



Scientific Journal of the Observatory of Mediterranean Basin.

Polis University / Ferrara University /

UNECE Center of excellence / Co-PLAN Institute.

TITLE:

**Albanian Riviera / urban form and landscape, the
core elements for a future metanational
landscape**

AUTHOR:

PhD researcher Saimir KRISTO

SOURCE:

*Scientific journal of the Observatory of Mediterranean Basin,
Volume 2 / 2016, pp. 134-141*

PUBLISHED BY:

POLIS-Press

DOI:

10.37199/o41002115

Albanian Riviera / urban form and landscape, the core elements for a future metanational landscape

keywords / landscape, spatial form, metanational, territorial articulation,

Saimir Kristo
PhD researcher

Abstract

The territorial relationship of the Albanian Riviera regarding its location relates to a platform that is investing by tradition in tourism, taking into consideration not only the economic values that tourism can offer but also a mission to maintain and transmit cultural and heritage values through time, extending the social and intellectual outreach of its civilization. This wealth of culture along the areas of the Blue Corridor can be emphasized in the Riviera so as to further develop sustainable tourism as a model structure of progression. As a South European and Mediterranean country situated on the Adriatic coast, Albania is an especially important part of South Eastern Europe, serving as an essential transport bridge between Western, Southeastern and Northeastern Europe. Because of its particular geographical position and spread, Albania has a demanding form. It is crucial to understanding the potential of the Albanian Riviera in the national and regional context, as a missing piece of the Blue Corridor of the Adriatic a clear Met National Landscape of immense value.

Landscape and its elements as a cityshaping factor / landscape characteristics

"Landscape characteristics refer to the unique aesthetic features that can distinguish one scene from another in particular time and space ranges. It is the expression of the unique aesthetic features of the landscapes" (Yu, 2008). Landscape characteristics are the result of heterogeneous aesthetics, which, in turn, express the types of landscape features. The case of the church of Saint Athanas in Dhermi village (fig1), which is like a queen's crown on the top of the mountain is one of the characteristic aspects of this village. Its shape, color and volume, as well as the materials used for the heterogeneous aesthetic features, which, in turn, exhibit the landscape characteristics.

Landscape aesthetic structure

"Landscape is a kind of objective existence. A scene, whether natural or human, shall

not be taken as the landscape if it cannot be or will not be understood by people" (Yu, 1997) Landscape aestheticism is a positive reaction that occurs in the dialogue between the viewers and the landscape. A single object might trigger different aesthetic responses from various viewers, similar to the famous western saying, "There are a thousand Hamlets in a thousand people's eyes." As such, this study organizes landscapes into an aesthetic group to lay aside individual characteristics of landscapes and determine the generalities of the group accordingly. The generalities resulted are used to construct the "composition relations and methods of the types of the landscape characteristics created in aesthetic activities by aesthetic subjects in the aesthetic system of particular time and space by means of the functions of aesthetic psychological structure of citizens" (Yu, 2006) In the case of the Albanian Riviera, the landscape is



Fig1 / The church of Saint Athanas in Dhermi village
source / internet

constructed by patterns, sculpted in time and space.

Temporal and spatial quality

"According to philosophers, time and space are the essential attributes of the existence of a moving object. Time represents the sequence and continuity of the object's movement, and space represents the extensibility and flexibility of the object's existence" (Yang, 1997) Thus, the landscape, when understood as a "moving object", also presents its existence and evolution in dynamic temporal and spatial systems. The historical and territorial features of landscapes are being represented by temporal and spatial dimensions, respectively. Temporal dimension: A landscape itself is an artwork of time, which has experienced constant evolution over the course of human history. Landscapes in the same region represent different external appearances and aesthetic sensibilities derived from various historical periods. Therefore, the discrepancies over time form the basis for the territorial features of the territory. The historical feature of such evolution and differences of landscapes over time is important in investigating the dynamic evolution.

Garrett Eckbo said that in any landscape we look for two features: one is an expression of landscape nature specifics, the other is development of maximum landscape opportunities for adjustment to the human being's needs.

To understand the current arena of urban spatial form in Albania, we should dig into Albania's recent history. A history that is

remarkably different from the history of Western European countries and the United States, on which most planning literature and theory are based. In Western Europe and the US, in a timeframe that starts just before the Second World War, we see a wave. The history of urban planning (and urban development) in Albania has passed through periods that are closely connected to its political developments and different historical milestones.

