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Climate change awareness in the Lezha area through artistic practice.

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Abstract- *The phenomenon of global warming and its triggering effects among which are the rising of water levels is a fact that is happening unstoppably day by day. Many coastal parts across the globe are in danger of disappearing. One of the cases that should be considered is the lagoon of Kune-Vain in the Lezha district.*

The whole area administered by the Municipality of Lezha has problems and will have problems with the floods of the lands that make up this administrative unit. At the same time, the cultural heritage sites of this municipality are endangered. Seen from a wider scale, man has his own responsibilities for these climate changes, such as rising temperatures and coastal erosion. For this reason, the awareness of the residents of this municipality but also that of tourists can play an important role in protecting the ecosystem and even more, in protecting the Kune-Vain lagoon.

Based on several previous implementations, the lagoon in addition to a national park can be turned into an art park through the implementation of art pieces, which will serve to raise public awareness against climate change. The art pieces can give an even greater visibility to the lagoon, increasing the number of visitors.

Artworks that have the same concern about climate changes that are already showed and are part of public art, they can be installed in the Kune – Vain lagoon, by use of sensors, colors, lights, etc. the installations will interact with the rising hypothesis of the increment of water; activating on the predictions of the sea level and rain flood. The works provide a visual reference of future sea level rise.

One of the art works that will suit very well as part of the lagoon is “Lines (57° 59N, 7° 16’W)” (Niittyvirta & Aho, 2018), an interactive site specific light installation located Outer Hebrides in Scotland, UK. The project was a collaboration between Timo Aho & Pekka Niittyvirta.

This installation will explore the catastrophic impact of our relationship with nature and its long term effects. The work provokes a dialogue on how the rising sea levels will affect coastal areas, its inhabitants and land usage in the future.

Introduction

Rising water levels due to global warming is a fact that is happening unstoppably day by day, many coastal parts across the globe are in danger of disappearing. As reported in Nunez’s article, she says;

“When sea levels rise as rapidly as they have been, even a small increase can have devastating effects on coastal habitats farther inland, it can cause destructive erosion, wetland flooding, aquifer and

agricultural soil contamination with salt, and lost habitat for fish, birds, and plants.”
(Nunez, 2022)

One of the endangered areas is the lagoon of Kune-Vain in the region of Lezha. The district of Lezhë - a region of 479 km² located in the northwest of Albania - has a large diversified ecosystem, its environmental and landscape features are of considerable importance and constitute

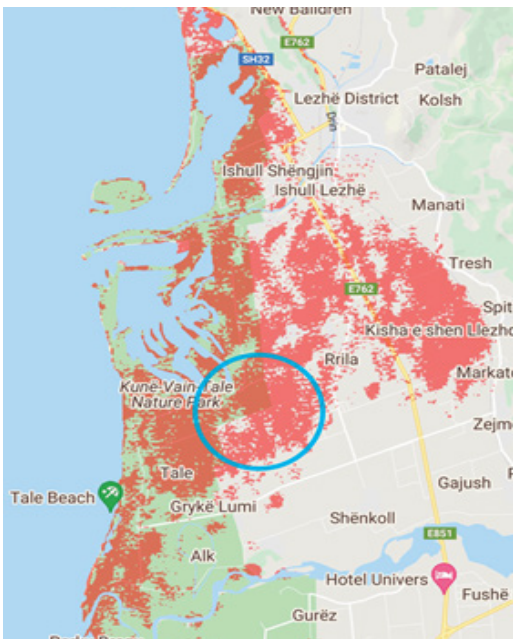


Fig. 1 / Lezha area, in circle the area of the hypothetical intervention and in red color the area under flooding.



Fig. 2 / Artistic interpretation of the land that is risked by flooding in Lezha municipality. Courtesy of the Artist.

internal characters of the region itself. One of them is the Kune-Vain Nature Reserve, a wetland system located in the administrative district of Lezha. The area includes the Kune side on the north of the Drini river in Lezha and of Vain to the south of the river. From the total area of the Kune Vain area (excluding the Tale area and the Kenala lagoon) is about 2000 ha. Kune Island (part of the Kune slope) is a strictly protected area. Area and according to Albanian environmental legislation, tourism cannot be applied there. The area is bordered by Shengjiin beach and the island of Shengjiin village, Lezha island village, Tale village and Tales beach, etc. (Kreci & Sinojmeri, 2017)

As is showed at the figure 1¹, not only the lagoon but also most of the area administered by the Municipality of Lezha has problems related to the flooding lands. At the same time, the objects related to the physical – cultural – heritage of this municipality are endangered, as well as the natural parks.

It is difficult to not deny human involvement and responsibilities in climate change, greenhouse gas emissions, river inert exploitation and waste mismanagement are some of the causes of rising temperatures and coastal erosion. For this and for many other reasons it is important that the awareness of the residents of this municipality but also that of the visitors of the park has to be one of the strongest points for the protection of the ecosystem in the area and in the lagoon of Kune - Vain.

1 Figure 1, Lezha area. In circle the area of the hypothetical intervention and in red the land that according to "Coastal Climate Central" is below 0.5 meters of water.

