

6.2 The need for strategic projects for a new urban gate to Tirana as a business card for Albania

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More than two decades after opening up towards market economy and democracy, Albania has not yet been able to establish a national vision of spatial-territorial development and policy document. Despite many changes of legislation and tentatives towards reforms a vacuum still exists between the authorities and people. The authorities have not been able to guide developments, services and infrastructure in a strategic way, while people are taking initiative in their hands only via informal channels. An enormous amount of investments might be delayed or totally wasted if there is no further strategic visioning and guidance. Serious investors have medium to long term time horizons, so stability and predictability in planning scenarios are key issues in order to attract new capital sources, both from national and foreign markets.

Therefore, under such circumstances, it is urgent that serious efforts are to be taken aggressively in order to develop a national visioning for urban development. At the same time, some urgent strategic actions must also be undertaken to address key issues in certain priority areas of the country, with broad public impact,

in order to test, establish and boost modern models of sustainable territorial-economic development. The list of priority areas includes, among others, the following: the strategic corridor Tirana - International Airport, which probably stands out as the number one sensitive area where a swift planning action is required; the Tirana - Durres main international port; the Sothern Albanian Riviera; the National Corridor Road; the natural-touristic corridor of the Albanian Alps.

The point is: how to develop intelligent creative planning processes that allow and stimulate radical improvements in a short time period with minimum resources; having visual, economic and practical impact not only in terms of such strategic corridors, but serve also in return as a model of good territorial-spatial governance for the whole country? This was the intellectual and scientific exercise the PhD researchers of POLIS and UNIFE undertook for several months. The selected area was the corridor between the capital city and the main international airport. We hope the findings might be of interest not only for academic purposes but also for public policy-makers and, broadly

speaking, for all decision-makers. Some of the main conclusions are listed below.

1. The analysis and research of this project made PhD researchers go towards a proposal that maintains a balance of several strategic actions including:

a. Maintaining strategic control over the existing situation and future developments in the highway-economic and river-natural corridors.

b. Promoting a regular fast speed, high quality public transport both in terms of rail and bus systems, between Capital, Airport and Port; connecting such trunk infrastructure with the coordinated metropolitan system of urban local public transportation; connecting a public transport system with main nodes of urban-economic developments.

c. Protecting “windows” of visual communication and physical access between highway and agricultural land as well as the rich landscaping potentials; developing stripes of easy pedestrian and biking access along with natural, agricultural and landscaping itineraries. Equipping them with basic facilities and services and ensuring safety.

d. Investing advanced services and infrastructures on strategic nodes of developments; exploiting the potentials of urban-economic areas and economic corridors. Ensuring environmentally friendly strategies and sustainable development. Developing modern systems of PR communication, advertisement and marketing without entering in conflict with a clear and modern system of road signaling and touristic information. Creating an integrated system of information for good governance via regular periodical update of indicators and database.

2. Albanian Authorities must consider such corridors not as mere standard territory but as a strategic territory that creates opinions and builds an image for the capital city and the whole country. This greatly impacts the way in which society thinks in terms of public order on arranging and organizing the physical, social and economic space of a nation. Such corridors are used and visited every day by a considerable number of people, both Albanians and foreigners. The confrontation of any person with such a quality space might help branding Albania and its capital, Tirana. It helps bringing enthusiasm and encourages local and foreigner investors. It also helps Albanians learn more about their own country. On the contrary, the lack of positive planning actions focused on the above-mentioned areas and corridors might discourage local and foreign investors as well as local citizens.

3. At present, authorities are concentrated on reestablishing order with the logic of “stick and carrot”, demolishing certain buildings in high conflict with the public interest and initiating several improvement programs on strategic areas. With the existing government the dilemma for making full national plans and strategies, against focusing selectively on certain strategic project areas with big impact, seems to go in favor of the latter option. Probably, this is a more pragmatic choice in Albania’s current conditions and under the time pressure of a political mandate which lasts 4 years. However, Albania still needs a simple national visioning document and a conceptual spatial plan. The two approaches may be conducted to a synthesis.

