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2.4 Creative processes in comparison. Energy, material and hidden logics.

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Design workshops in schools of architecture can generally be defined as design activities where creativity processes and operative tools are strongly connected to time-related issues. The design experience is exercised to the best of its potential, emphasizing the interweaving of creative processes and practical issues; Polis University is one of the few platforms, in the Albanian context, in which the concept of workshop represents an interesting way of developing research by design

In this frame of work, the concept of design becomes a moment of research application and theoretical reflections. The workshop's object was designed as a platform for sharing skills and knowledge applied to the study of an area full of contradictions and undiscovered potential. The area to which we refer is one of the main ones surrounding the city of Tirana; specifically, it is located between the Rinas Airport and the municipality of Kamza. In this extended area the urban development is still in a phase where the boundaries between agricultural patterns and informal settlements are confused. In this site informality is preventing the advancement

of future development stages of the city. The refraction elaborated during the past years, on this specific area, has been useful as a background for the development of two important international workshops organized in the same area and sharing the same characteristics. (Fig 1)

The first was an international workshop - Viral Ecologies -organized in the framework of Tirana Design Week (TDW) 2014 in cooperation with the department of Kuma Lab from the University of Tokyo. The aim of the workshop was the creation of a new image for the city of Tirana.

The second one - Tirana, New Metropolis- was organized in the framework of the international Joint PhD Program POLIS University - Ferrara University (IDAUP). The purpose of this second workshop was the creation of a New Sustainable Image for Albania. My paper will address both experiences, not through a description of the end results, but in an attempt of underlining the process that anticipated the design project through personal reflections on design issues related to creativity and architecture. (Fig.2)

Before developing this comparison between the results of the two workshops, I would like to retrace some important topics which, I hope, could prove useful in facilitating the reading of Tirana's complexity. The topics I am referring to can be considered investigative tools which filter a reality where urban disorder renders less obvious some basic principles which are still active and waiting to be rediscovered and repeated within new design processes.

My first visit to Tirana occurred back in 2011 and, on that occasion, my understanding about the concept of order was

completely upside down. In the logic of reverse meanings there are some topics where disorder can create events or accidents capable of being rediscovered through specific tools. Like in a painting by the Swiss artist Ursus Wehrli¹, where the meaning of disorder can become a basic concept for prefiguring a new decoding system and the concept of disorder is explored through ironic contra-positions between disorder and order. (Fig.3)

¹ Ursus Wehrli born 1969 is a Swiss comedian and artist. His paintings are famous for the elaboration of "clean up" concept. He published books in which he "tidies up" works of art.

