Landscape project / Large-scale project

A reflection on green-structures and territorial networks as key-elements for the development of a sustainable Southern Albanian Riviera

keywords / territorial planning, green-structures, sustainable development

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Abstract

Within the conception of a multi-disciplinary and large-scale project like the one of the southern Albanian Riviera competition, it is fundamental to consider impacts and implications of landscape planning especially as an opportunity of valorization and requalification of the territorial framework. An integrated approach to these matters should be able to combine local heritage (both material and immaterial), natural features, urban settlements and landscape peculiarities, pursuing the aim of local re-configuration yet contextualized within a broader and shared vision.
Starting from the assumption that a large-scale project is a landscape project, this essay wants to stress the importance of ecology as the paradigm for the implementation of new local development policies in which territorial networks and greenways could play a fundamental role within the advancement of a greater vision grounded on environmental, infrastructural, and socio-economical relationships.
The competition area has shown remarkable potentials in terms of touristic development but the risks coming from enlarging the already existing gap between the coastal settlements and the inner ones -especially in terms of resources to be empowered and exploited- are to be carefully taken into consideration and managed during the whole planning process. This is where integrated strategies of large-scale planning and territorial networks must come into play, empowering the existing site characteristics in order to conceive a unitarian vision for a new sustainable southern Albanian Riviera.

Large-scale / landscape coastal projects

The "Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion" represents the third and latest EU macro-area, endorsed by the European Commission in 2012 after the Baltic Sea Region (2009) and the Danube Region (2011). It is composed by a broad seaward territory that stretches over eight countries -among which Italy and Albania- and various landscapes, offering both recurring features and many local peculiarities.[1]
The EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR, 2014) has been jointly developed by the Commission together with the Adriatic-Ionian Region's countries and stakeholders in order to address common challenges; by aiming at creating synergies and fostering coordination among all the involved territories, such strategy should go beyond the concept of large-scale project, developing a supranational, unitarian vision.
EUSAIR's general goal is to promote economic and social prosperity and growth by improving the macro- region's attractiveness, competitiveness and connectivity, also playing an important role in encouraging the EU integration of the Western Balkans. The whole strategy has been built on four main thematic pillars, such as:
1) enhancing blue growth;
2) connecting the region by working on transport and energy networks;
3) Improving environmental quality;

Fig 1 / Countries and territories involved in the EU Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion / source / EuroGeographics Association for the administrative boundaries 2014

4) empowering sustainable tourism.
Nevertheless, for the wide range of existing situations (natural, urban, socio-economical, legislative, etc...) and for the relatively new development of such concepts and common strategies, the issues raised by the re- qualification of the macro-region's waterfront areas -for whatever purposes these may occur- are complexes and not surely limited to the re-generation of specific sites or relicts. There are important and broader matters related, for instance, to the modification of the coastal landscapes due either to processes of urban growth and sprawl (particularly intense in some parts of the Italian seaboard) or to the opposite phenomenon of abandoning the coast and its inland by the locals (as the southern Albanian Riviera case-study showed us), also enlarging the gap caused by the touristic seasonal impact.
This problem embodies a complexity that displays its effects on different levels, starting from the management of a multi-dimensional planning process, to the definition of strategies for large-scale projects involving a variety of topics: from urban re-configuration to landscape re-organization and environmental protection (Farinella, 2008).
The extended area that was object of the "Reactive Riviera" project has been the focus of many studies and initiatives aimed at its re-consideration and relaunch especially in regards to touristic and promotional purposes, not least the Albanian Riviera design competition[2].
However, the risks of focusing primarily on the issues concerning the coastal strip, neglecting reflections and propositions on the inland -despite its great landscape potentials- could enlarge the already existing gap between these two parts of one and the same complex territorial system.
The coast -being the buffer between sea and mainland, in whichever part of the Adriatic-Ionian region we may focus on- presents a series of diverse situations that, in addition to the beach, involve different environmental emergencies that in the selected case-study of the southern Albanian coastline could be summarized as: the presence of underused agricultural lands that are no longer exploited for production (e.g. the beautiful terraces created during the dictatorship for the cultivation of citrous and olive trees); the existence of relicts of vegetation or specific areas of environmental relevance (e.g. the Llogara national park or the Porto Palermo gulf); the presence of lagoons and wetlands (as the UNESCO heritage site of