4. The axis between Rinas International Airport and Tirana may be seen as a spatial planning exercise with national positive impacts which cannot be



Source: Nikos Danilidis from AlbanPOLIMI-2012 on Flickr - Caption: Tirana seen from the airplane

achieved by any other project in any other strategic area or economic corridor. So, the lessons learnt and positive effects of the proposed spatial programme built through a coordinated number of single projects along the Tirana-Rinas axis (which may be referred to as the “New Gate to Albania”) could, on one hand, produce the largest impact at a national scale. On the other hand, it could pave the way for a much broader work needed to build a national spatial development plan of the country.

5. The development of a special plan for the Tirana -Rinas axis needs to show that public authorities can act as fast as required when the payback is public interest. In this strategic area, the timing of intervention is a key element to success as well as a streamlined planning attitude which means stronger, not weaker, public control over expected changes. To act as fast as needed the selected area should be clearly identified on maps at

the required scale and all land conversions should be put on hold as soon as possible. In the meantime a special institutional entity should be put in place, for example an enterprise zone authority, or other institutional entities which could act swiftly.

6. Continuing ahead with the spatial planning exercise of the axis between Rinas International Airport and Tirana requires attention in order to improve, right from the start, social cohesion, local empowerment and citizens’ participation. These issues have been a constant efforts of EU to foster European cohesion among its member states. For example, the “Green Paper on the Urban Environment” (published on 27 June 1990 as COM (90)218 final , by the Commission of the European Communities) emphasized the role of mixed use areas in building urban environments without barriers between “bedroom communities” and high street neighborhoods. The EU has constantly



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emphasized the positive role of spatial strategic planning to set the right frame in which various kinds of development projects could conduce to the expected positive results for local communities.

7. More recently the EU has launched a strategy (see: An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering, specifically a renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities, COM (2009) 200 final, 27.4.2009) to address the fact that “Europe’s future depends on its youth. Yet, life chances of many young people are blighted”. Participation has been a recurrent requirement of most EU programmes in the last decades. Yet, it still seems an overall goal rather than an achievement, especially when youth is concerned. To foster European cohesion and the very future of the EU it seems essential to involve youth in decision-making processes at all levels, including urban planning. Young people could play a leading role in making a

shift in the trend of misuse of participation discourses. Empowerment should be linked to participation and the youth attracted to decision-making processes should be rewarded with a real say in the making of alternative solutions before decisions involving public issues are taken. It seems that accountability is the realm where most progress is needed. Participation may sometimes become a closed circle game with no real winners apart from the professionals who have been paid to attend.

The spatial planning exercise of the Tirana- Rinas axis may become an optimal practice project for the local government in actively involving young people, in proactive participation which may lead to a stronger sense on citizenship, sustained not by ideology through a serious use of accountability methods in the planning process. We should not only plan the new Albania for the youth but with the youth.



Legend

Land-Use

- Agricultural
- Forest
- Park
- Water
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Transport Sea - Air
- Mix used
- High density residential
- Medium density residential
- Low density residential
- Informal housing
- Village
- Vacant land

Transport Points

- Airport
- Harbour

Roads

- National Roads
- Communal Roads
- Railway

Administrative Boundaries

- Region
- District
- Municipality
- Commune
- Shore line

Dwelling Points

- Capital
- City - Center of Municipality
- Village - Center of Commune
- Village

