inland using historical routes to reach Saranda; the panoramic corridor starting from Llogara and ending in Saranda. The three corridors, being complementary to each other, can be further connected through transversal routes that enable the differentiation of the offered services and accesses to the entire South of Albania. The local infrastructure is combined with a secondary water mobility system



*Fig1 / Shift (1970-1972) project by Richard Serra*  
source / internet



*Fig2 / Shift (1970-1972) project by Richard Serra*  
source / internet



*Fig3 / Linear Park between Caltagirone and Piazza Armerina, Sicily, Italy, project by Marco Navarra  
source / internet*

constituted mainly of small boats and piers located in strategic parts on the coastline that can contribute to the lightening of the traffic load in the principal inland corridors, especially during the busier summer period.

In this vision, the Panoramic Road is interpreted as a landscape element (linear park) that while connecting the man-made environments of villages, castles and cultivated terraces offers a series of opportunities to structure activities and to open up vistas and trails that connect the visitors with the many attractions of the larger inland territory and the sea. The introduction of programs in strategic points (gates) is not conceived as a series of radical transformations of the sites but a clear framework that enables to restore, connect and activate the area starting from what is there. This site-specific intervention can act as a barometer for reading and enhancing the surrounding landscape.

In an article from 1984 Yve-Alain Bois and John Shepley explain, through the works of Richard Serra, the characteristics of the picturesque as an experience of perceiving the landscape by the introduction of specific devices that emphasize its traits and qualities:

"I wasn't sure what he was talking about. He wasn't talking about the form of the work. But I guess he meant that one experienced the landscape as picturesque through the work." Serra's interpretation of Smithson's remarks is based on one of the common places in the theory of the picturesque garden: Not to force

nature, but to reveal the capacities of the sites, while magnifying their variety and singularity. This is exactly what Serra does: The site is redefined not re-presented... The placement of all structural elements in the open field draws the viewers' attention to the topography of the landscape as the landscape is walked (Serra, 1982). For Serra the dialectic of walking and looking at the landscape establishes the sculptural experience. In one of his primal works, *Shift* is emblematic regarding the ways in which the internal structure of the work responds to the external conditions of the site, revealing the land's gentle undulations.

*Shift's* beauty comes from the provision of access to a visual pleasure that we had not considered and had not noticed in the empty fields in the surrounding area: its concrete forms provided a guide for our eye, allowing us to find and follow what had been all but invisible, the gentle topography of the landscape. The combination of Serra's structures and the land became a single whole; the more time we spent with the work, the more we saw and the more we understood how the land and the art worked together.

This attitude towards emphasising the peculiarities of the site while walking within the landscape sculptures of Serra could become a reference for a project that is sensitive to the various physical conditions of the ground and uses the perspective from the main road as the principal position of the observer.

The Riviera promenade built on the ridge of the mountain offers a panoramic views



*Fig4 / Linear Park between Caltagirone and Piazza Armerina, Sicily, Italy, project by Marco Navarra  
source / Salvatore Gozzo*

on all sides, the mountains, the villages and the sea. Viewpoints, rest areas and a variety of programmatic possibilities can mark the path facilitating the orientation and transforming the experience into an exciting journey.

How can we reveal the landscape while creating singular experience along the road?

One strategy adopted by Marco Navarra in his project for the Linear Park in Caltagirone is the underlining of the surrounding territory's characteristics introducing a vocabulary of simple elements and devices. The intervention is part of a general master plan that proposes the reuse of a former railway track built in 1920-30 to connect Caltagirone to Piazza Armerina. The truck runs for almost 35km through different kinds of agricultural and natural landscapes. Four villages become connected through a soft infrastructure for recreation, tourism and biologic agriculture.

The suggested transformation entails making small but significant changes. The project is developed by the continuous intertwining of two parts: the material (rows of trees, gardens, colors, smells) and the creation of specific vistas, by the physical construction of devices that frame and interpret the existing landscape.

Over the years the railway has given rise to the formation of specific flora and fauna that has spontaneously diffused along the edges. The project evolves from an attentive understanding of this framework while re-proposing the logic

and strengthening the principles.