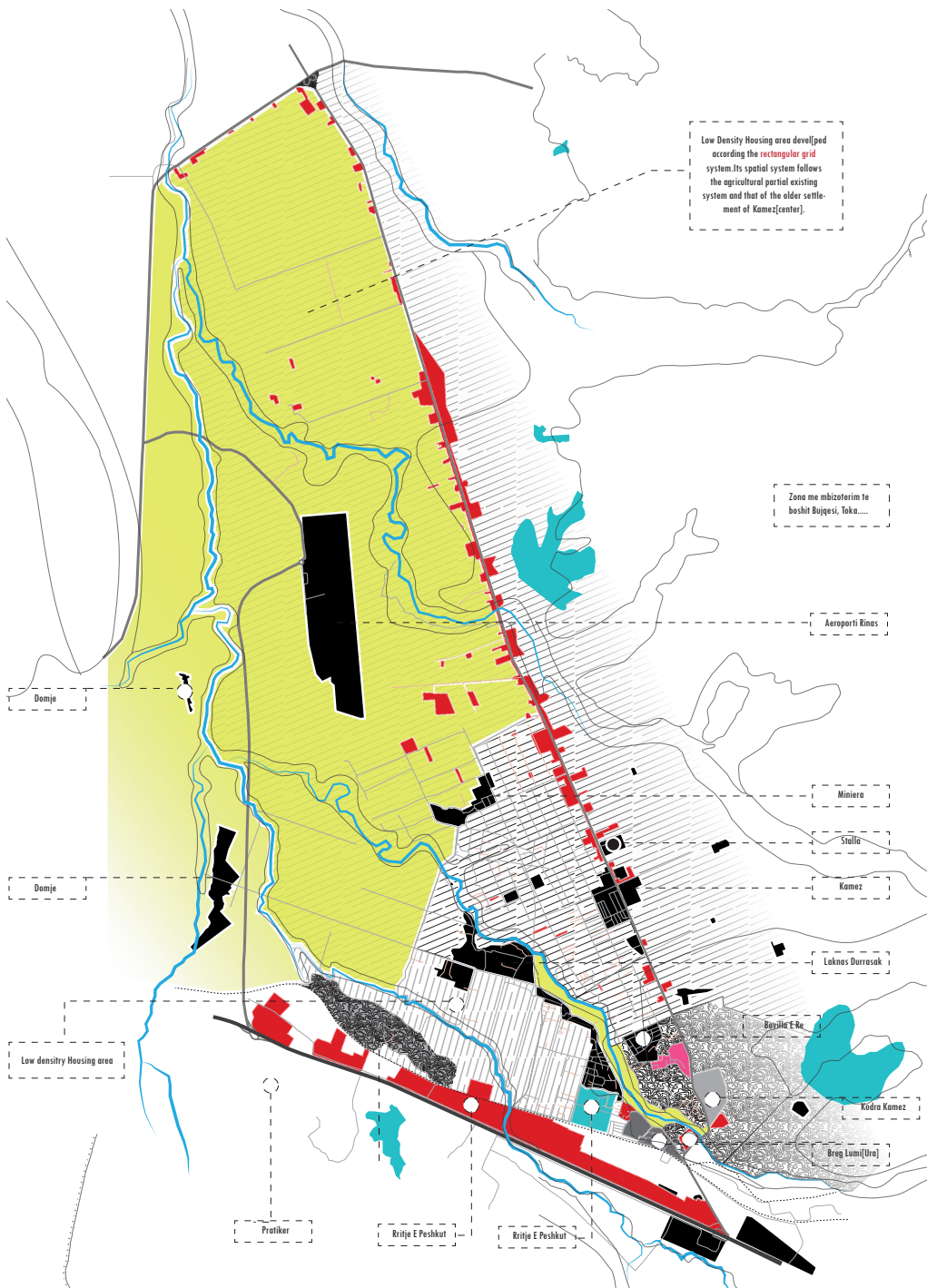


Fig.1 – Urban System

What fascinated me more than anything else as I visited Tirana was the way in which the concept of energy and matter were completely perceivable in all the surrounding buildings. The relationship between energy and matter is something that still persists as an indelible sign in Tirana's context. To support this argument I will present some important reflections suggested by Aldo Rossi. In his scientific autobiography, there is an interesting quotation by the physicist Max Planck, which clarifies the meaning of energy conservation through an anecdote about a mason who is bringing up a stone on a roof of a house and the stone falls off:

"The mason was struck by the fact that expended energy does not get lost; it remains stored for many years, never diminished, latent in the block of stone, until one day it happens that the block slide off the roof and falls on the head of a passer-by, killing him." (Rossi, 1994, p.1)

The strange mason story immediately offers us the clue that some important meanings are not visible, and our task as Architects or Planners is to investigate and discover them. It is a simple exercise which combines creative activities with some weak instruments, thus facilitating the se-

