

# Rivieras

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## UniFe – PolisUniversity

Since 2010, our two Universities - the Architecture Department of the University of Ferrara and Polis University of Tirana - have been collaborating on the teaching and research aspects - through the PhD program IDAUP, workshops, Master's degree thesis - and, more recently (since 2014), the Departmental Research Centre Sealine has been working on different competition projects with CO-PLAN and Metro-POLIS from Polis.

## Sealine

Sealine, focusing its activity on coastal systems and tourism's sustainable development, was founded in 2009 thanks to an agreement with the Municipality of Riccione, one of the Italian icon touristic destinations. Such agreement has been later extended to other thirteen municipalities, some of them along the coastline and some others inland around the the Conca river valley.

Progressively, Sealine has broadened its activity to other Italian regions and foreign countries of the Adriatic-Ionian basin. At the same time, the original mission was also better defined as we found that major landscape transformations (hyperNatural landscapes ) in such contexts are preponderantly determined by two phenomena: Tourism and infrastructure developments. In this perspective we started, in partnership with other institutions (Wageningen University, UPC-Barcelona and Cornell University), a research project (the T-Atlas) aimed at building an atlas of

tourist territories, analysing them and proposing new strategies to manage the issues related to their development. On these same assumptions, we are appraising the opportunity to create a II level Master Degree on Infrastructure & Tourism Landscapes. Coastal systems as well as the territories subjected to strong anthropic pressure are still the kinds of landscape in which Sealine is interested the most, and in particular their maritime and marine environments.

In this framework, the "Vlora Waterfront Competition" and the "Albanian Riviera Competition" have been an opportunity to operatively face such topics outside Italy, offering the chance to compare two different realities that are physically near, but very far from each other regarding their recent history.

## to React

The project proposal for the "Albanian Riviera Competition" is called Reactive Riviera. Reactive is the same adjective we used to describe the reaction of the Italian area known as Riviera Romagnola to the economic crisis (starting in 2008), following the very same attitude it had previously developed in similar experiences (e.g. the mucilage proliferation in 1989, which destroyed the "seaside reputation" asking for a change in the touristic model). In the Albanian case, the adjective is used to give a sense of reaction to the challenge represented by current tourism pressure. The Albanian Riviera is a brand new destination for international tourism: arrivals are growing, and the local

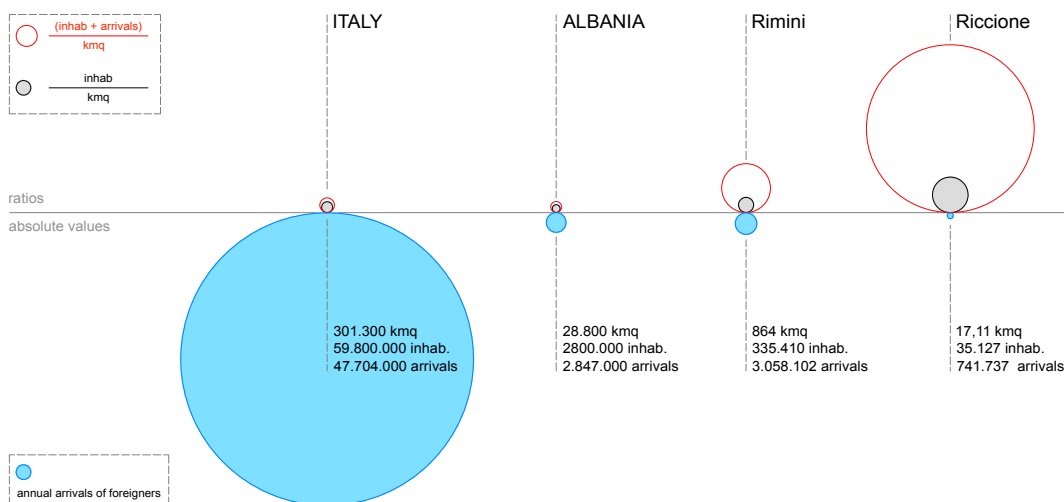


Fig1 / Touristic data comparison between Italy, Albania and the touristic district of Emilia-Romagna (referred in particular to the territory of the Rimini and Riccione) / source Sealine

potential is high, but the territory is not yet fully equipped for that. Here, the informal growth of touristic accommodations - due to a sort of lack in planning and regulations - has been recently tackled by the new Government through strong and sometimes exemplary actions (as demolitions). On this basis, a new attitude should be grounded on planning policies, on a clear vision for the future and based on a careful assessment of the tourism impacts.