0 2,500 5,000



10,000 15,000 Meters



Sustainable and Integrated Development of the Tirana-Durres Region

MACRO COMPREHENSIVE VISION

ADRIATIC SEA

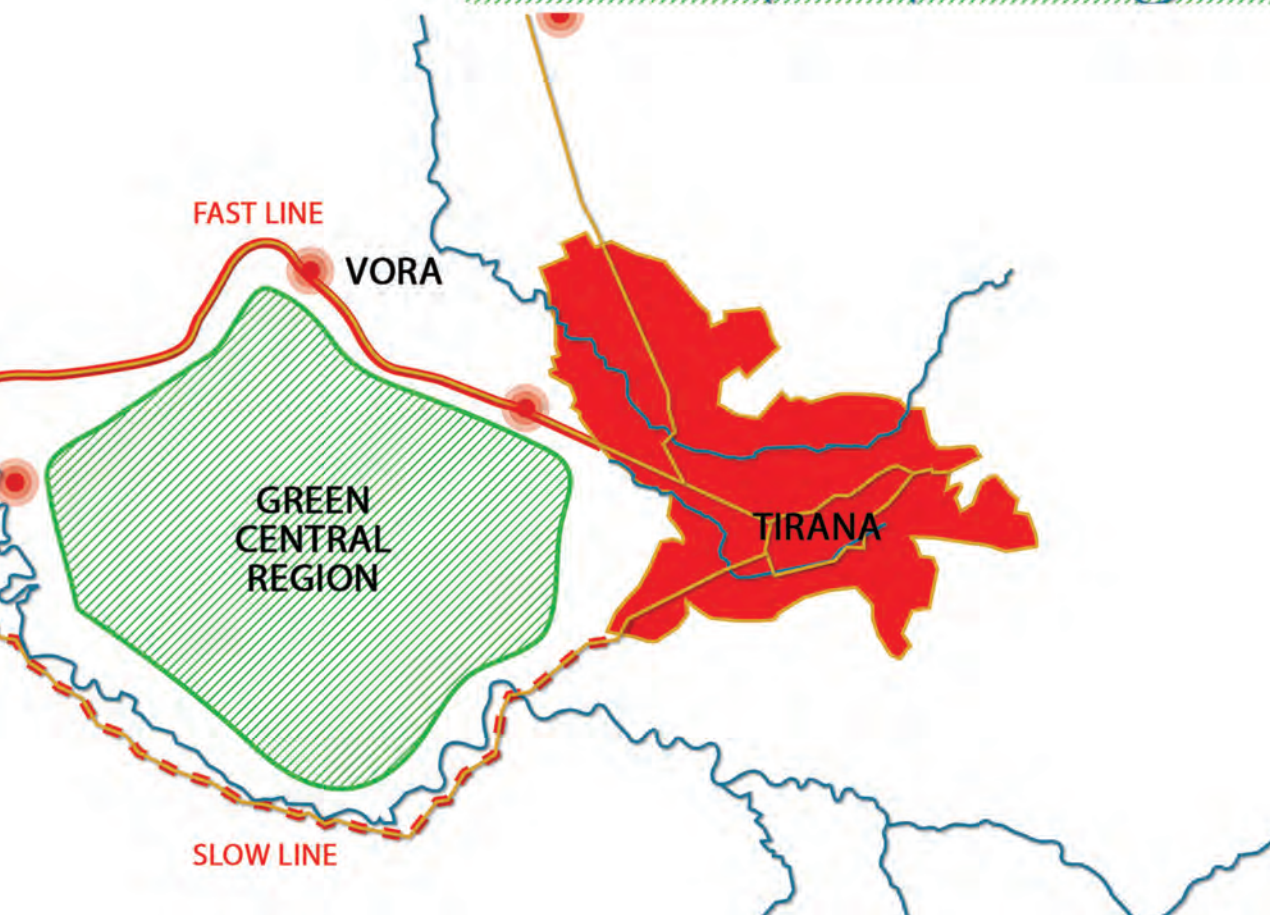
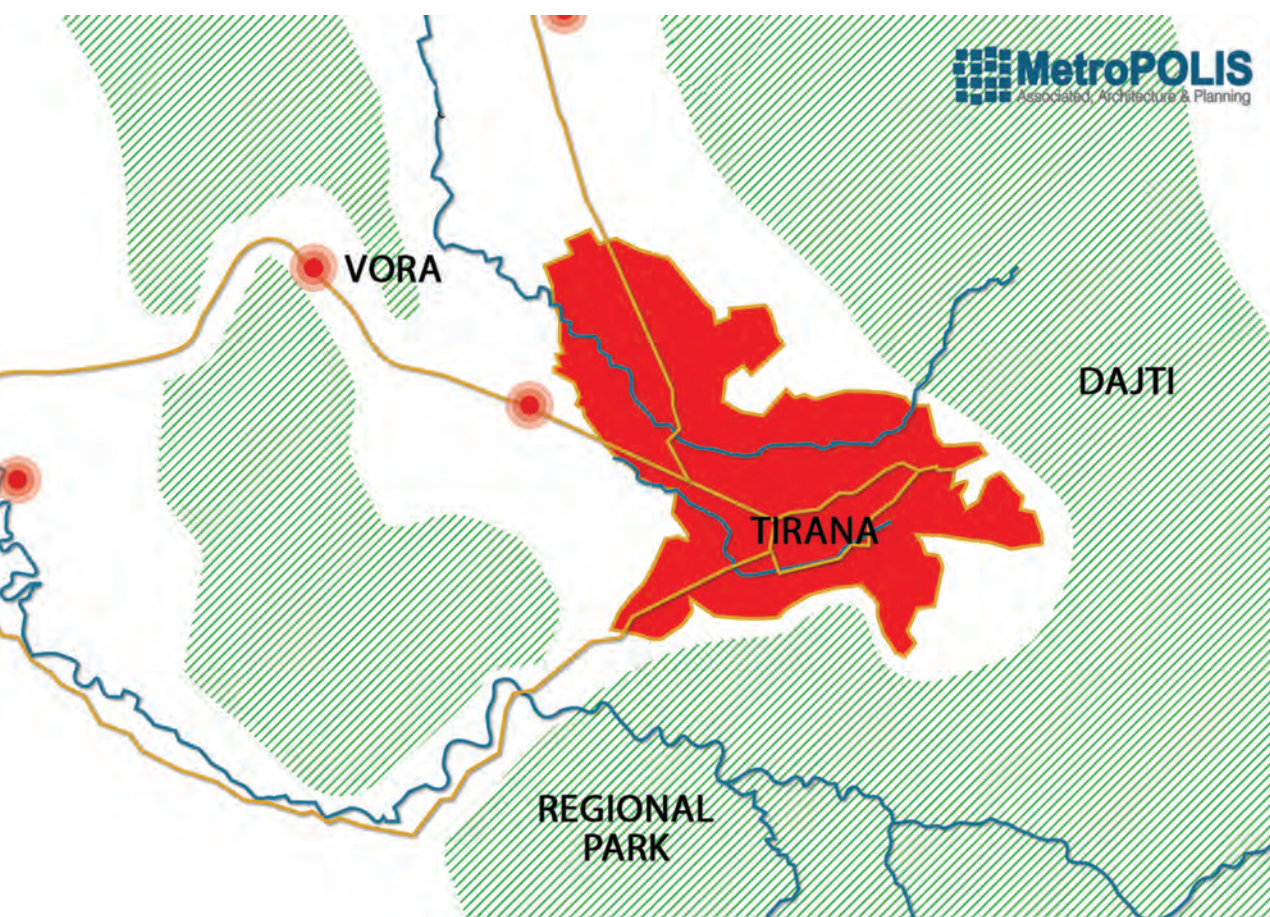