Urban form on the Albanian Riviera

Urban settlements in southern Albania have been continuously inhabited from ancient times down to the present day. Close to each other, they bear witness to the wealth and diversity of the urban and architectural heritage of this region.

Nature as a material to construct urban form and public space

The Albanian Riviera owns several interesting artifacts of historic fortified cities that are well preserved, and this is particularly true of their vernacular buildings. The urban morphology of this city is quite diverse following the two models of cities.- open city and enclosed city- The 'idea of city' means 'form' of the urban settlement, overall order of the urban construction while the main characters of each idea of a city refer to the underlying order structure, and to the dialectic between recurring and exceptional elements, incorporating more ancient influences at the same time. This way of life has respected Orthodox Christian traditions that have thus been able to continue their spiritual and cultural



Fig2 / System of the Acropolis
source / internet

development, particularly in Himara, in which the Christian influence dates since the 3rd century BC. Himara has signs of constant habitation for over 3,500 years beginning with an important castle and administration point for many important points of that area.

Following the system of the Acropolis (fig2), the settlements of Himara (fig3) – as well as certain Greek agora, Axis for example – are defined starting from the proxemics and topological relationship between the public buildings. The civil structures (in the particular case the church) establish long distance relationships, and reciprocal stresses were starting from the definition of a void like a break, spacing. Landscape is an determining element, where the spatial arrangement as in the Campo Dei Miracoli in Pisa, not only acts as the place where relationships form and take place but also as a way to include nature as a constitutive element of urban construction. In the case of the Greek Acropolis, the similar architectural space is the polar area. The relationship between the elements is not a conventional symmetry but a relation of interferences where different planes of arrangement, counterpoints, dynamic equilibriums coexist. Nature as a city-shaping element with the symbolic feature of the tree and water determines the functional use of space. In the case of Lukova and analog villages in the south of Albania which clearly demonstrate the influence of the Christian Orthodox tradition, grown during the last century, public space is defined by the tree – as Athens was created at the root of the Olive tree – possessing thus a symbolic

character since the plane tree (*Platanus orientalis*) is the most characteristic one in many villages of the Riviera and considered as “the noble tree of Epirus” (fig. 4), establishing the origin and being time-measuring scale. The dialectic syntax of the typology of a public square is defined by the tree, the church, and the market. The tree is shading and an element of measuring time, the church as functional – identity attractor, and the market as an economic, social factor define the genius loci and character of these areas. A relationship that has its source in the clear dialectic between territorial elements and human-made artifacts taking into consideration the vernacular approach and sensitivity of the social, historical, geopolitical and cultural aspects of this territory.

Old Vuno contains several remarkable examples of vernacular stone-built architecture houses (fig5), which date from the 17th century, but also more elaborate examples dating from the early 19th century.

Himara bears witness to a town that was fortified and open and for an extended period inhabited by craftsmen and merchants. Its urban centre reflects a vernacular housing tradition of the Balkans, examples of which date mainly from the late 18th and 19th centuries. This tradition has been adapted to suit the town's lifestyles, with houses on the slopes which are predominantly horizontal in layout, and make abundant use of the entering daylight.

Dhermi and Old Qeparo bear outstanding testimony to the diversity of urban societies in the Balkans, and to longstanding ways



Fig3-4 / The settlements of Himara and "the noble tree of Epirus"
source / internet



Fig5/ Vernacular stone-built architecture houses in the Old Vuno
source / internet

of life which have almost vanished today. The town planning and housing of Qeparo are those of a citadel town built by notable landowners whose interests were directly linked to those of the central power. Berat bears the imprint of a more independent lifestyle, related to its handicraft and merchant functions. Together, the villages along the Albanian Riviera bear outstanding testimony to various types of monuments and vernacular urban housing, in continuity with the various Medieval cultures which preceded it, and in a state of peaceful coexistence with a significant Christian minority, particularly at Himara and Dhermi.

