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# Tourism for Landscape - the new Seman National Natural Reserve / Tourism and protected areas as possible combination for territorial development, protection and valorisation

keywords / sustainable tourism, ecotourism, protected areas, landscape, adriatic-ionic region

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## Abstract

*Tourism plays a fundamental role in our society, economically, socially and environmentally. But how to relate tourism and heritage, for building a solid and productive relationship between these two elements? This paper explores the concept of sustainable tourism in order to apply it in the Albanian context, and tries to create a strong connection between the protected area system - for both natural and cultural heritage - and tourism - conceived as economic and social resource. The main objective is to show that the development of tourism in protected areas, not always causes destruction and exploitation, but that it can also start the development of strategic processes in specific territories. In its final part, this paper aims to define possible guidelines for the development of Seman region, based on tourism and its protected area. The methodology used, is the comparison of different experiences in the Adriatic-Ionian region, in order to find common features and analyze the management strategies and the adopted solutions. The Seman case is completely different from those, in terms of natural heritage, but the idea is to re-use the touristic approach in terms of management and structures on a territory, where tourism has never been introduced before. Focusing on the importance of international and national policies about protected areas, the paper ends with a paradox proposal for the valorization of Seman river basin through the creation of the Seman National Natural Reserve.*

## Introduction / Tourism vs Landscape

The "tourism" concept changes according to social and economical global transformations. And so does its approach to the territories, landscapes and cultures. It was during and after the World Wars that tourism became a strong impact activity, as the workers obtained paid vacations and public transportation improved, leading to a better performance in terms of substantially. People started to move more frequently and easily, due to the creation of railways networks, highways and airports. After the two wars, western European countries lived a phase of great touristic development, as natural territories became the main target of private investors<sup>1</sup>, who were in search of perfect places for relaxing. So it was by this time when tourism

started to be one of the main actors in the transformation of territories. But introducing tourism in a territory rich of natural heritage is a risky process, which needs to be controlled and well planned. Tourism may be either a threat or a tool in improving global sustainability (Buckley, 2003). So how can tourism be a resource for territorial development? Which is the right touristic model to protect the natural and cultural heritage?

## From sustainable tourism to ecotourism

The word "sustainable" has been part of our vocabulary and our daily issues for too long already. If in many other fields it may have been a mere pretext to legitimize more or less morally correct initiatives, in the tourism industry it remains a real challenge (Vallarola, 2013). Sustainability

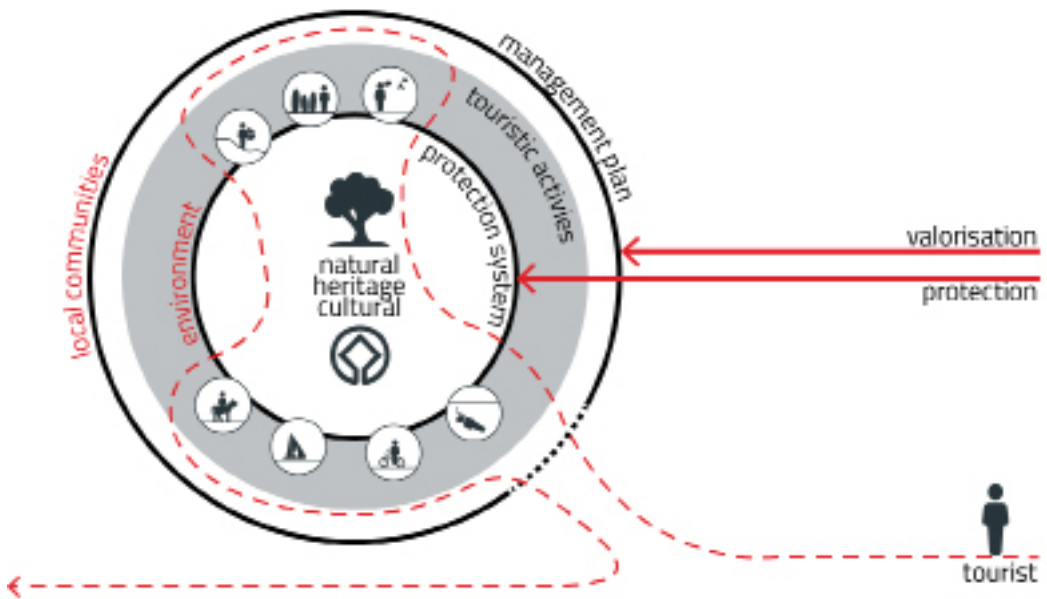


Fig 1 / Ecotourism activities beneficiaries and territorial development actions  
source / drawing by the author

is a wide concept and it is often used without full awareness. But what happens when it is associated to tourism?

