

A new characterization of the Mediterranean landscape / itineraries, lines and natural podiums

PhD Loris Rossi

Head of the applied research IKZH and OMB research unit / POLIS University

Begin an article by attempting to explain a possible new characterization of the Mediterranean landscape is an act of great responsibility. This paper does not aim at demonstrating anything new but, rather focalize the attention of the reader on certain important aspects which have been long discussed during the PhD Riviera workshop.

The area object of study, requested by the tender, is located in between Vlora and Butrint, divided in three lots: the Orikum area stretching from Vlora to Palas Beach; the Himara area stretching from Palas Beach to Lukova Beach; the Saranda area stretching from Lukova Beach to Butrint. The so-called second lots from Himara to Palas Beach has been a matter of our reflection in terms of the PhD workshop experience and design competition.

In the last years, the Albanian coast has started to become an important point of reference concerning the potentiality of tourism as well as the development of the urban settlement. In fact, it is not a coincidence that the new Albanian government has organized different important international competitions focused on the idea of changing the image/role of its coastline.

Thus, one of the main aims of this project is to underline, within the area selected, the main characteristics of the landscape, capable of redefining the strong peculiarities of the Albanian coastline.

The identity of the Albanian landscape is something definable through commons characteristics traceable in the biophysical,

anthropic as well as in the meanings of a number of local traditions. Among these characteristics, the beauty of the landscape can be certainly rediscovered through the identification of specific actions able to capture some historical and natural persistence in Albania's landform. To explain how to capture the essence of the beauty of Albania's coastline landscape, we must compare the experience of the site visit with the experience of drawing as an act of interpretation. The experience of the site visit became an experiment in the moment in which the act of drawing became a tool able to redraw the main line belonging to the landscape; certainly, in between these lines the artificial one, composed by roads and paths, are the most easily recognizable. The experience of the crosswalk through paths is an ancient human activity. Since its origins, the concept of wandering has represented the main activity for many ancestral populations. (Fig1)

Before the competition site is seen as a place of renovation in terms of building and infrastructure, it must be first seen as a landscape experienced by the lines which mark the land. As a first attempt, these kind of lines can be intended as simple connections useful for the human activity in joining different places belonging to the landscape. In a deeper analysis the lines can be seen as an aesthetic experience for better understanding and capturing the beauty of the Albanian coastline.

The above introduction want to underline how certain typologies of Landscape



Fig1 / Drawing elaborated during the Riviera workshop by the students of Ferrara and Tirana
source / PhD international workshop students



Fig2 / Ancient engraving, Bedolina Val Camonica, 10000 A.C.
source / Francesco Careri, Walkscapes

can be translated in terms of aesthetic experience (thanks to the real experience) through interpretative drawings. This modality of linking both conditions, has been very well investigated by Francesco Careri in his book *Walkscapes*. In the practice of landscape as experience and experiment, the act of walking (in our case to be intended as crossing a certain landscape) assumes a specific relevance especially if related to the idea of landscape as a matter of observation and investigation.

"the history of humanity's origins is a history of walking, a story of the people's migration and cultural and religious exchanges which have taken place along intercontinental routes. It is to the first men's incessant walks that the earth owes the beginning of the slow and complex act of appropriation and mapping of the territory. (CARERI, 2006, p. 22) (Fig.2)

The idea of mapping mentioned by Careri holds specific relevance if compared to our tentative to observe the landscape through direct experience or interpreted drawings. In our specific case the entire coastline of South Albania is identifiable with two important itineraries: the first is called the Riviera road, the most important feature of which is its panoramic quality due to its position above of the sea. For obvious reasons, it has also the peculiarity of being artificial because it was built by man. Its opposite, the second line has been created by God but in a certain sense it has been rearranged by human activity. This line is definable as the coastline and its main role is to guarantee the natural subdivision in between sea and land. In the majority of

cases, its configuration is continuously contradicted by the movement of the sea. Observing the map from above the two lines, the Riviera road and the coastline, one notices a strange relation between the two, in which in function to the reciprocal distance the landscape changes its shape as well its inner inclination to be crossed by the secondary path. Both itineraries are characterized by a varied topography due the always different condition of the land. The characteristic of this part of the Albanian landscape is its production of an immediate effect of metaphysic suspension in which, as a main interpretation the meaning of landscape podium can introduce a new typology of panorama.

As part of the Mediterranean basin, Albania's coastline is characterized by a rich variety of landscape typologies and, in most cases, the relationship between the coastline and the mountains above is always emblematic especially when the artificial condition created by men meets spontaneous nature.

There are traceable cases in south Albania coastline where the distance in between the line of the coast and the Riviera road offers the possibility to include a natural and spontaneous vegetation or the presence of old villages. In both cases the main problem to be considered is how the three elements, the itineraries, Mediterranean nature and the old villages can be reinterpreted within common esthetic characteristics able to identify a certain modality of observing the Albanian landscape.