DAJT-ADRIATIC REGIONAL PARK CONCEPT

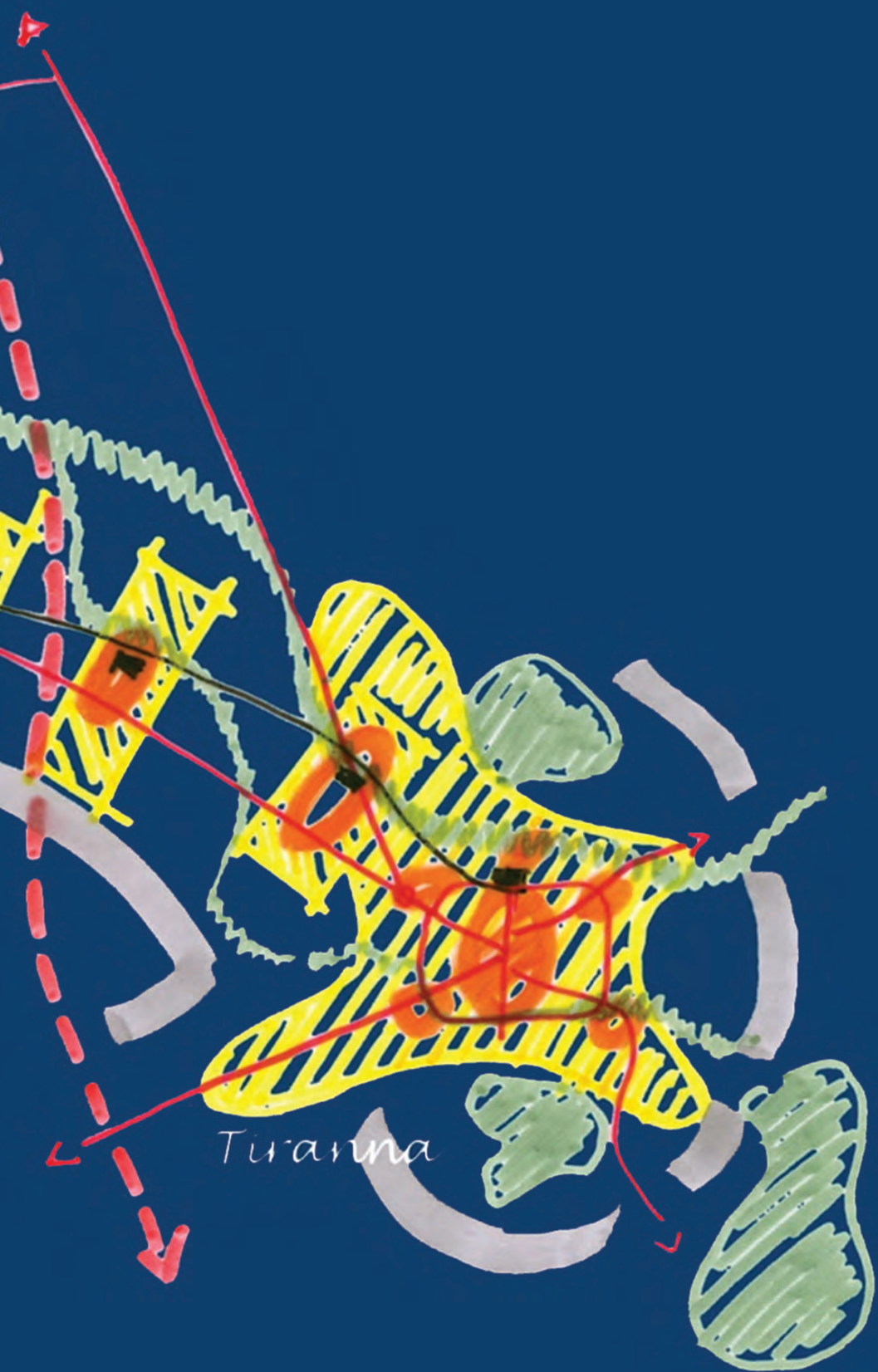
ADRIATIC SEA



DURANA CONCEPT

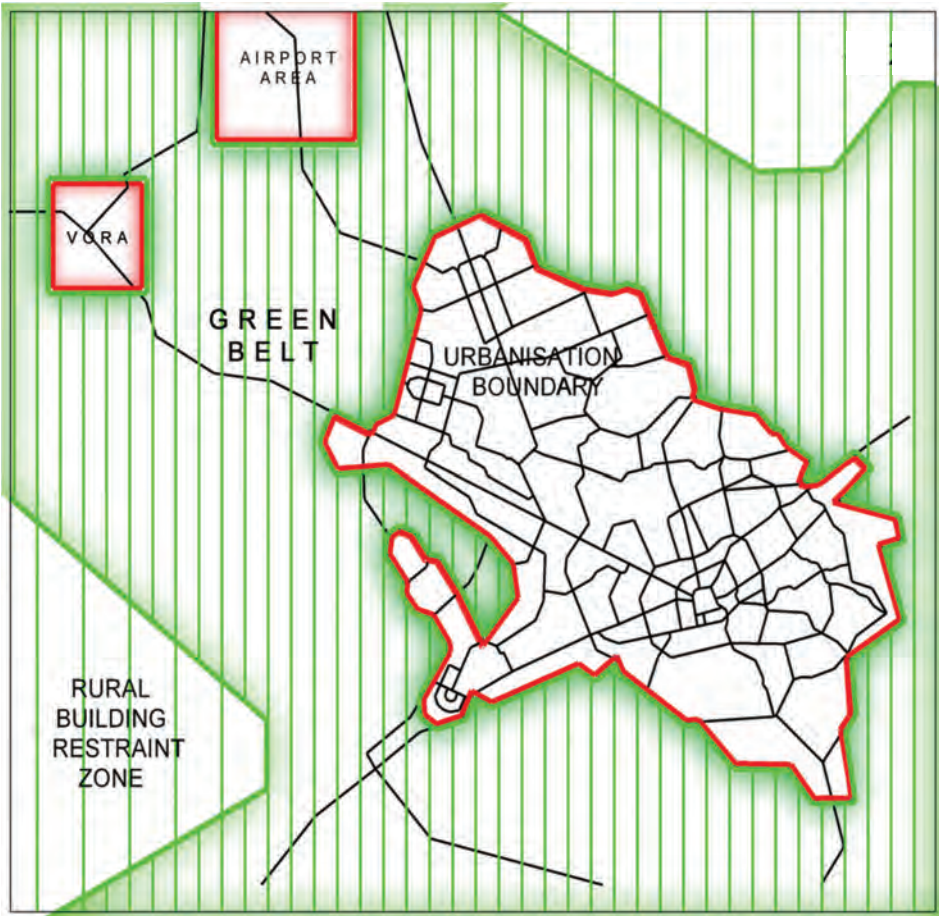








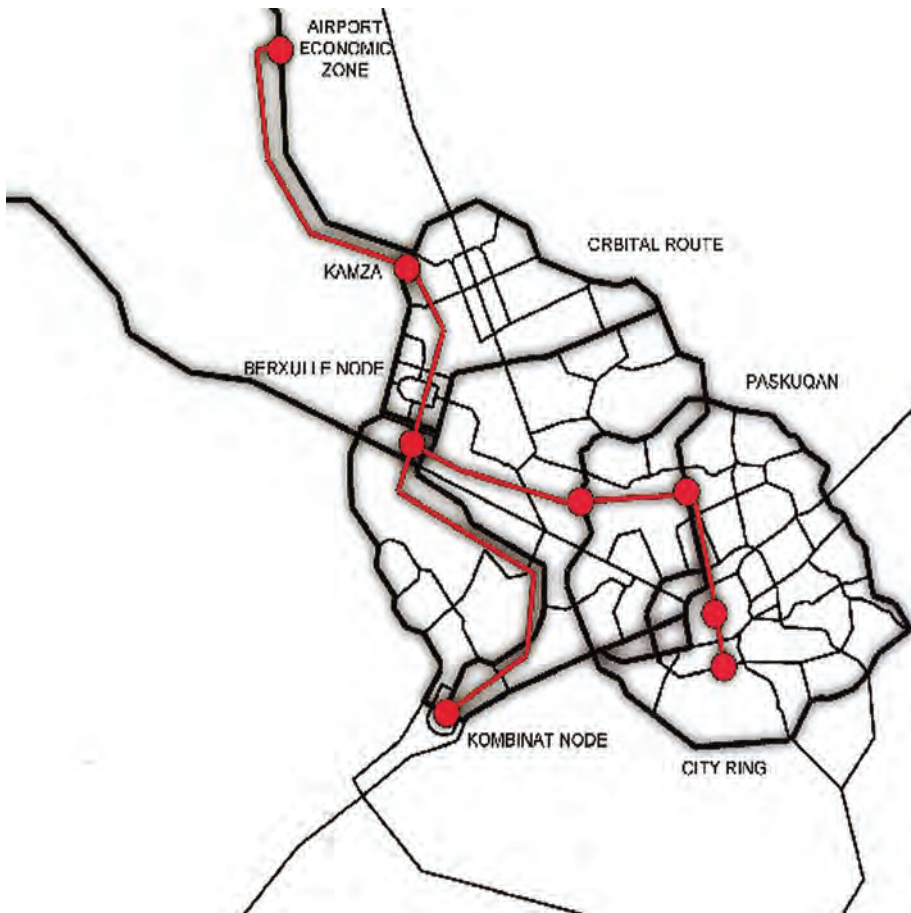
Tirana Terminal & Tram System, Tirana Municipality 2014



Green-Belt Concept, LMTF 2003



Tirana Terminal & Tram System, Tirana Municipality 2014



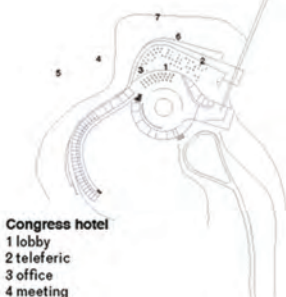
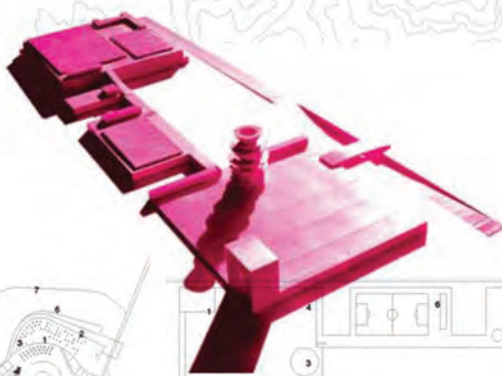
Tirana Airport Tram System, LMTF 2003