The adjective sustainable officially<sup>2</sup> appears associated to tourism in 1995 during the World Conference of Sustainable Tourism held in Lanzarote, Canary Islands. The "Lanzarote Charter" states that touristic development should be based on sustainable criteria, from an ecological perception, economic development and ethical respect. It also has to consider its effects on natural and cultural heritage, respecting the weak balance of touristic destinations.

The most important element is that by this time tourism was recognized, for the first time, as a powerful instrument of development<sup>3</sup> (UNEP, 1995) to be included in the sustainable development strategies. But when referring to protected areas and natural heritage, the tourism introduction process is still a fragile theme. For this reason in 2000, the Institute for Policy Studies stressed out in the Mohonk

Agreement<sup>4</sup> the necessity of identifying an "ecologic" branch of sustainable tourism: the ecotourism. According to the conference participants ecotourism is sustainable tourism with a natural area focus, which benefits the environment and communities visited, and fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation, and awareness (IPS, 2000).

The official recognition happened in Quebec Ecotourism Declaration<sup>5</sup>, on the framework of the UN International Year of Ecotourism 2002 organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Tourism Organization (WTO). In this occasion, ecotourism has been defined as "sustainable tourism in natural areas that creates benefits for both the environment and the communities visited, and also promotes culture, knowledge and respect for environmental and cultural aspect" (UNEP, 2002). But ecotourism is an ambiguous concept. Hintze (2008) affirms that "ecotourism is nothing more than a kind of environmental show business". So

1 / Italy, France and Spain lived the "colonialist" phase of tourism. Proper cities raised for touristic purpose, such as Port Grimaud and the mission Racine in France, Benidorm and Binibeca in Spain, Costa Smeralda in Italy.

2 / In the Lanzarote Charter, the first official definition of "sustainable tourism" is provided, but it is far away from saying that it is the first time this issue appears. An example is the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 where the fundamental principles and the program of action for achieving sustainable development have been provided.

3 / Tourism development shall be based on criteria of sustainability, which means that it must be ecologically bearable in the long term, as well as economically viable, and ethically and socially equitable for local communities. Sustainable development is a guided process which envisages global management of resources so as to ensure their viability, thus enabling our natural and cultural capital, including protected areas, to be preserved. As a powerful instrument of development, tourism can and should participate actively in the sustainable development strategy. A requirement of sound management of tourism is that the sustainability of the resources on which it depends must be guaranteed. (Article 1, Lanzarote Chart 1995).

4 / The Mohonk Agreements is mainly a guideline for sustainable and ecotourism certification programs worldwide and it has been written in 2000 during a conference organized by the Institute of Policy Studies, based in Washington D.C.

5 / The introductory paragraph of the declaration specifies that "The Québec Summit represented the culmination of 18 preparatory meetings held in 2001 and 2002, involving over 3,000 representatives from national and local governments including the tourism, environment and other administrations, private ecotourism businesses and their trade associations, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and consultants, intergovernmental organizations, and indigenous and local communities".



Fig2 / map of the study cases  
source / drawing by the author

how do we avoid this risk?

The development of an ecotourism program aims to create benefits both for the environment and local communities<sup>6</sup> through two simple actions: protection and valorization. So the two main beneficiaries are environment and local communities, while tourism and tourists represent the economic resources for development processes.

The protection action has the natural and cultural heritage as direct beneficiaries and consists of all the interventions aiming to preserve it and monitor its transformations, reducing to minimum the human pressure. Protection is not considerably a profitable economic activity, since it has a cost and it does not provide a direct profit. Tourism and tourists are indirect beneficiaries.

The valorization process is the proper economic activity and aims to enhance the territorial features through tourism. Direct beneficiaries are tourists – that experience the natural heritage and the touristic services – and local communities – that are responsible for providing and managing touristic services. The natural and cultural heritage benefits in terms of investments, since parts of the funds gained in the touristic activities are re-invested for protecting the natural heritage.