1 / For further information on the subject, see: European Commission Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy (2014), For a prosperous and integrated Adriatic and Ionian Region. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
2 / The Atelier Albania mandated by the Ministry of Urban Development and Tourism and the Office of the Prime Minister has launched in 2014 an international design competition for the improvement and re-configuration of the southern Albanian coastal strip and its surrounding villages defined as RIVIERA (lot 1, 2, 3). The main aim was to generate original and visionary design interventions concepts for the southern coastal strip and the related settlements, working especially on empowering the existing peculiarities of the area (which can already be considered as a touristic site, good catalyst for the economy of the whole region especially during the summer).

Butrint); the flowing of rivers into the sea (or the traces of ancient ones, as the glacial delta near Pal asë); a built environment comprised of a constellation of small-size villages rich in history yet often degraded and partially or totally abandoned (e.g. Vuno and Dhermi), and so on.
Therefore, the coast could be considered as a composed and complex system, raising issues of environmental and landscape control as well as issues of territorial management of all the physical transformations. As Quaini reminds us (2006; 11.06.2015, Lecture are the XVIII SIU National Conference in Venice: "Coste/aree interne") when dealing with coastal systems, today we should go beyond the "linear model" that, for too long, chased the dream of modernizations which -for instance in Italy- produced only failures and ruins; effective large-scale projects are those able to focus on local issues, planning the territory for integrated systems and no longer pursuing a linear coastal development.
From this perspective, the concept of ecosystem (as the combination of the terms ecology and systems, defined by Schulze (2002) as the network of interactions among organisms and between organisms and their environment, within a limited space) could be used to represent the condition of inter-dependency between the seaside and all the other water and ground elements -natural or artificial- that create the territorial structure. This is an open system, living in a dynamic and active balance condition grounding on the peculiarities of its structure, its operation and its specific development (Farinella, 2008).
So the re-qualification of coastal landscapes needs to be evaluated within the framework of a complexity of interventions that should guide us towards a more integrated vision of the matters necessary for creating a new synergy among urban settlements, natural features and landscapes.
The definition of the Natura 2000 Network and of the European Landscape Convention (as will be later explained in this paper) have recently represented two great opportunities in redefining territorial development policies towards sustainability and biodiversity preservation and empowerment in Europe. Landscape problems connected to broad tracts are increasingly becoming reference points also for urban planning strategies both at a local and broader scale: these issues require the finalization of coherent actions also aiming at the valorization of local heritage involving natural, cultural and urban assets that are no longer ascribable only to the image of the coastal settlements.
Amongst the goals of such a territorial and landscape approach, the enhancement of local awareness and the promotion of initiatives for landscape protection and valorization are to be stressed. Within this picture, the operative proposal should well represent and empower local Albanian landscapes at all scales, from the macro-regional to the municipal one, by enhancing the transformations undergone over time and the vestiges of their history along with the current dynamics, opportunities and visions especially the ones related to touristic development, innovation and sustainability.
The achieved and yet missed solutions to the wide topic of sustainable development (starting from the 1987 Brundtland Report[3]) are increasingly imposing the need of a critical reflection on local development models and on the so-called "ecological footprint". As is know, this metric measures nature's aiming at the territorial re-configuration and relaunch of the southern Albanian coastline, it could be used as an active tool for calibrate the environmental impact of future planning and design choices.
Within such a framework, the need for local development approaches to turn into policies of territorial government seems obvious, also grounding on the inclusion of the environmental variable within administrative decisions and on the adequacy of objectives, tools and actions on a certain area (Zaoli, 2014).
In order to better contextualize such a large-scale / landscape coastal project, it is useful to reflect on what has been happening on the other side of the Adriatic coast before the creation of the Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion; on how, for instance, in Italy, planning approaches and management policies, from a legislative and operational point of view, have dealt and are still dealing with the regulation of territorial transformations regarding landscape projects.
Th e European Landscape Convention represented a fundamental step for reducing the existing separation between landscape projects and territorial management projects, meaning " landscape" as a "basic component of the European natural and cultural heritage". Adopted on 20 October 2000 in Florence (Italy) and come into power on 1 March 2004 (Council of Europe Treaty Series no. 176) , the Convention ratifies an already existing but not yet enforced awareness that is clearly stated in article 2 (scope):

Fig2 / These graphs track the per-person Ecological Footprint and Biocapacity in Albania and Italy since 1961, both measured in global hectares. Biocapacity per-person varies each year with eco-system management, agricultural practices, ecosystem degradation, weather and population size. Footprint per-person varies with consumption amounts and production efficiency source / Global Footprint Network edited by Elena Dorato

" (...) This Convention applies to the entire territory of the Parties and covers natural, rural, urban and peri-urban areas. It includes land, inland water and marine areas. It concerns landscapes that might be considered outstanding as well as everyday or degraded landscapes"[4].