### method/model

In order to develop the project idea, in both competitions, we started "sizing the context" through the comparison to other touristic areas, more consolidated and mature. A key-indicators analysis has been carried out to define an appropriate intervention scale and foresee the project impacts.

The Figure 1 shows only few data of the main ones that have been taken into account: in particular the territorial extension, the number of inhabitants and the number of touristic arrivals from abroad - listed in terms of absolute value and related through a graphic representation of their ratio. If the comparison between Italy and Albania points out a similar impact index of foreign tourism in the overall country (in relative terms), the analysis of specific Italian areas - such as the Rimini province or the city of Riccione - clearly

highlights how mass-tourism can stress and totally "shock", at least for a period, an entire territory. It is useful, for example, to remark the fact that the Rimini Province on its own (864 km<sup>2</sup>) has the same foreign arrivals (3.058.102) as the whole Albania (2.847.000) and Riccione on its own (17,11 km<sup>2</sup>) a quarter (741.737). Such destinations owe their "performances" to a consolidated and popular touristic model, but, at the same time, they are facing the consequences of controversial choices in term of urban development and touristic flows management. The same issues are possibly the ones that will affect some spots of emerging touristic destinations such as Albania in the near future.

In this regard, the sociologist Eric Laws' scheme (1991) about the Tourism Design Model is a useful instrument to represent and understand how tourism "works" and affects a territory. In Figure 2, we propose a new version of it, adapted to our aims and research field. Such a diagram helps to analyse the components by which tourism organizes and "shapes", in some way, a place.

The Primary Component can be described as the set of the attractions that the visitor is encouraged to seek over a city or a region: it is the trigger for the trip. The Secondary Component includes all the range of touristic service facilities, including accommodation and catering. Such two

1 / Refer to the Chapter 4.2 for a more detailed explanation of what we mean for "hyperNatural landscapes".

2 / Refer to the Chapter 1.1.

3 / The data (updated in 2014) come from: the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) and the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT).

components can sometimes merge with each other to become one: a set of high-standard, diversified and unique services that can contribute to the attractiveness as the appeal of a destination is also dependent on the offer's richness and its complexity.

The Transportation Component deals with the accessibility to a sight and it is supported by the Connectivity Index of that place which refers to its ability to be recognisable on the market and "user-friendly" in terms of trip planning.

The original version of Law's diagram shows a Buffer Zone between the influence area of the Local Community and the tourists' one (the temporary community) where their mutual relationships take place. Inside it, we introduced a "Sustainability limit" beyond which such relationships turn into conflict affecting moreover the Primary Component. Many are the examples of popular destinations "drained" by their own development: here containing the touristic flow becomes an urgency which must be dealt with. Such a limit has to be considered and planned also for those areas that are currently growing. Defining a tourism development strategy means to set targets and limits at the same time: the accommodation capacity, for instance, should be planned according to the existing supply and to a careful assessment of all its repercussions on the environmental and infrastructural networks (for water, energy, waste management, etc.).

Working on the Albanian Riviera, this has been the basic point on which to focus: how to deal with a territory that is going to host an increasing number of visitors in the next few years while, probably, its best and more charming current features are related with "loneliness" and isolation?

### keywords/analysis

Such kind of topics need to be explored by a deep analysis of the Primary Component, both in a present and in a future perspective. A site-specific interpretation can be supported by a set of key-words allowing to read into a place, better draft its development and strengthen its potentials. They describe the consequences that tourism generates in a territory, once it starts to change, in term of behaviours, trends, processes. Some of those, derived from the Riccione case-study, are:

. accumulation over selection - the act of accumulation doesn't select, but collects very different things in a rapid and intense

way;

. frenetic update - the attitude to always be updated, opened to the change and new trends, is pursued through small and fast interventions;

. diffuse repetition - new trends are captured and displayed by few, then they are replicated diffusely by many;

. multiplicity without inhibitions - anomalies and irregularities foster the ability to multiply experiences without inhibiting the various expressions;

. interferences and overlapping - different activities overlap and interfere to go beyond the seasonal tourism switching from a cyclical temporariness to a simultaneity of temporariness;

. reassuring instability - the instability of the territory, instead of generating uncertainty, reassures through the change; the result is not an enclosed framework, but the chance to imagine adaptable scenarios.