The two actions need to be well balanced, in order to avoid negative impact on the environmental quality. This balance can be reached, if priority is given to protection processes, which at the end have an

indirect influence on the valorization actions. To develop a correct ecotourism program in a specific territory, there are four main elements to consider: heritage and its protection system and touristic offer in terms of structures and activities.

### Adriatic experiences / tourism in the protected areas of the Adriatic-Ionian region

The following paragraphs analyze three natural parks in the Adriatic-Ionian region, focusing first on the attractiveness of the areas, then on the level of protection according to the international and national laws, and on the touristic structures and activities. This comparison aims to show different possible touristic approaches to the natural and cultural heritage in order to develop a proposal for the Seman region in Albania, based on reinterpretation of common features. For this reason, all the chosen cases present an important anthropic presence, such as the Albanian case.

#### Adriatic experience #1 / the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park in Slovenia

**Heritage** / The Sečovlje salt-pans are fascinating wetlands<sup>7</sup> of international importance. The combination of an amazing natural heritage - halophyte meadows, reeds, halophyte islets in the basins, overgrown and bare levees and mudflats - and human presence - over 100 abandoned saltpan houses - creates a unique landscape.

**Protection category** / According to the Slovenian law, the park belongs to the category of landscape park, which is an



Fig3 / Se ovlje Salina Nature Park source / Tourist board Portorož, 2013

area with intrinsic natural value where the influence of people in shaping, maintaining and caring the environment is evident<sup>6</sup>. The Slovenian Landscape Parks belong to the IUCN category V, the most flexible one. In the objectives of this category there is the creation of opportunities for enjoyment, well-being and socio-economic activity through recreation and tourism (Stolton, 2013).

**Touristic structures** / visiting centers and info points.

**Touristic activities** / guided tours, creative workshops, various educational programmes and sportive activities (biking, walking, jogging, rowing, parachuting, surfing, sailing). According to the Management Plan, it is allowed to individuals or small groups, normally up to 15 people, to carry out physical recreation activities, such as biking, walking, jogging and similar activities. Although their purpose is recreation and not visiting the protected area, they are considered paying customers. [...] The park also allows the Rowing Club Piran to do training session in the channel Drnica<sup>9</sup>.

The Sečovlje Salina Nature Park is a good example in terms of the management

process. Belonging to a protection category, which allows the organization of activities and events, is the starting point for any touristic development process, supported by a Management Plan, which clarifies duties, responsibilities and limitations. In this specific case, touristic activities are related to sport and environment. It is noteworthy to refer to the necessity for considering as "paying customers" all people that decide to take part in sportive or educational activities, even if they don't enjoy all the touristic activities that the park offers<sup>10</sup>. The tourism introduction, even if limited and controlled, starts processes, such as the creation of touristic services and their maintenance, which have a major economic impact.

### Adriatic experience #2 / MPA and SNR Torre Guaceto in Italy

**Heritage/** Torre Guaceto is both a Marine Protected Area and a State Natural Reserve, due to its huge natural heritage. The terrestrial part of the reserve hosts the Mediterranean scrubs and a wetland area<sup>11</sup>. Two characteristic habitats<sup>12</sup> have been identified: the vegetated sea cliffs of the Mediterranean coasts with endemic

6 / See above the ecotourism definition.

7 / In 1993, the Sečovlje salt-pans were inscribed on the list of wetlands of international concern under the auspices of the Ramsar Convention, which binds the countries that have signed it - including Slovenia - to protect and conserve the wetlands and strive for their sustainable use.

8 / Art. 71 of the Nature Conservation Act, published on the Official Gazette RS, No. 96/04, 1999 / Zakon o ohranjanjunarave, No. 96/04, 1999.

9 / Art. 9.2 titled "Tourism and Recreation" of the park Management Plan.

10 / The idea of a park tax is not far away from the city tax. City tax or tourist tax is a tax that certain municipalities or regions require hosts to collect from tourists who stay in tourist accommodation such as hotels, B&Bs or vacation rentals as a contribution to the maintenance of local facilities. When applicable, it is the host's responsibility to collect the tax from tourist and pass it on to the municipalities/regions.