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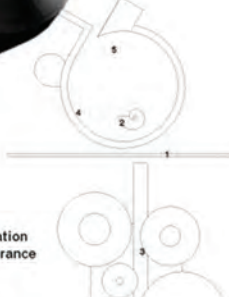
MICRO INCISIVE INTERVENTIONS: NETWORK NODES



Congress hotel
1 lobby
2 teleferic
3 office
4 meeting



Congress center
1 metro station
2 shops
3 public offices
4 offices
5 convention center
6 auditorium



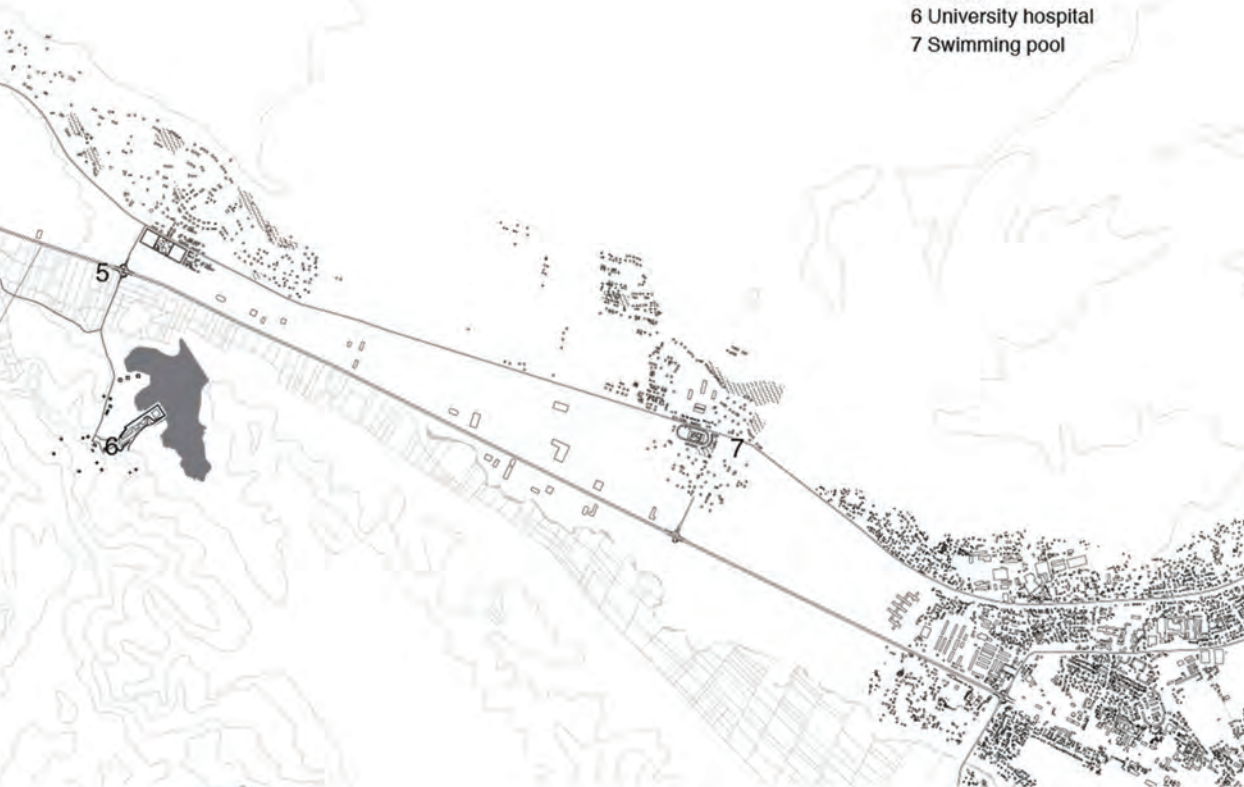
Disco
1 metro station
2 disco entrance
3 disco
4 shops