The void/axis the material to construct urban form

As Antonio Monestiroli wrote (MONESTIROLI, 1994) The ancient city during its millenary construction proposed, ultimately, two basic models (fig6-7) for the development of public spaces understood as anti-poles, exceptions, recognizable figures in the background determined by the residential texture that represents the recurrence, the west of the city. These two conceptual models hypostatize themselves in the urban types of forum and Acropolis and, in this way, they recall two concepts of space described by Giedion (GIEDION, 1968). The

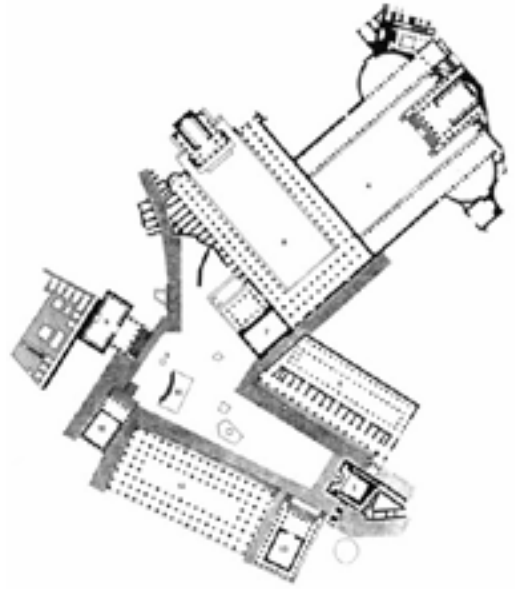


Fig6-7/ The two basic models for the development of public spaces: Greek Acropolis and Roman Forum / source internet

in which the most significant element is the void as the canvas transforming the building material into a frame for the landscape. The carved frets reach out and grip the infinite blue, the stove slender rail and enclose the sea, creating a sequence of infinity and shock.

Both of the abovementioned models can represent possible alternatives, not necessarily excluding, for a new beginning – with the appropriate re-significations of scale and sense – of the needed construction of public spaces in the contemporary city. The concise built-scape in the natural territory is creating indoor and outdoor rooms. "Rooms" that nature and human have perceived with a serial vision of walks and uniform pace.

A sequence, of solid, intermedium, and landmarks as an attempt to recapture in the unlimited and static medium of printed page a little of sense of discovery and drama that we experience in moving through the Albanian Riviera.

VLORA/THE SOLID PLOT (fig8) / the cubes, the drum, and the cones, are creating an unfolding drama of solid geometry, on top of old and future ruins. The unfolding of a mystery, the sense that farther on, more is revealed.

VUNO/THE INTERMEDIUM AND THE PORTICO (fig9 left) / a modest archway performs the office of diving the prospect into things, the street is in the place beyond, into which you emerge so that you move out of one environment into another.

OLD DHERMI / THE CULTURAL LANDMARKS (fig9 right) / the shifting interplay of church bells, spires and masts, all the intricacy of fresh alignments and

groupings, the shafts of penetrations and the sudden benching of emphatic verticals into a dramatic knot, these are the rewards of the moving eye, but an eye which is open and not lazy.

THE STREET / the typical narrowing structure of the built-scape achieves, through the crowding together of buildings forms, a pressure, an unavoidable nearness of detail, which is in direct contrast to the broad piazza or promenade but the square is the balcony and the panorama. "In this articulation of the built-scape, narrowness exercises the definite effect on the pedestrian, inducing a sense of unaccustomed constriction and pressure". (Gullen, 1994)

from acropolis city structure to a self designed system

After the independence from the Ottoman occupation, on 28 November 1912, the rate of urbanization was small, Albania had poorly developed urban centres, and the development of the road infrastructure was limited. During the Ottoman period, the land was stated/considered property. However, there were three forms of state property: 1) regular state property land that constituted most of the country's surface, 2) land that was owned privately by feudal landowners and 3) land that was owned by religious institutions. During the Ottoman period, Albanian cities mainly developed as nuclei that were structured around Mosques and public buildings attached to open spaces. The residential areas consisted of low-rise houses, houses with vegetable plots and gardens and dead-end streets, an organization