11 / Registered as Ramsar Site, wetland of international importance since 1981.



fig4 / Cycling tour in Torre Guaceto  
source / intothebike

Limonium<sup>13</sup> and the coastal dunes with Juniperus<sup>14</sup>. The marine area is important for its biodiversity, both for its fauna and flora species. The Reserve also includes archaeological sites as the Torre Aragonese, built in 1440.

**Protection category** / The State Natural Reserve belongs to the IUCN category IV, whose main objective is to maintain, conserve and restore species and habitats (Stolton, 2013). This category aims to protect particular species and habitats (see above) that need regular and active interventions.

Many protected areas of the IV-th category exist in crowded landscapes and seascapes, where human pressure is comparatively greater, both in terms of potential illegal use and visitor pressure (Stolton, 2013). For this reason touristic activities need to be constantly monitored and planned. Due to its heritage, the Reserve is also a Special Protection Area (Birds directive) and a Specially Protected Area of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMI).

**Touristic structures** / visitor center “Al Gawsit”, Punta Penna and Apani services areas, ecologic stations and recovering centre for marine turtle “Luigi Cantoro”.

**Touristic activities** / sea-watching, bike trekking, trekking, diving sessions, sailing and windsurfing courses, cultural and gastronomic events, summer camps and workshops.

Activities are regulated by the internal Management Plan<sup>15</sup>, according to which environmental education and research activities, as well as general access is

subject to permission<sup>16</sup>. The management consortium organizes educational days as “La via Traiana” - focused on the archeological heritage – and “Discover the reserve with the fishermen” - a project with Lecce University and Slow Food on environment awareness and sustainable fishing.

The Marine Protected Area and National Natural Reserve of Torre Guaceto is an exemplar reference for touristic activities developed according to natural heritage protection. The partnerships established with universities, local and international institutions and the development of profitable projects, such as the Slow Food project about the recovery of a typical tomato species “Pomodoro fiaschetto”, allowed the consortium to economically manage the protection interventions.

**Adriatic experience #3 / the Brijuni National Park in Croatia**

**Heritage/** Brijuni Park has an interesting touristic development<sup>17</sup>. Due to historical events, the park has been widely transformed by human presence. Its flora and fauna are a combination of Mediterranean features, with exotic species imported, which are more than 600, both plants and animals<sup>18</sup>. Roman villas, archeological sites and architectural objects of different ages, the natural science and archaeological museums represent the wide cultural heritage, which includes underwater patrimony and paleontological findings.

**Protection category** / The Brijuni park belongs to IUCN category II, whose main



Fig5 / Historical reenactment "Kupelwieser on Brijuni"  
source / np-brijuni.hr

objective is to protect natural biodiversity along with its underlying ecological structure and supporting environmental processes, and to promote education and recreation (Stolton, 2013). On the Croatian law, national parks have scientific, cultural, educational and recreational purposes. In the national parks, only activities that do not threaten the authenticity of nature are allowed. [...] Tourism and recreation must be restricted to visits, guided tours and sightseeing, permitted to everyone under the same conditions<sup>19</sup>.

**Touristic structures** / hotels, villas, restaurants, conference rooms, marina, info points, archeological and natural science museums.

**Touristic activities** / cycling and underwater tours, cultural guided visits, historical reenactment The touristic activities disclose the whole park heritage, from the "Cycling Heaven on the Brijuni" path, to the educational underwater trail in the Verige Bay. Cultural guided tours walk tourists through archeological sites,

the exotic garden, the dinosaur trail and the zoo. In addition, the park offers the historical reenactment "Kupelwieser on Brijuni", during which an acting troupe evokes the culture and lifestyle of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The Brijuni National Park is an interesting case in which the touristic "invasion" caused important changes in the natural environment and strongly influenced the local ecosystem. The transformation of the archipelago in a touristic resort in 1900 shaped its natural landscapes, but after being declared as a protected area, the policies changed. Touristic structures are strictly limited to some areas, the ones built previously, and the remaining areas are under protection and under continue monitoring activities.

The protection "label" cannot change the transformations done in the last century and the consequent environmental damages, but it can stop further human

12 / The Habitats Directive ensures the conservation of a wide range of rare, threatened or endemic animal and plant species. Some 200 rare and characteristic habitat types are also targeted for conservation in their own right. Council Directive 92/43/EEC, 1992.

