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A project for the Albanian coast

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Every architecture project is always constrained by particular aspects, the famous *Genius Loci*, and more general intentions that act, urged by a necessary action of transforming the existing. Such a dichotomy is expressed through its marks on the paper. This reflection wants to show something about the meaning of these signs. Before doing this, however, a brief premise on the state of the places is needed.

At the moment, the Albanian coastline represents an area that has withstood great transformations over time and therefore shows a very weak infrastructure. This is a characteristic of the entire Albanian coast, with the exception of few urbanized points, as for instance Durrës and Vlora; therefore, the challenge of the project has been that of endowing the territory near the coast with a system of infrastructures that can enhance its use, while at the same time respecting the landscape and environmental characteristics of the place they traverse. The projects introduced here want to create a stronger connection between the new system of longitudinal crossing of the country that will run upstream of the coast, and a secondary road network that allows the comb penetration toward the coastline, where sustainable tourist development functions are hypothesized in the area of intervention. Such interventions have a "light" nature, since they try as much as possible to maintain the unbuilt nature of the coastal band working, above all, on the paths and on "landscape design" actions, corresponding to the wish of preserving

the natural features of the sites of our interventions.

But, before describing in detail the intentions of the project from the architectural and functional point of view, I would like to express some reflections on the meaning of the coast project. I think that planning along the coast means confronting the topic of limits: the coast is, not only from the geographical point of view a limit of dry land, a place that evokes the very concept of the limit, beginning from the "limit of the look", evoking several particular perceptive conditions.

Such a reflection is part of a phenomenology of architecture and is inclined towards reading the signs of the project as linked to a more general perceptive dimension of architecture, in continuity with the natural landscape in which it is inserted.

One of this particularities, for instance, could be defined as "the indifference of the horizon line". Beyond the historical/geographical that differentiates one sea from another, as Predrag Matvejevic showed in his fundamental texts on the various historical/geographical meanings of the Mediterranean, the line of the horizon is the same for every sea, it on the Pacific coast or the more defined limits of "Mare Nostrum". The coast is the limit of a territory with a precise identity and "genius loci", but it leans toward an endless infinity that is the line of the horizon.