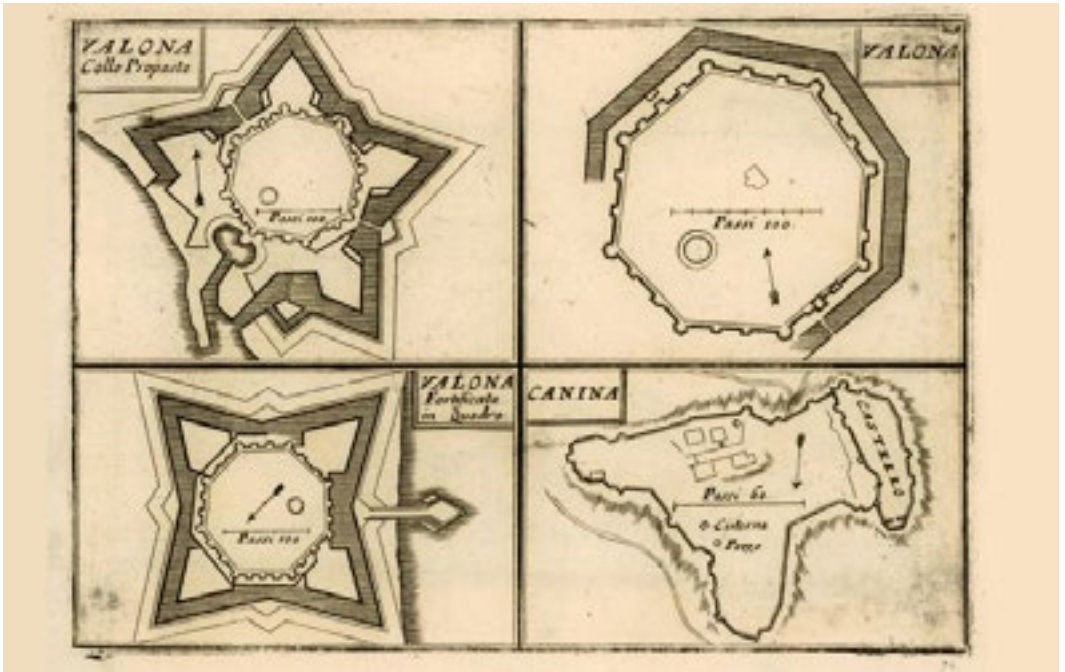


Fig8 / Old plans of Vlorë Castel
source / Coronelli (1688)



Fig10 left/ Drawings of Vuno / source Hughes, T. (1820) Smart. Travels in Sicily Greece and Albania
Fig10 right / The old village of Dhermi / source internet



forum, also an archetype of the European piazza, is based on the identification of a completed, ended and bounded void. The city breaks into this void and, here, represents itself. The principle axis, the public buildings of the city are unified and synthesized, as in the Pompei forum, by an architectural system on the perimeter: the portico (in other cases by the uniformity of the characters of the public buildings). This paradigm is similar to that of the architectural 'box-space' defined by its horizontal boundaries and the regularity of the internal space. A quite difficult typology evident in the Albanian Spatial typology is the case of Porto Palermo Castle (fig9)

that followed the social structure of Islamic culture, divided into family groups (Capolino, 2011; Aliaj, et al., 2012). Today the inheritance of urban design and architecture from the Ottomans is limited since many buildings were destroyed over time, especially during the Second World War. Tirana, Albania's capital, is an example where some Mosques and Churches (religious monuments) have remained, but the central function of the Bazar is not present anymore. Indeed, today it is hard to find further traces of Islamic architecture and urban design such as the structure of streets, the positioning of public buildings and its distribution of

graves and cemeteries (Miho, 2003). The declaration of independence from the Ottoman rule did not pave the way for further urbanization in Albania. Albania has been continued to be occupied by foreigners, and there were significant tensions with the Serbians, Greeks, Italians and Austro-Hungarians (Aliaj et al., 2003). During this time the people in power paved some streets and several buildings with administrative functions were constructed, but there was no clear Albanian urbanization policy in place. The slow pace of the urbanization process was considered to be the result of the lack of education and of the contrasting situation of war and independence both coexisting in the country (Miho, 2003). Despite this, it was the period in which the foundations for urban development instruments were developed. After the declaration of independence in 1912, the new Albanian state confiscated all state properties while private ownership was not affected. It should be specified that the process was not considered confiscation, but the land considered before 1912 as state property of the Ottoman Empire was declared as property of the Albanian state with the advent of independence. The land ownership system in Albania in this period was dominated by the land tenure system: peasants were obliged to contribute labour and produce either for a private landlord, for the state, or for religious institutions, or because peasant families have owned their inherited land. This traditional form of tenancy, with its roots in the Ottoman Empire, changed little until the Communists abolished it with the proclamation of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania in 1944 (Cungu & Swinnen, 1998; Miho, 2003; Wheeler, 1998). In coastal areas like Vlora and Saranda, many multi-storey buildings were constructed which function as second homes or are leased to tourists by the owners during summer season. The developer of these buildings provides only the structure and not the essential services such as water supply, sanitation, parking. This situation has led to the degradation of the coastal areas and reduced the value of the land. The entire Albanian coastline is built up in this manner. Outside the tourist season, the buildings are abandoned. In the era of globalization, cities are now experiencing a "characteristic crisis". The tension between "tradition" and "modernity" has generated two harmful trends in city construction and urban planning. Firstly, in urban planning and design methodology, various kinds of outstanding theories