13 / Habitat code 1240, Mediterranean Terrestrial Region Reference List 2010, Natura 2000.

14 / Habitat code 2250, Mediterranean Terrestrial Region Reference List 2010, Natura 2000.

15 / State Natural Reserve Torre Guaceto Management Plan, registered in the Official Gazette on the 26th September 2013 / Regolamento della Riserva naturale statale di Torre Guaceto, supplement ordinario n°67/L alla Gazzetta Ufficiale n°226 del 26-09-2013.

16 / Only for area A, B and C - the most interesting in term of heritage.

17 / For its strategic position close to the Istrian Peninsula, the archipelago of fourteen islands - known as Brijuni Islands - changed its landscapes according to human presence. First the Ancient Roman settlements, then Venetians invasion, then Napoleone, the Austrian Empire to end with Paul Kupelwieser – an Austrian businessman – who bought the islands and transformed them in an exclusive beach resort in 1900. The two World War saw the islands passing from Italy to Yugoslavia, when it was used by Tito as his personal summer residence. Only in 1983, after Tito's death, the park became National Park of Yugoslavia.

18 / The park hosted also a zoo with many species imported from all over the world, such as chital deer, fallow deer and Asian elephants. Since the XX century, it hosts a Safari park, touristic attraction for European travellers.

19 / Article 4 of the national law about Nature Protection, published on the Official Gazette 30/94 in 1983 / Zakon o zastitipirodeNarodnenovine30/94, 1983.

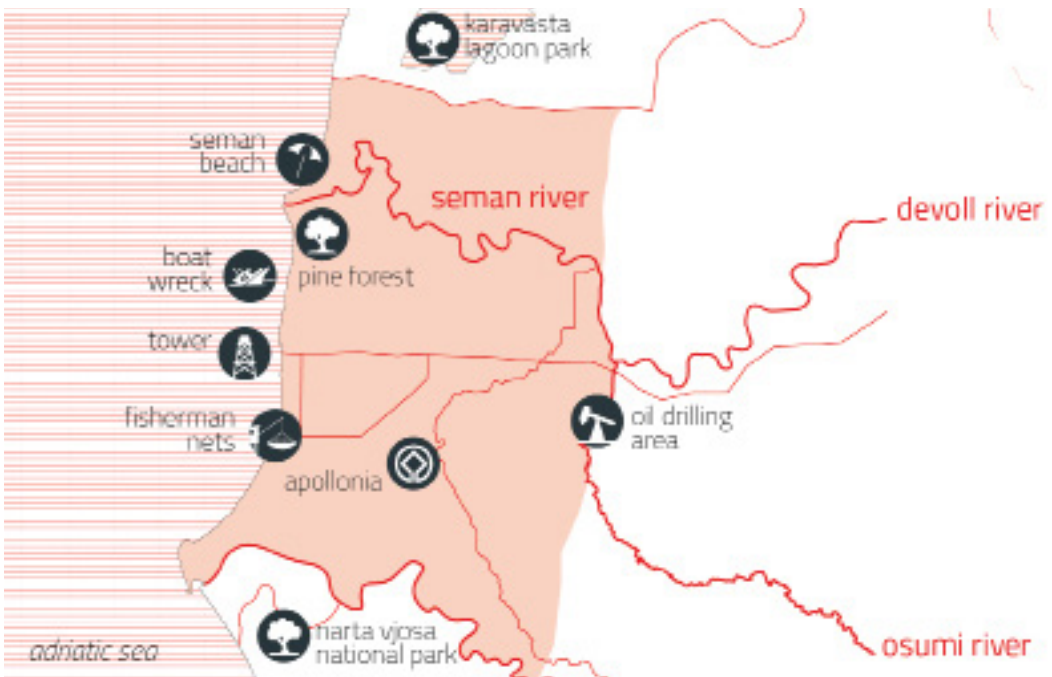


Fig6 / Map proposal for Seman National Natural Reserve  
source / drawing by the author

interventions and educate the tourism fluxes to an environmental friendly approach, through specific programs and activities.