### some considerations

A first consideration is about the word Tourism and the evolution of its usage. Such a term, first used in the singular form, has soon been employed in the plural form (Types of Tourism) in order to better highlight the many facets composing the phenomenon. Nowadays, the attention is shifting on the Tourist itself, as an independent entity with specific and personal interests who plans his/her own the trip and the experiences he desires. In this framework, the Connectivity Index of a destination is increasingly important in reaching these kind of users, to show them the alternatives offered by a territory, to improve its popularity. Such new way of access, by the Tourist to a site, also question the notion of "identity" related to a destination. It seems more appropriate, in this perspective, to use the word "character" instead.

A second consideration concerns the seasonal trends of tourism and the fact that many mature tourism-oriented territories are now striving to overcome it. Their mission is tough considering the fact that often their whole urban and social system has been developed according to the classic vacation scheme derived from the mass-tourism phenomenon. The rigid distinction between tourists' and citizens' settlements, corresponding to the same split between the seasonal and all-year services, or the great density and propriety fragmentation, are only a few of the problems slowing down the change. Emerging destinations, such as Albania, can instead programmatically tackle this

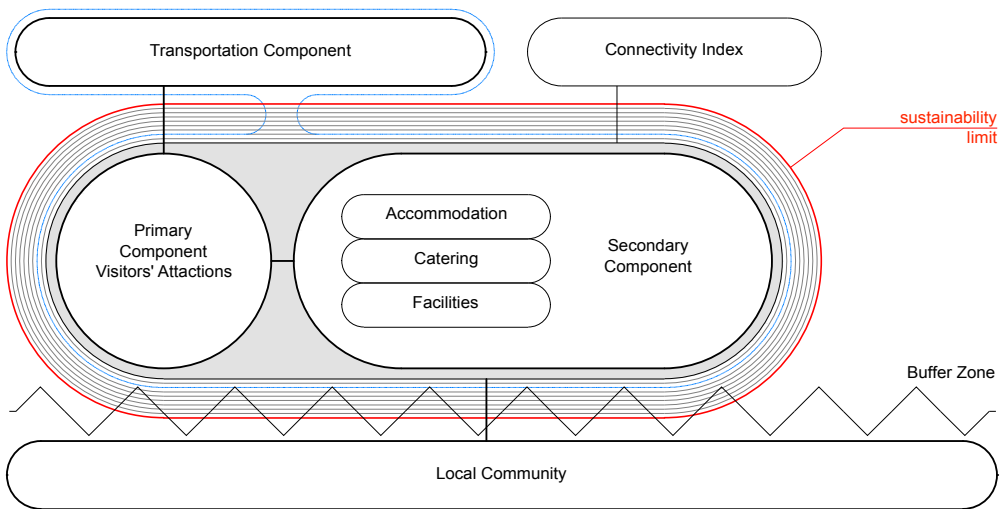


Fig2 / The reviewed version by Sealine of E. Law's diagram on Tourism Design Model.  
source / Sealine

topic from the very beginning, setting up more resilient development models. The negative consequences of the touristic growth are sudden and fast. In some way they need to be forecasted by planning strategies and, more importantly, they need to be managed over time by a clear and flexible framework of rules.

A third consideration deals with the boundaries in which the strategic design can actually be effective in addressing the development. We believe that the "landscape dimension" is fundamental to approach the topic of tourism, especially if the landscape is interpreted with disenchantment: as a change-driver and not as "victim" of it.

In order to manage such a "touristic landscape", the above-mentioned diagram helped us to evaluate the consequences of our design choices. In the projects for Vlora and the Albanian Riviera, we decided to focus on a specific component that seemed to override the other ones. In Vlora, we worked on the

Primary Component (represented by the beach and the sea quality), trying to figure out how to exploit its potential (over the seasons) through new services and to manage its overcrowding. In the Riviera project, we focused on the Transportation Component and the way it can be turned into an instrument to drive the territory towards the touristic transition, regulating flows, affecting the touristic experience and consequently the type of users to attract.

### today

A final consideration that can be seen as a warning too, concerns the unpredictability of tourism given its global dimension and the influence of geopolitical issues on its trends. For example, in the last few years, several happenings (civil wars, natural disasters, trade sanctions, etc) have been shifting the Mediterranean touristic flows from one area to another. Whether it cannot be directly tackled, such a dynamic should affect the way a touristic model is thought, designed, achieved.