The agricultural and natural landscape are enhanced by the use of different principles and instruments: a more traditional one represented by the use of frames and horizontal lines and a more contemporary other such as the dynamic work and the sequences along the path.

These sequences and transitions between spaces with different qualities and vocations are marked with distinct colours and intensities: wider behind the open landscape, frequent when the path curves or when there is something important to underline. Light shells and steel structures integrate specific view points and rest areas.

The strategy that works with structuring spaces of transitions and pauses using small and simple elements that highlights the existing qualities of the site could be adopted and reinterpreted in the Riviera Panoramic Corridor. A vocabulary of signage, street furniture, lighting and public space arranged in key positions along the promenade could function as a system of marks between the different urban and natural areas which ties them together in a unique comprehensive hole.

As Piero Zanini says in his book, If we want to try to tie things together, or to understand them, it is necessary to rethink our relationship with the thresholds, as an experience of the limit, and this is a difficult and challenging task....Thresholds are elements that mark a passage, give it thickness, ritualizing it. To cross them in a conscious way means to be able to



Fig5 / Memorial in Portbou\_Passages\_Dani Karavan project by Walter Benjamin  
source / internet

recognize the traits that characterize them and distinguish them from the surroundings. This is something that we learn while living and inhabiting a place. This is in the relation that we establish with it (ZANINI, 1997).

Site-specific interventions operating as extended thresholds could structure important programmatic points along the road and act as elements that sign and clarify the transition between urban and natural environments. These gates could be designed according to a specific landscape or scenery and be the starting points for trails that connect the road with different attractions in the surrounding areas. Open air activities, local productions and urban life could increase the touristic offerings and embed the possibility for a more extensive use throughout the whole year.

Where we can position these multimodal gates? Could they host a series of activities and events in relation to the seasons and based on the sustainable exploitation of the local qualities?

The various topographic declination structures a number of sequences that are different in morphology and character. Our territory could be seen as an in-between area, a mitigation zone where the natural elements create several distinct environments along the coastline. From the inhabited slopes of Dhermi to the fertile valleys of Borsh and Qeparo, we can identify six exemplary sequences that could have different programmatic

amenities in relation to their vocation and existing physical conditions: Dhermi-Palase (cultural tourism); Vuno (alternative tourism); Himare (city tourism); Porto Palermo; Qeparo – Borsh (family tourism); Lukove (eco tourism)

The first important natural gate coming from the north is the point in which we overpass the Mountain where the Llogara National Park is located. The meandering road moving from the mountain to the sea opens up incredible vistas operating as “windows” towards the surrounding landscape. The path has a so-called scenic quality.

Strategic signs acting as devices that emphasise specific traits of the place could be integrated along the path and one important viewpoint area can be implemented.

Moreover, the view from the road makes a fair first approach to landscape, which can be experienced, later in a wider and deeper sense, once the car is parked. Extreme sport activities like mountain biking, paragliding, rock climbing and hang gliding can be implemented.

Following the road we pass through the territory between the villages of Palase, Kondraq and Dhermi, once productive environments now subjected to strong urban pressure. The mountain moves smoothly towards the sea offering large terraces and gravel beaches while the road passes through the villages presenting important objects of cultural interest in the form of various religious buildings. In this context it is of fundamental



*Fig6 / Memorial in Portbou\_Passages\_Dani Karavan project by Walter Benjamin  
source / internet*

importance to arrange an important public space that could function as a principal entry from the road and facilitate the orientation of the visitors to the many historic and recreational spots. An urban 'belvedere' that could integrate the necessity for parking lots with the demand for public activities and services.