**The Albanian experience / the new Seman National Natural Reserve**

Albania has an extremely interesting touristic potential. This is expressed in terms of natural heritage, as well as historical and cultural. Natural influencing factors are the favorable geographic and geo-touristic position, the variety of natural landscape, an appropriate climate, a rich water assets and rich flora and fauna system. From a historical point of view, the Albanian territory is widely characterized by cultural hotspots (Doka and Humolli, 2015).

Seman river<sup>20</sup> region has a hidden touristic development potential, but it is also rich of environmental problems. The area is strongly polluted, due to the presence of numerous factories and oil extraction sites. The environmental quality represents a territorial emergency. The area strongly needs to be preserved – especially the Seman beach on the Adriatic coast, where the river ends carrying all the pollutant factors. Nevertheless the landscape is beautiful and there are many noteworthy cultural sites spread in the inland, which must be properly valorized. The proposal is to officially recognize the area from the city of Fier to the sea, as protected area and develop programs with touristic purposes, in order to enhance and valorize the region. The following analysis has been developed according to the format

used for the study cases, but it still is a proposal.

**Heritage /** The natural heritage of Seman region is strongly affected by pollution, but it presents many interesting spots, such as the coastal area, where a wide pines forest has been planted during the communist period, and in which the typical Mediterranean flora and fauna are present. From a cultural point of view, the area hosts the archeological site of Apollonia – the ancient Greek city, home of a famous philosophy school – and it is also crossed by the Via Egnatia – the Roman itinerary that connected Rome to Byzantium. In the canals, typical fisherman structures are still operating, despite the low quality of water. In addition there are industrial archeology spots on the coast and in the inland – e.g. the piezometric tower in the sea, the boat wreck on the beach and the machineries for oil drainage.

**Proposed protection category /** The institution of a State Natural Reserve – IUCN category IV – is suitable for this area where human pressure is comparatively greater, both in terms of potential illegal use and visitor pressure (Stolton, 2013). According to the Albanian law<sup>21</sup>, the institution of a Managed Natural Reserve<sup>22</sup> allows interventions to solve environmental problems and the integration of tourism activities. This strategy is even more feasible – from a legal point of view – if thought as an extension of the existing Karavasta Lagoon and Narta Vjosa National Parks. According to the Albania 2030 vision (Aliaj et al, 2015), the Seman basin region is



already planned to be an extension of Karavasta Lagoon which will also include the Apollonia archeological site.

**Proposed touristic structures** / info points, visiting centre, ecologic stations, industrial archeology museum

The Seman beach will host the visiting centre – the head quarter of the reserve – for both monitoring natural transformation processes and temporary accommodation structure for researchers and tourists. Ecologic stations will be spread in the most polluted spots and they will work as scientific hubs for promoting the Seman water deputation process through the installation of bio-remediation and treatments plants and experimenting different energy resources – such as bio-gas station. The archeological heritage will be connected through thematic itineraries, according to specific features: historical and industrial.

**Proposed touristic activities** / cycling tours, cultural guided visits, educational programs and summer camps, sailing and windsurfing courses.

Since the area is facing the open sea, sailing and windsurfing are perfect sportive activities to promote. Educational programs in form of workshops and summer camps related with environmental scientific researches can greatly contribute to the territorial development. The cultural guided tours will walk the tourists through the Illyrian archeological heritage and the industrial archaeologic hotspots.

The Seman National Natural Reserve represents an opportunity for both protecting and promoting the territory, increasing and stimulating different kind of economic activities. In this case the institution of a protected area is functional to a protection purpose with large-scale effort and it aims to slowly introduce a touristic model, which attracts interest on the emergency state of the territory.

### **Tourism for Landscape**

“Tourism for landscape” is a strategy for sustainable territorial development. Tourism becomes a tool for activating transformation processes, acting as the main economic resource, from which the territory benefits in terms of natural heritage regeneration and protection. In the specific case of Seman river area, the industrial heritage assumes a fundamental

central role, both in positive and negative. The skeleton of old polluting industries are now considered as fascinating hotspots, and if regenerated they can start interesting development processes. But, as already said, this industrial vocation also determined the high pollution level of the area that strongly needs to be reclaimed.