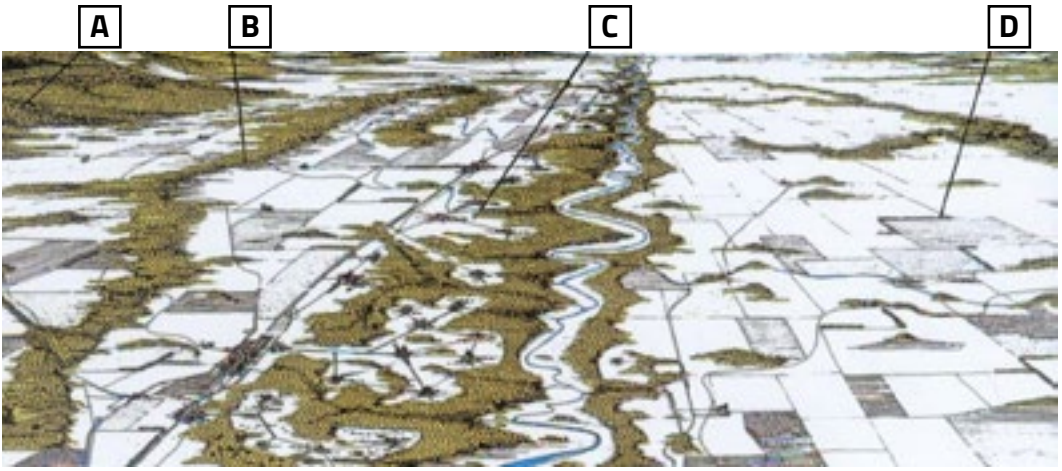
By signing this document, Italy has extended its provisions to the whole national territory, overstepping the problematic regulatory separation between State and Regions. In fact, despite the division between landscape and urban planning legislation, due mainly to the different jurisdictions stated by the Italian Constitution (landscape to the State, while urban planning to the Regions) and to cultural hangovers, the introduction of t h e Convention has greatly contributed to strengthen the mutual dialogue, along with enhancing co- planning and co-designing experiences among landscape projects and territorial planning's stakeholders. In this perspective, the most innovative Regions (among which Emilia-Romagna) have tried to integrate landscape and urban planning disciplines by stating that the whole planning system -at all levels- should embody, besides the subjects of local territorial and landscape management, also the matters coming from the national law, representing de facto the local landscape and territorial project in its entirety. In such virtuously executed cases, where the whole planning system is well integrated, the landscape project -from whichever kind of initiative it comes from- needs to be brought into the planning framework, submitting to the rules and regulations of urban planning: ultimately, it needs to be integrated within the plan, otherwise the landscape project could not be implemented (Clementi, A., Di Mascio, V., Dorato, E., et al., 2014).

Such operational intricacy regarding landscape / large-scale is not able to guarantee a projects' quality if it conforms to the planning system and hierarchy. Furthermore, many are the risks undermining the landscape project implementation at this point; public administration's need for bureaucratic checks along the process could shift the focus from planning objectives to mere procedural congruence. Also, the times elapsing from a project's definition to its realization, with the great number of intermediate steps to be accomplished by the regulation, represent a real issue.