*Fig3 / Villa Malaparte, Capri. Arch. Adalberto Libera 1938.
source / Marco Ferrara, Adalberto Libera - Casa Malaparte a Capri*



*Fig4 / Curcio Malaparte facing The Annunziata Church in Lipari Sicily 1934
source / Adalberto Libera: Casa Malaparte a capri: 1938- 1942*

The above reflections attempt to bring out new arguments easily connected within the concept of podium as an interpretative tool able to link and underline specificity in a determinate typology of landscape. In this frame of investigation, it is possible to include meanings useful for us and to connect many of the previous discussions regarding the importance of landscape as value and perception.

We can start to assume that one of the main challenges for the new characterization of the Albanian coastline is the reconfiguration of the value of its landscape through two important elements: the concept of podium, seen as a natural threshold and the idea of the itinerary as aesthetic practice.

To better connect abstract concepts with objective realities, I will try to proceed describing my sources of inspiration, through images and thoughts.

The first thought is associated with a very important image in the history of architecture which shows in the foreground the poet, writer and controversial author Curcio Malaparte (1898-1957). Behind him, an old stone path can be seen which leads to a steep stairway and holds up an important church called "Chiesa dell'Annunziata" in Lipari; an island in the Tyrrhenian sea close to Sicily. In addition to the beautiful atmosphere it evokes, this photo, depicts two important moments: the first is, without a doubt, the figure of Curcio Malaparte with the church held up by an artificial podium preceded by an old road, as already mentioned; the second moment, hidden but substantially present in the photo, is the snapshot of a wonderful intuition that will be materialized in the following years.

The intuition of which we speak, sees the extension of an old itinerary with an artificial podium that underlines and, metaphorically speaking, suspends in the void the importance of the temple of Christianity.

The second thought is easily describable thanks to the previous image that most probably, as already mentioned shows the materialization of an intuition expressed and later realized in a different context and place. That intuition was completely absorbed and reinterpreted by the great Italian architect Adalberto Libera (1903-1963) to whom Curcio Malaparte in (1938) gave the commission to design the famous villa Malaparte in "Punta Masullo" in Capri (FERRARI, 2015).

Villa Malaparte is the conclusion of a path that, after crossing all the striking existing

nature, guides the visitors until the end of the line of the coast through an artificial podium.

Similar to the case of the church of Lipari in which the idea of the podium is to suspend and elevate the temple of Christianity, in Malaparte villa's the roof of the building becomes an artificial podium used to suspend and elevate the beauty of the horizontal line of the sea.

The two lines of the Albanian south coast: the Riviera road and the natural coastline, initially introduced, became in this frame of investigation the focus of moment of reflection in which the Albanian landscape can find a new possible characterization. The existing Itinerary, the natural podium and the artificial lines belonging to the landscape can contribute to the rediscovery of a new possible interpretation of Albania's coastline which may prove useful for future intuitions regarding the preservation and rethinking of this beautiful territory. (Fig.3,4,5)

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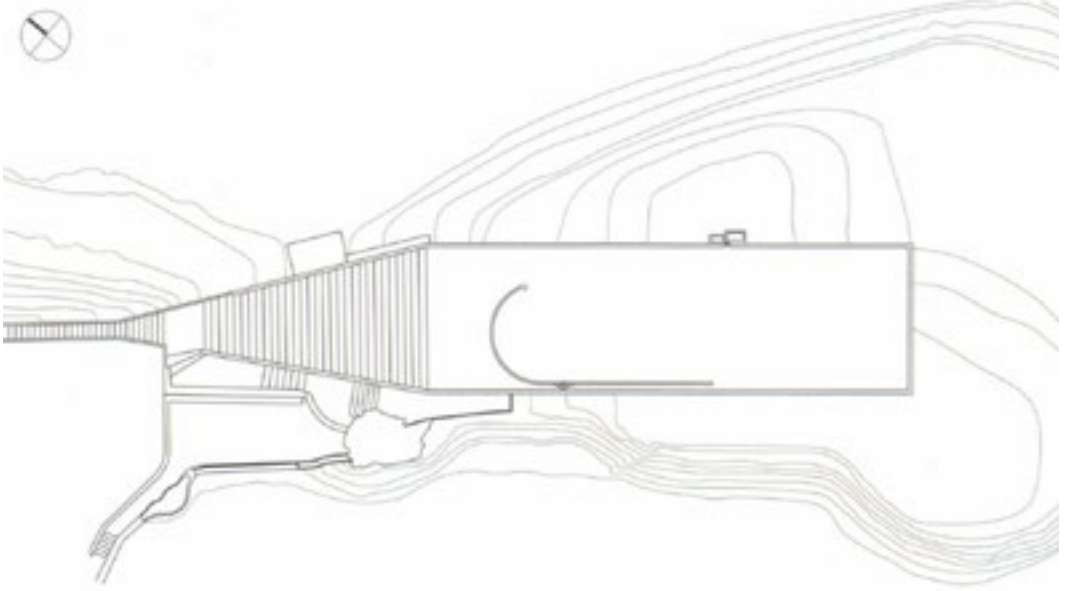


Fig5a,b,c / Villa Malaparte, Capri. Arch. Adalberto Libera 1938
source / internet