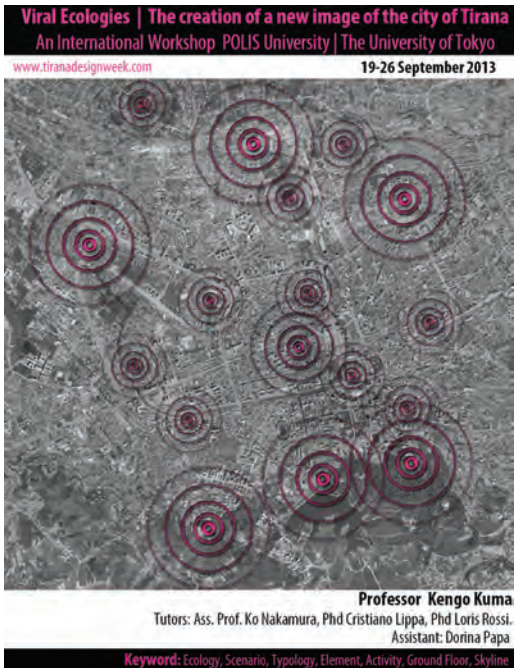
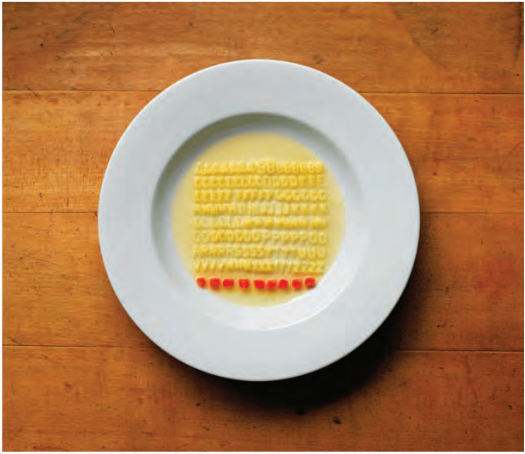


Fig.2 – Viral Ecologies workshop.
POLIS University 2013

Fig.3 - Representations of Ursus Wehrli



lection of important design tools. Man's energy is retained and preserved inside the building's material and, in the majority of cases, is reflected on aspects connected to creative actions. Some events, apparently extraneous or with transversal meanings, can be useful in activating the everyday mood destabilizing the normal balance of a specific place.

The experience described by Aldo Rossi through Max Planck's reflection, provides interesting scenarios where different disciplines can interact with each other by means of similar conceptual processes. Drawing inspiration from Planck's theory, we can easily transfer the same concept to the relation between human energy and creativity. In others words, we can use the creative energy originated by the inhabitants, expressed through informal constructions, and use it as an operative tool. This first reflection attempts to investigate some perceptual theoretical issues in which Tirana, with all its contradictions, can be seen through multiple interpretations. In the specific case of the workshop, the area under study introduces cognitive mechanisms linked to the bottom-up logic in which micro design action can influence the surrounding environment.

From another prospective, the relation between scale and site of intervention recalls a series of conceptual analyses in which many architects anticipated their design

selection; a typical approach of many contemporary urban designers. The topic of large-scale intervention frequently brings with it issues and dilemmas of how to intervene in a specific area (like ours) especially in terms of architectural scale and urban scale. Today, the debate is centered on the urban planning front; in fact, in the last years, Tirana has been object of too much rational planning and, unfortunately, very little attention has been paid its image through a comprehensive vision. Observing Tirana from above, we can clearly read the traces of infrastructures and recognize their origin in the pattern of agricultural fields; from above, the city describes itself through signs and meanings activated by men through time and space. Through this logical interpretation we could say that there are hidden force fields able to reactivate urban processes and historical meanings. In the book about Francis Bacon, Gilles Deleuze argues that there is a possibility of prefiguring a hidden logic in each creative process and he quotes Paul Klee's famous formula:

"Not to render the visible, but to render visible" (Deleuze, 2003, p.53)

Deleuze focused on the idea that some forms of art, such as music and painting, must be able to make visible forces that are not, in this way forces are strongly connected with sensations.