Moreover, there exists a pent-up danger within the necessity of combining the three main elements of sustainable development (economic, environmental, social fields): the loss of the strategic, overall vision in favor of the implementation of smaller local projects, unable to respond to the holistic vision and to a real sustainable development in the long turn. So, despite

3 / Also known as "Our Common Future", its targets were multilateralism and interdependence of nations in the search for a sustainable development path. The report sought to recapture the spirit of the UN Conference on the Human Environment (the Stockholm Conference) which had introduced environmental concerns to the formal political development sphere; Our Common Future placed environmental issues firmly on the political agenda, aiming at discussing environment and development as one single issue. Retrieved June 4th 2015 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Common_Future

4 / For further information on the subject, see the "European Landscape Convention" and other reference documents at: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/heritage/Landscape/Publications/Convention-Txt-Ref_en.pdf.RetrievedJune12th 2015



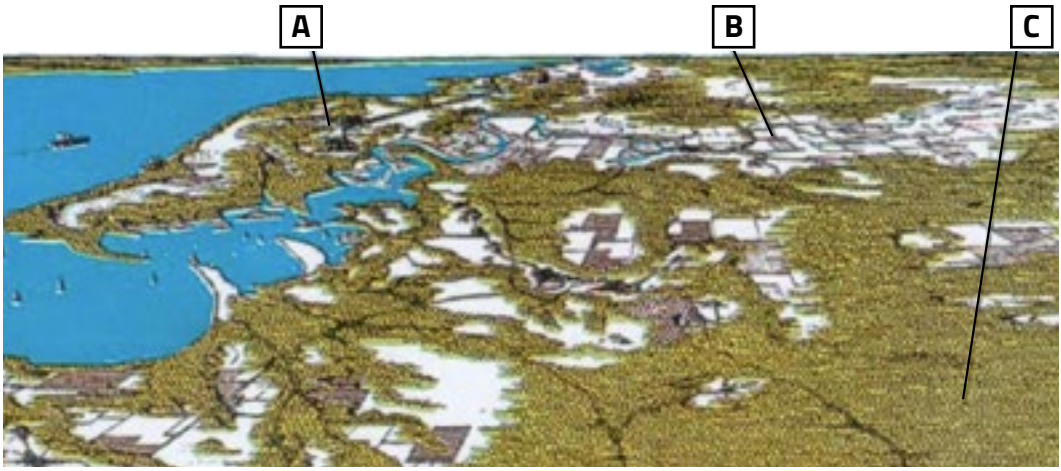
A / Western hills and their woods offer the best conditions for free time and leisure in this region.
B / steep hills which are not suitable for mechanized agriculture are often best for horticulture.
C / Best areas for urbanization are on strategic clay-rich and high ground locations. These areas have a low agricultural value, but are very scenic and more advisable for human settlements.
D / The valley is suitable for intensive agriculture on calcareous, productive soils.

Fig3a / Ian McHarg, Great Valley Physiographic Region, Potomac river basin study 1965-66 source /McHarg I.L. (1969) Design with Nature. Garden City / McHarg was an American landscape architect, one of the first to draw territorial views able to highlight the relationships between human settlements and the surrounding landscape elements.

the differences among the Italian regions (and, generalizing, among all the countries and situations being part of the Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion) the main problems related to large-scale / landscape projects' implementation are common and can be summarized as: fragmentation; separation; actualization of small, single projects where -for whatever reason- the global strategy has been lost (Zaoli, 2014).

The importance of territorial networks and green-structures within sustainable projects

The Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) first introduced the concept of ecological network in 1991 and, starting from the Netherlands, it quickly spread all around Europe. This term was conceived for representing a combination of protected areas connected among them by green corridors and embodies a new methodology, a new approach to environmental policies for safeguarding no longer isolated emergencies but whole eco-systems, dealing with all the involved issues in a broader and more global way.
As far as landscape protection, in 1992 the Habitats Directive within the "Natura 2000 Network" were approved as the centerpiece of EU nature and biodiversity policies; each member state was asked to identify in its territory special areas for protecting natural habitats and their living species (for instance in Italy these have been actualized into ZPS-Zone di Protezione Speciale, ZSC-Zone Speciali di Conservazione and SIC- Siti di Importanza Comunitaria).
Yet "landscapes", in their natural being, are dynamic and constantly evolving entities; their features are always changing, depending on many variables: first of all the human imprint. So along with this quite static idea of landscape safeguarding, ecological networks were introduced as operative tools for territorial reconfiguration, to be achieved by quinquennial plans. Such concept led to a new territorial planning approach also grounding on a more active conception of environmental, landscape and urban re-qualification of compromised areas; from this time on, the environmental issue gets directly tied to the social and economic ones, raising a growing international acceptance (starting from the 1992 Rio Conference on Environment and Development[5]), and leading to the creation of new instruments elaborated and enforced by international, national and local authorities.
Within this framework, there is a new instrument in the so-called territorial approach: the "territorial ecosystem6" as "a combination of the relationships between an environmental system and a human society which (...) finds in that very system the majority of the resources fundamental for living, developing culturally and producing a network of relationships, symbols, knowledges" (Saragosa, 2001).
These territorial networks -if focusing more on the environmental aspects than on the centrality of the human impact- have three main objectives: increasing biodiversity, reaching a proper level of landscape conservation, maintaining the global coherence of the network itself; the