and methods are borrowed and referred to frequently yet are not appropriately adapted to local conditions. Moreover, such designs fail to fulfill aesthetic Requirements of citizens. Thus, these designs might be considered "designer-oriented". The "designer", with obscured design languages, acts as the only creator who decides on the characteristics of the cities and their landscapes, preventing citizens from appreciating their cities and landscapes. Thus, citizens experience less "characteristic identification". These problems result in the "characteristic crisis" in cities where similarities among landscapes are found. In the case of the Albanian Riviera, a tension between the relationship of cityscape and landscape is quite evident. The Fundamentals of ARCHITECTURE like the captures space of louvred opening reveals the net dimension of the space and the window complete it, or the fundamental of the Arch /portico is emphasizing the street giving a functional in its open space, below which becomes alive and informal sparkles, conversation, tension and full blurring of the landscape typologies. The differentiation of the scales, from urban to natural, from architectural fundamentals to the emotional shock that the infinity is creating the chaotic and undefined urban form that is wrapping nature with the modest but powerful early vernacular touches are creating the inquiries of the Albania Riviera. While dumping movements between, The Ordinary, The Beautiful and The Powerful are drawing the contradictory but still picturesque sequence of "rooms" views and patterns. Writing about landscape is like writing for a across range discipline trip. Starting digging on history, art cultural geography, investigating the hybrids roof fields and drawing a creative and critical at the same time attention of future progressions. One question is rising now, whether it makes sense speak of a landscape scale, ask how landscape relate to the concept of land, form, nature, environment and place. Partially we in the Islamic influence areas the idea of the gardens; climates and regions are more salient than landscape it sells. In the opposite site of Riviera, a quite contradictory contexts lines of landscape inquiry are in the formation of a new landscape model for the 21 century. Not surprisingly there are many gaps between historical and contemporary concepts. But either to the most different approaches that may be oppositional, e.g., neo Marxism vs. romanticism, landscape ecology vs. political ecology, preservation vs. adaptive reuse, landscape is a drawing



Fig10 / Porto Palermo Castle
source / internet

machine of fascinating new and old cultural geographies."Today, the challenge for global is to innovate by learning from the world. Tomorrow's winners will be to create value by searching out and mobilizing untapped pockets of features and intelligent urban systems that are scattered across the globe, connecting and leveraging dispersed pockets of knowledge and features for future development.(Yves Doz, Jose Santos and Peter Williamson,"From Global to Metanational.

owns the right?, Tirana: OPEN FORUM U_POLIS DECEMBER 15th 2011

WANG, M., YU, B. (2012) Landscape characteristic aesthetic structure: Construction of urban landscape particular time-spatial pattern based on aesthetic subjects, *Frontiers of Architectural Research*, Vol. 1, Issue 3, September 2012, Pg 305–315

141

References

YU, B.C. Concept Interpretation: landscape scene-characteristic, *Journal of Urban Planning and Development*, 11 (2008), p. 95

Urban Nature CELA (2011) Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture 2011 Annual Meeting Schedule and Abstracts, 2011

MONESTIROLI, Antonio. (2002) L'arte di costume la città. In ID. La meta e il trig LIFO. Nove lezioni di Architettura. Laterza, Roma-Bari

GIEDION, Siegfried. (1968) *Architektur und das Phänomen des Wals. Die die Raumkonzeptionen in der Architektur*. Tübingen, Ernst Wasmuth

RUIJSINK, S., DUKA, I., TOTO R. (2013) Urban planning and the free market in Albania

ALIAJ, B., (2012) Vulnerability in Albanian Cities, Dealing with Informality in Tirana. Vienna, European Urban Research Association/ EURA conference 2012.

MIHO, K., (2003) Shqipëria, Vështrim Urbanistik. Tiranë: Extra.

CONGO, A. & SWINNEN, J. F., (1998) ALBANIA is RADICAL AGRARIAN REFORM. Policy Research Group Working Paper, Volume 15.

TOTO, R., (2011) To Build or not to build - Who