In this sense, the Ruhr region is an exceptional reference. Simultaneously to the industrial blight during the past four decades, the Ruhr area as a whole gained a growing national and international importance as a centre of business services, science and culture. As a result, the building complex of the coal mine “Zollverein” in Essen became enlisted by the UNESCO as a World Heritage Memorial. In 2006 the Ruhr area was finally nominated as European Capital of Culture 2010 (Trettin et al, 2010).

The Ruhr example is different in extension and importance, but it reveals a new resource for tourism: the industrial heritage, the biggest expression of the human impact on a territory. The capitalization of industrial heritage can be seen as the most promising field of developing a very distinctive concept of city tourism for old industrialized urban areas. The focus on industrial heritage tourism opens chances (i) to raise awareness about historical processes and thereby creating some inrush of tourists, (ii) to strengthen the local identity and to create new centers of urban life, (iii) to enhance the regional image to attract new investors and, (iv) to restore and prepare the buildings for new commercial and cultural usage (Soyez, 1986).

Seman region represents one of the most critic area, environmentally speaking, of the whole Albania country. The establishment of protected areas, according to the environment protection system, is one possible answer, which through its regulations and limitations helps to plan a sustainable strategy. In conclusion, if developed according to an environment protection system, tourism is a fundamental tool for territorial valorization and enhancement.

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20 / The 85km-river crosses the country from east to west and it is the results of Osumi and Devoll confluence.

21 / The Albanian current protected areas law - no.8906 dated 06.06.2002 and updated in 2008 - listed 54 protected areas divided in six protection categories (Strict Nature Reserve, National Park, Nature Monuments, Managed Natural Reserve, Protected Landscape, Protected Area of Managed Resources) and 25 ecological Emerald Areas.

22 / The Albanian protection category “Managed Natural Reserve” refers to the IUCN IV categories guidelines.

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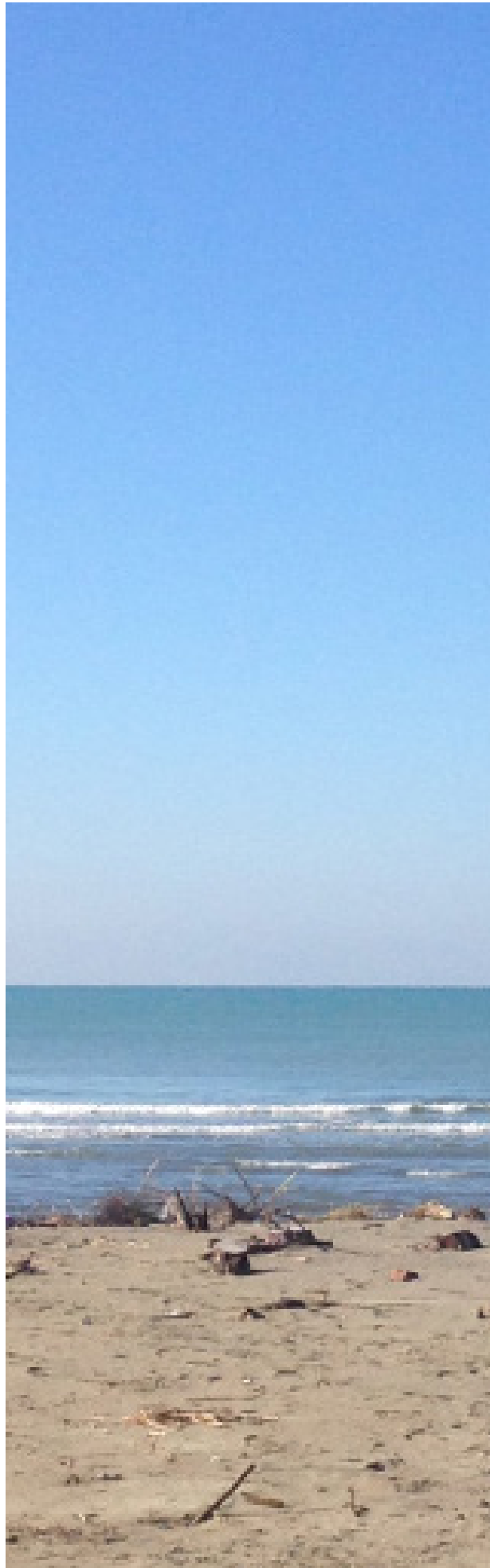
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*Fig7 / Pizometric tower on the Seman beach  
source / the author*