Agriculture
1 main
2 office
3 bar
4 laboratory



- 1 Congress hotel
- 2 Congress center
- 3 Agricultural University
- 4 Disco
- 5 Library
- 6 University hospital
- 7 Swimming pool



Agricultural university campus
lecture hall
shops
laboratories

Library
1 metro station
2 humanities library
3 sciences library
4 hill

University hospital
1 public entrance
2 emergency entrance
3 emergency rooms
4 rooms

Swimming pool
1 metro station
2 shops and offices
3 olympic swimming pool

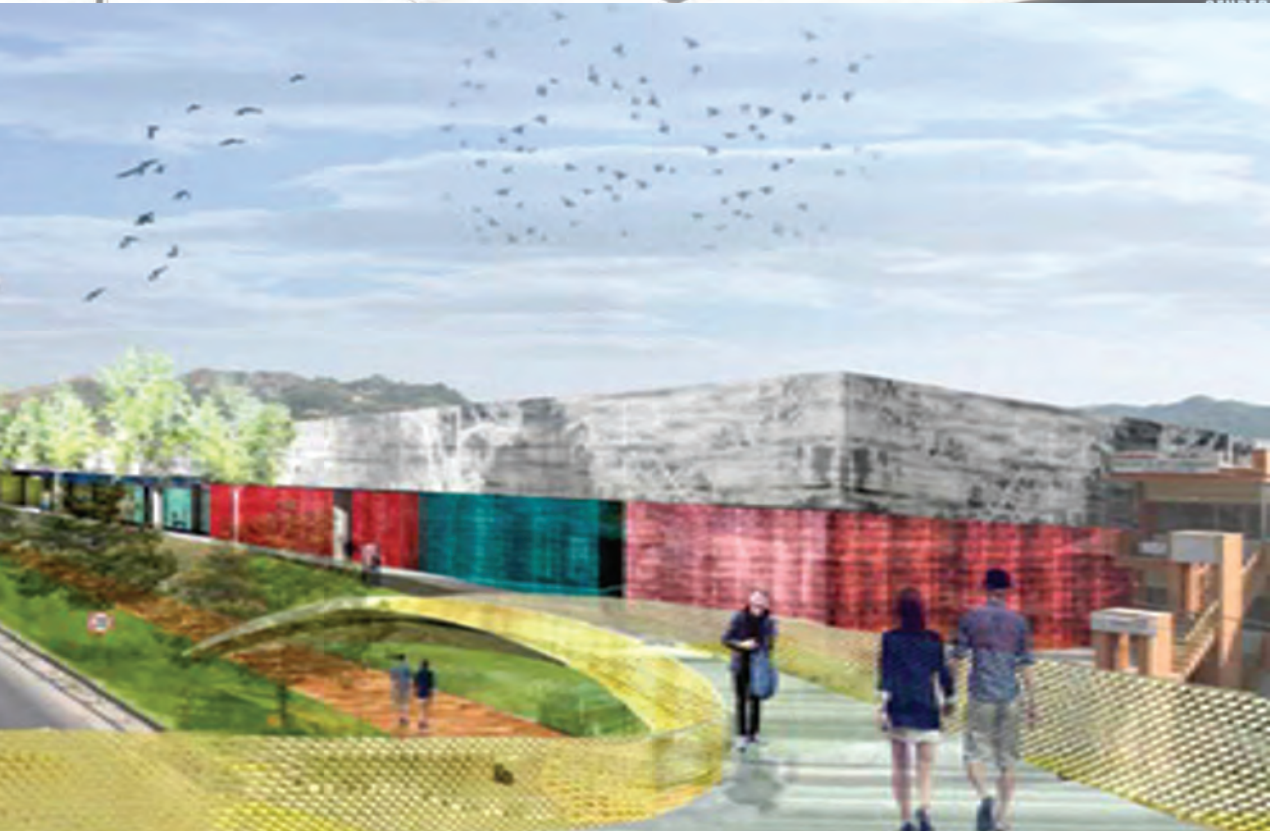


*Pedestrian Pathway along Tirana Green-Crown Corridor,
Vora Municipality, MetroPolis 2013*



*Pixel Intervention in the Durana Corridor, Vora Municipality,
MetroPolis 2013*







*Pixel Intervention in the Durana Corridor, Vora Municipality,
MetroPolis 2013*