Therefore the project, as "every project" that wants to define the identity of

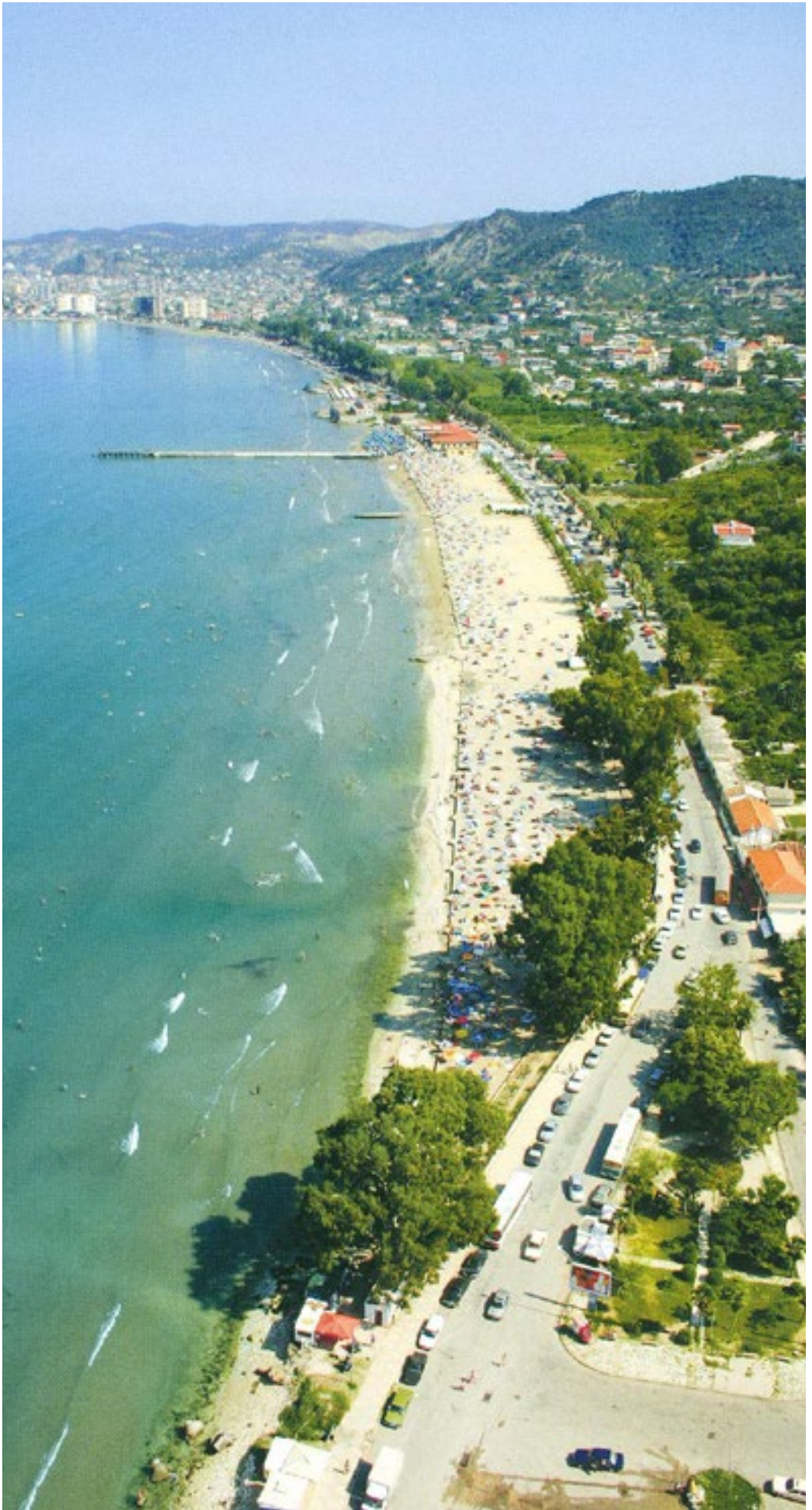


Fig1 / Vlorë waterfront
source / internet



a coastal place, faces two particular conditions: on one side you must answer to the particularity of a place, unique in every coastline: steep, plain, jagged or linear from the point of view of the geographical characteristics; and urban, natural, more or less suitable and adapted to the human presence; and also architecturally different according to the "genius loci" to which it belongs, while on the other side it looks at the infinite/indifferent horizon line.

Another very important action of the general project has been to think about and therefore plan the relationships between the various places, giving them equal or even more importance than the particular projects of the places themselves. Planning a long coastline means, firstly, connecting different points that today are quite connected among them, finding new relationships but also ensuring that every place maintains his own particular characteristics, both geographical and social.

This way, the projects developed for the Albanian coastline in the area of Vlora, located in the South of the country follows the logic of this dichotomy, even reading the signs that represent it on papers: starting from the inside and thus the line of the new north-south axis that runs internally, the new coastal setup leans out toward the sea with the wish to orient itself toward the horizon as the last visual limit. In the different morphological situations connected to the different areas of intervention, some more urbanized, others more natural, some

others even more consolidated from the point of view of the touristic provisions, the guidelines of the project are always the same, differentiating themselves only for demands that are functional and of different uses.

From the functional point of view, it is important to underline the ways in which the choices of the project led to the hypothesis of a strengthening of tourism with an increase in services available for tourists, as this is the vocation of this area of the country. In this sense, therefore, the symbiosis between architecture and landscape, between artificial and preexisting natural elements, represents the original concept that has shaped the project and the guiding element for every project choice.

In particular, observing the project's drafts, the new interventions search a continuity with the signs of the existing territory, as if they want to prolong the signs of the ground, abstractly represented by the curves of level. The desire is to think of the architectural project as the transformation of the natural terrain.

Finally, the general strategy of the project, as emerges by these brief considerations, starts from the idea of preserving the characteristics of the existing landscape as much as possible, and particularly the "Genius Loci", which in Albania, especially along its coast, maintains a very natural and unbuilt character that must remain so, thus trying to recover and improve the quality of the existing buildings



Fig2 / Albanian Riviera
source / PhD international workshop students



Fig3 / Vlora waterfront
source / internet

(sometimes also demolishing structures of low quality, as already done by the government for a lot of constructions built illegally along the coast). Starting from this premise, the new project wants to favor such characteristics, adapting to the signs of the area and interpreting the

theme of the coast as a general "limit": the limit between the natural landscape and architecture, between built and not built and finally between the signs of the existing land and the new signs of the project.