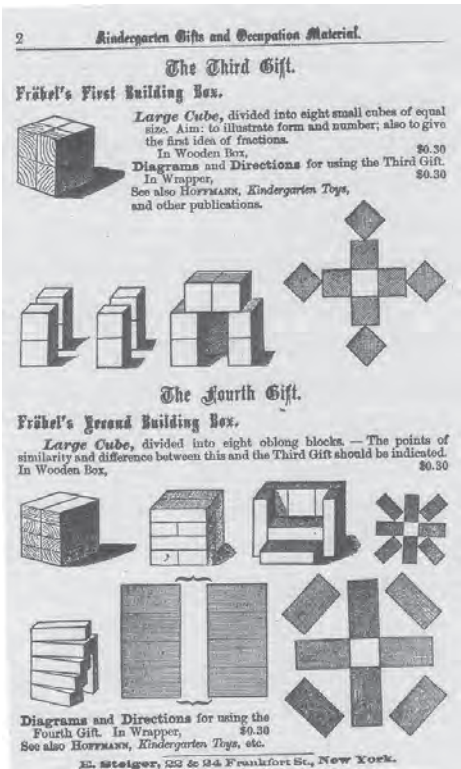


Fig.4a – Example of Froebel Blocks



Fig.4b – Field condition by Stan Allen

In relation to the above mentioned hidden forces it is interesting to notice the case of Frank Lloyd Wright and, in particular, his approach to architecture especially in the phase that anticipates the design process. In his drawings of modular grids we can clearly recognize the connection with past experiences. It is well known that he was fascinated by “froebelian” games and by the traces that certain agricultural machinery leaves on the ground. (Fig.4a, Fig.4b, Fig.4c), (Riley, Reed, 2000, p.17). The abstract grids that transformed his vision by consecutive design activities focused on the objectification of architectural works. The grids reinterpreted by Wright are nothing but reorganizing means of complex systems pertaining to urban disarray.

Returning to our topic, I think that both workshops can be synthesized through the previous considerations. Tirana and the specific area under discussion have been observed and interpreted not from a logic of traditional planning but filtered through interpretive actions aimed at the repositioning of Tirana in the international debate. In the *Viral Ecologies* workshop the creation of a new image for Tirana was preceded by the identification of typical cases of spontaneous architecture in the existing informal settlements and by the definition of *viral* design actions, which can be useful as a repeatable tool. The idea was to select in the project area common methods or creative errors which could be analyzed and used as operative tools for the design project.

The second workshop, *Tirana New Metropolis. Reinventing a New Sustainable Image for Albania*, was centered firstly on the dimensional factor of the site; since the analytical phase the will to separate, order and reorganize the existing functions has supported what is commonly defined as layer phasing.

Every trace operated by man leaving an imprint on the territory had been analyzed and seen as a relevant action that ought to be understood and re-elaborated. In this case the PhD students developed a project through overlapping layers integrated to an abstract grid, representing the city through a sequence of.

In conclusion the hidden logic of such a complex area has been experienced and reorganized through creative paths linked to the value of the urban as well as the architectural scale. Both projects tried to establish concepts related to the value of persistence of meanings in complex urban settings. Perhaps, both experiences have in common an investigation of Tirana's urban development from a new perspective, where discontinuity of signs and meanings become a characterizing element that future generations can further investigate and introduce in the contemporary debate, unveiling the beauty of an “interrupted”² Tirana.

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² Tirana Interrupted takes inspiration from one of the most important moments in the history of Rome during the 70's, when 12 architects gathered by Piero Sartogo started to work on the idea of Rome interrupted. The main objective was to delete two hundred years of history characterized by speculation, reconfiguring an image for Rome starting from the plan drawn by Giovanni Battista Nolli in 1748 . Through this concept, Piero Sartogo froze the beauty of Rome exactly in the moment when Nolli, in the 18th century, offered to the Pope Benedetto XIV the first plan for the center of Rome.