A / On the alluvional plans there are limited sites for urbanization. For it's likely that such settlemets have a touristic vocation, they should be kept close to the waterfront areas.

B / Alluvional soils grant the perfect conditions for agriculture. The estuary, tide plans, swamps, alluvional plans, bays and coves make perfect habitats for fish and wild animals. The forests and cultivated lands are rich terrestrial habitats.

C / Forests and woods are appropriate areas for the aquifers' recharge. They protect soils fro erosion, support the fauna and represent a great element for leisure activities.

Fig3b / Ian McHarg, Great Valley Physiographic Region, Potomac river basin study 1965-66 source /McHarg I.L. (1969) Design with Nature. Garden City,

strategy is based on linking the relevant areas in order to create a continuous physical network. There are different elements to it, such as the core areas (as components of fundamental interest) connected by ecological corridors and the so-called nature development areas as re-qualification sites functional to the whole system.

Even though such networks appear to be highly rigid structures (also defined by their geographical extent: from local to large scale), the definition that Magnaghi (2009) gives of "urban bioregions[7]" tries to shift the vision from a hierarchical to a poly-centrical structure (same as the one envisioned by the Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion), grounding it on several environmental prerequisites that define the functioning conditions of the region itself, as the balance of the hydrographic system; the balance between the urban network and open spaces; the connectivity of the regional ecological network; landscape quality; agricultural multi- functionality. All these systems' great potential lies within the meaning of "network" itself, spotting and rehabilitating local emergencies by integrating them into a broader frame, generating a process that, if well managed, could induce new virtuous and more sustainable dynamics.

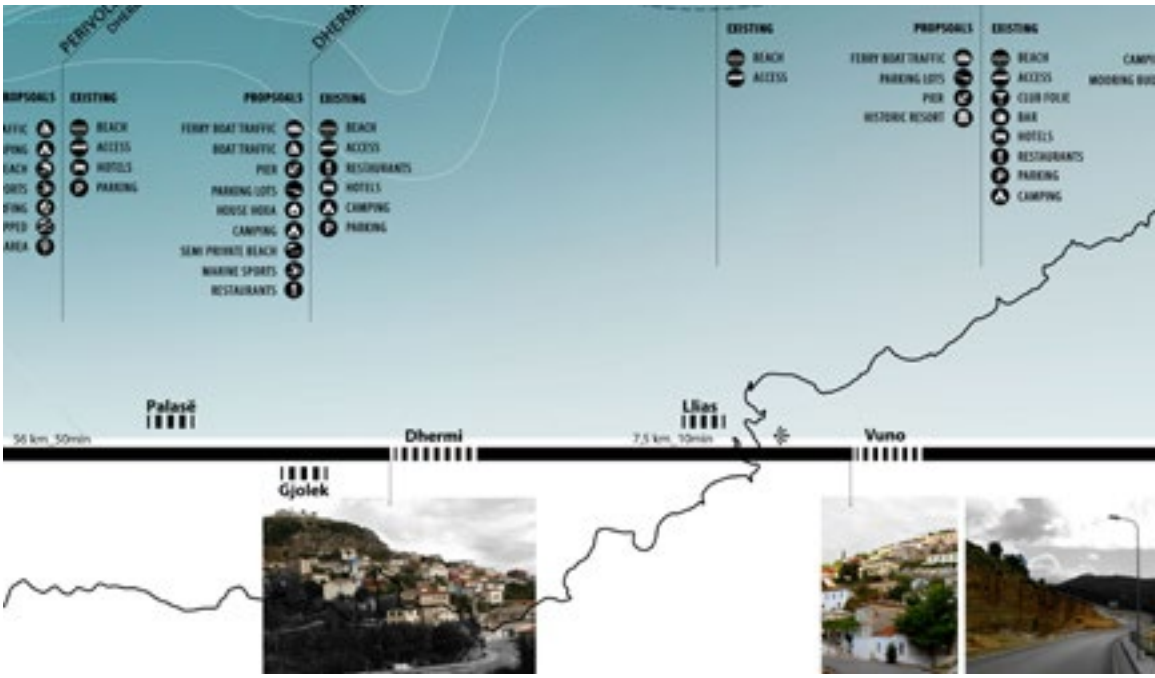
Furthermore, ecological networks could be conceived as:

- variable and greater issues are represented by interferences between anthropic and ecological routes;
- systems of parks and reservations where core areas correspond to the parks themselves and the network acquires great importance within large-scale, territorial planning processes;
- a system of "landscape units" built through the re-connection of the most valuable territorial elements. In this case the network has the major intent to re-configure the peculiar and distinctive landscape features, aiming at re-creating a territorial identity perceivable in its whole. The reference scale is the local one;
- an eco-systemic, broad-spectrum scenario built by environmental elements and an interconnected sequence of territorial strips (as different agro-ecosystems) which invert the model of soil exploitation in a more sustainable way.

5 / For further information on the subject, see the "Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development" at: http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/aconf15126-1annex1.htm Retrieved June 4th 2015).

6 / The concept of "territorial ecosystem", as Saragosa reminds us, comes from the study of the evolution of environmental, territorial, regional analysis, design and planning. The so-called "ecological planning" finds its roots in the english-speaking countries, especially in the USA where the Regional and Ecological Planning school met the Landscape Planning school. For further information on the subject, see: Gambino, R. (1991) I parchi naturali. Problemi ed esperienze di pianificazione nel contesto ambientale. NIS, Roma / Palazzo D., Treu M.C. (1994) Glossario dei termini, in Steiner F., Costruire il paesaggio. Un approccio ecologico alla pianificazione del territorio, McGraw-Hill Libri Italia srl, Milano 1994.

7 / An "urban bioregion" is made by a multiplicity of local territorial systems, organized in clusters of small and medium-sized cities each in ecological, productive and social balance with their territories. Magnaghi highlights how such model could be stronger than a regular center-suburbs metropolitan system, because it produces more prosperity through the valorization and the inclusion into the broader network of its elements and cores. Also, this model could avoid pollution, congestion, economical defect by reducing energy and environmental emergencies' costs; decreasing useless mobility and building "local eco-systemic balances" that could limit the ecological footprint.



From this viewpoint, ecological networks assume a strategic relevance not only within large-scale / landscape planning processes but also inside of urban and territorial policies, representing the framework for nature re- qualification in anthropic contexts, affecting issues like land use and soil consumption, territorial fragmentation, environmental sustainability and urban development. As already mentioned, all these issues are ascribable to the case-study of the southern Albanian coastal area that (for its very characteristics and for the goals that the Albanian Government wants to achieve in the near future especially in terms of touristic development) could represent an emblematic and potential example of using green-structures and territorial networks as key-elements for the development of a sustainable landscape planning process, capable of preserving local peculiarities and heritage while developing its potentials.

Founded on the belief that a territorial ecological network represents first and foremost a policy of intervention (Clementi, A., Di Mascio, V., Dorato, E., et al., 2014), the whole process should start from the identification of the already existing networks and their residual elements, of the networks to be re-qualified in their entirety and from the choice of appropriate operative tools (according to the Albanian legislation) aiming at integrating and completing such territorial project. Strategical models and shared visions will need to be adopted beforehand, in line with the above-mentioned "EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region" (especially referring to axis 3: improve environmental quality).

Also considering the highly anthropic structure of the whole Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion and of the Albanian coast as a part of it, it becomes fundamental, within processes of large-scale / landscape planning, to establish new relationships between natural and cultural resources in order to strengthen and give more importance to the non-built areas of a growing and increasingly built-up territory. As Magnaghi reminds us (2000; 2008), the history of a territory represents the first step in the establishment of the rules regarding territorial and large-scale projects; we need to build (or re-build, in the Albanian case) a "territorial patrimonial image" in order to consider the whole territory in which we operate as a heritage and common good. From this perspective, operating by promoting the realization of ecological networks and greenways becomes essential: the aim is to re-structure the local landscapes through the valorization of their cultural and natural components within a broader strategical vision.