The next important stop along our journey is the village of Vuno, where the road and villages are strongly separated from the coastline. By using and readapting the existing local houses, diffused hotels could be implemented, offering an

alternative model of accommodation. The abandoned water reservoir could become an important catalyst along the road, by its conversion and reactivation as a space for social events and music concerts. Its temporary structures could create a unique location for international festivals. As the road starts to descend towards the coastline, we start to approach Himare, a city that has the potential to become a service hub for the region. Himare is able to welcome more visitors than the nearby areas and thus the intervention could be more substantial. Improving significantly the quality of

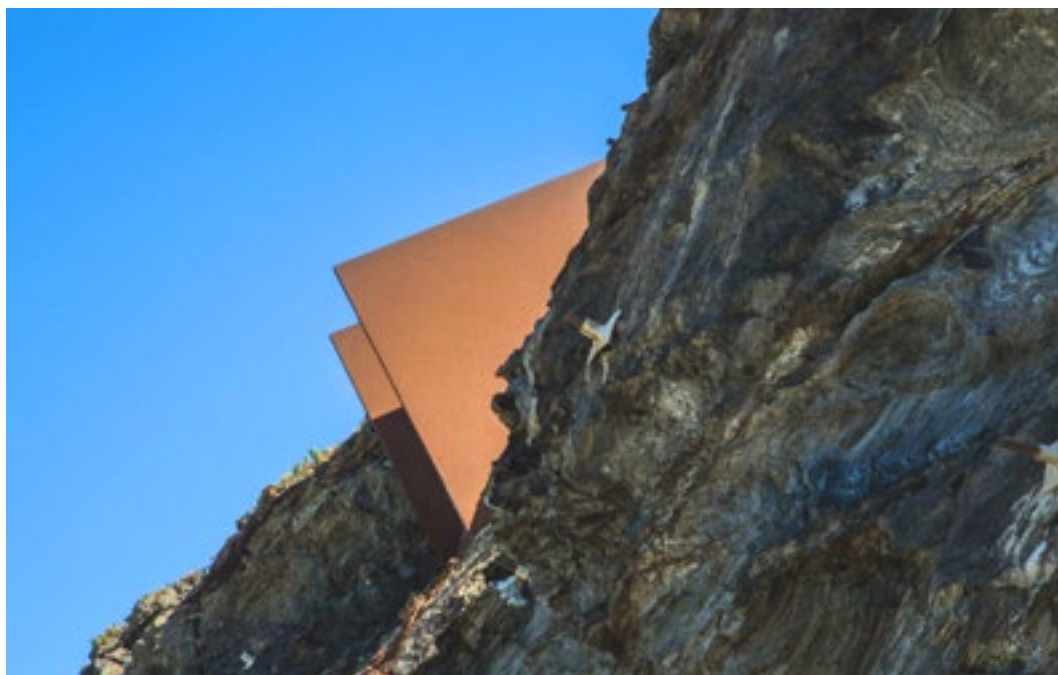


Fig7 / Memorial in Portbou\_ Passages\_ Dani Karavan project by Walter Benjamin  
source / Serge Briez

public space on the coast can give a new image of the waterfront and structure two important intermodal nodes along the Riviera Panoramic Corridor.

By doing this the waterfront could be imagined as a car-free promenade and diverse activities and programs could be realized. This is the most urban spot where the road touches the coastline and a transitional area where the two principal mobility systems interchange and connect with each other.

The second point where the two systems move one behind another is Porto Palermo. The Riviera drive crosses a naturally contrasted environment where high mountains directly meets the sea to create a unique protected bay along the coastline. The concept here is based on the preservation and enhancement of the strong historical and landscape values. A Cold War museum created by the reuse of the existing military camp and submarine tunnels and the implementation of a high quality eco resort could represent some of the proposed programs for the site.

Following the Riviera Drive towards Borsch and Qeparo, the landscape starts to change, the terrain becomes flatter and regularly cultivated with olives. The two valleys surrounded by steep mountains offer a dramatic landscape scenery with a great variety of environments such as long linear beaches along the coast, old villages and castles on top of the cliffs. The strong natural presence should be protected and the majority of the interventions could consist in implementing sports and open air activities.

All these landscape sequences require a common denominator that can keep them together in a unique comprehensive hole. The Riviera panoramic Road as a promenade of a linear park has the potential to become a backbone that could guarantee a continuity between parts while endorsing the singular experiences with the use of objects that reveal the landscape through a language of applied land art. Rather than a project incorporating the landscape, the landscape should become the catalyst that activates the project.

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