So mapping what Magnaghi calls "environmental prerequisites" represents the first step of intervention, which needs to be followed by the identification of local landscape peculiarities and emergencies. Along with specific interventions that will need to be defined for each site / territorial feature (e.g. the restoration o abandoned historical villages; the stabilization and recovery of ex-agricultural lands; the intervention on the existing mobility infrastructures and their implementation;

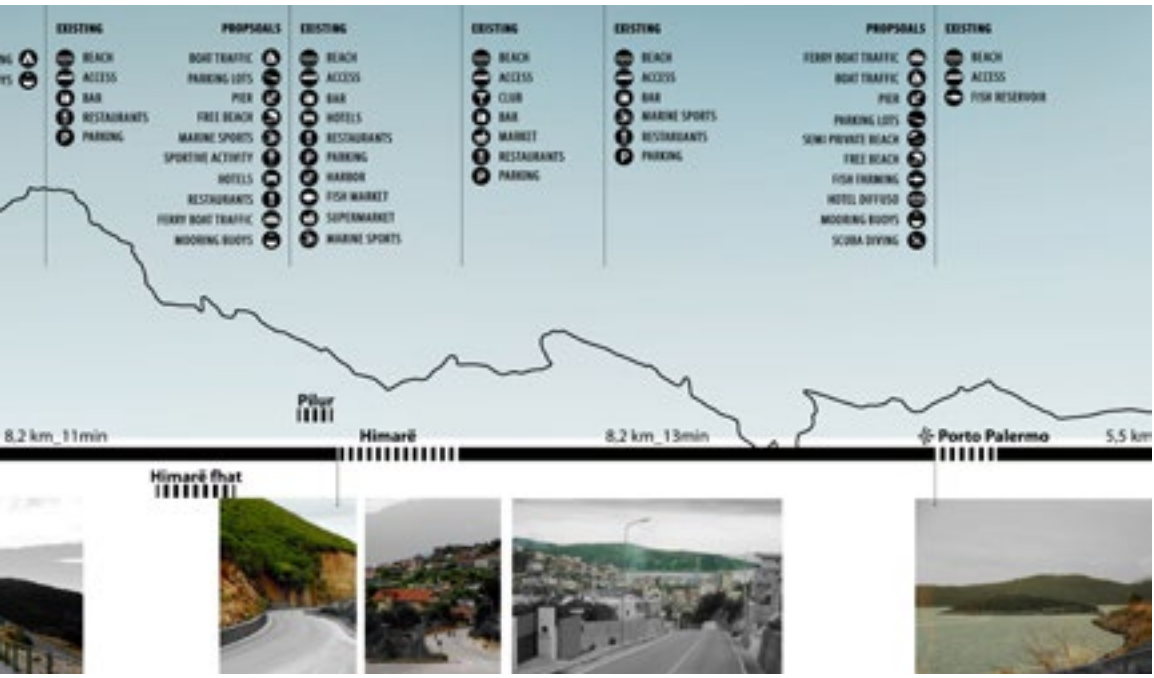


Fig3c / Extract of the southern Albanian riviera, its elements and its potentials
source / Re-Active Riviera competition panels

etc...) the focus of the whole large-scale project should be the creation (or the re-configuration) of the ecological network itself, as the bearing structure of territorial organization. By detailing along the southern Albanian coastline what we have already defined as a "territorial ecosystem" -with its core areas, the nature development areas, the green corridors, etc...- local awareness could be increased, creating the basis for the formulation of flexible tools capable of adapting themselves to such a context (that, at least in the Government intentions, will be expected to be fast- changing), driving the future changes instead of compelling them.

The definition of such territorial network will represent the objective and shared framework on which each specific project will be based on, contextualizing local peculiarities and transforming current "emergencies" into potentials to be developed and exploited, if considered within a broader and interconnected network. So such a beautiful and resourceful site, tied to its history but eager to move forward, finally finding its place within the Adriatic-Ionian context, should implement local and sectorial projects only after having defined its own territorial network and always being aware of the existing macro-regional development vision: sharing its general objectives (which also means adjusting to the EU guidelines, in a forthcoming perspective for Albania to enter the European Union) by re-interpreting them in a local key, using ecological networks and greenways as operational tools for landscape re-configuration and a territorial relaunch.

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