To achieve the desired result, it is possible to look at the European art – parks, such as one of the first of its kind "The forest of Dean" in England, or two other Italian sites "The Chianti Sculpture Park" and "ArtePollino - Pollino National Park". In them there are art – works that strongly connected with the history of these places which, in turn, acquire a new meaning. (Tiberghien, 1995)

One could work on their example to implement it in the Kune-Vain lagoon as well. These parks, but also many others show us that environmental art interventions increase the number of visitors, visitors with greater awareness towards nature and climate change.

Implementation of art interventions for the rise of climate awareness.

Since the dawn of civilization, mankind had specific areas of territory for particular purposes. Firstly, the places reserved for the worship of divinities followed by the idea of a "park" which has spanned through the centuries. There has been evolution and development of a variety of parks in the modern era, amongst which is the Natural Park of the lagoon of Kune Vain and according to AKZM (National Agency of Protected Areas) the lagoon is the first protected area in Albania with an edict emanated on 07/07/1940. In continuity with the newly edict emanated on 28/04/2010 (VKM nr. 432) the current status of the area is Managed Nature Reserve/ Nature Park, Category IV, IUCN. During the last decades interventions through art or public art in the parks has increase significantly and has create an



Fig.3 / Lines (57° 59' N, 7° 16'W), Pekka Niittyvirta & Timo Aho, Outer Hebrides Scotland UK.

interest and connection to the place.

Art has always looked towards nature, evidence of this are the landscapes well painted by various painters, especially by impressionists. But during the second half of the twentieth century this situation began to change especially with those artistic research which were making their way to the United States, those that came under the guise of Land Art.

These researches or the interventions mentioned above should not be confused with the park sculpture as Germano Celant points out "Environmental intervention differs from the work with the object precisely in that which refers to the purpose of being a work related to a specific context" (Poli, 2003). So Celant clearly shows us that the contextual collocation solicits a sense of reciprocity based on a real mutuality, in which art creates an environmental space, to the same extent that the environment creates art. If we look at works such as Robert Smithson's (Morgan, Holt & Smithson, 1980) "Spiral Jetty" or Walter de Maria's (Krauss, 1979) "The Lighting Field" which are part of Land Art, their link with the territory is evident. And their ability to make people aware of the forces of nature and changes in motion. Tiberghien reports that the creation of the artwork enters ipso facto in the place, with which it establishes a mutual relationship of belonging. (Tiberghien, 1995) In similar way works the intervention of Pekka Niittyvirta and Timo Aho in Outer Hebrides in Scotland. **Lines**

As aforementioned an attempt was made to investigate the ability of art to function as an agent of awareness and as

a turning point around which to reflect on the strength of nature and the future of climate changes. But particularly the last one that was mentioned above and that is on view at the figure 3, the intervention of the two artists "Lines (57° 59' N, 7° 16'W)", an interactive site specific light installation located Outer Hebrides in Scotland, UK. By use of sensors, the installation interacts with the rising tidal changes; activating on high tide. The work provides a visual reference of future sea level rise, everything below this line will be under water.

According to artists note "The installation will explore the catastrophic impact of our relationship with nature and its long term effects. The work provokes a dialogue on how the rising sea levels will affect coastal areas, its inhabitants and land usage in the future". (Niittyvirta & Aho, 2018)

As was mentioned by Isabella Ong & Tan Wen Jun in their essay "Healing And Intimacy In Climate Narratives" (Ong & Wen, 2021), this is particularly relevant in the island archipelago of Uist, in the Outer Hebrides, off the west coast of Scotland, and in particular in the Taigh Chearsabhagh Museum & Arts Center in Lochmaddy, where the installation is located. The center cannot develop on the existing site due to the sea level expected for storm surges. It remember that the Romans used the word "Limes" (Emily Rodriguez, 2020) to indicate a border line, a delimitation line. Something that was indicative of a different place reachable only by crossing the line. At the same way that the two Finish artists use the potentialities of the line.



Fig. 5 / Photo-montage of the proposed intervention in the lagoon of Kune - Vain, Lezhe. 2#

And no longer that a line becomes a visual metaphor of the change in the landscape as we know it, the observer immerses himself in the change becoming aware that such a reality is not a mere hypothesis but a certainty if man does nothing to preserve it.

Conclusions

There are many things to do and artistic projects that can be included in a natural park to activate a common awareness among visitors on climate change and, moreover, in rising water level.

The lagoon in addition to a natural park can host art projects, which should not affect the complex fauna and ecosystem inside the lagoon. The park will take some of the modalities of operation of an art – park, which will serve for the purpose of public awareness against climate change. The art pieces can give an even greater visibility to the lagoon, increasing the number of visitors.

A replica of the installation that Pekka Niittyvirta and Timo Aho (Niittyvirta & Aho, 2018) developed in Outer Hebrides island, due to the same conditions can be installed in the Kune – Vain lagoon, the installation will interact with the rising hypothesis of the increment of water; activating on the predictions of the sea level and rain flood. This intervention will provide a visual reference of future sea level rise.

Furthermore, the idea of using the "line" as a reference to the increased water level, especially for floods, is something that has been present in the Albanian territory. For example, in Shkoder at the Baçalleku Bridge (Ura Baçallëkut) there

is a metal rod acts as a limit alert for the water level of the Drini River. Also in Berat a similar situation where some slabs in the buildings show how far the floods have reached in the past.

The presence of art works or artistic interventions in the park will also increase the number of visitors, increasing the number of visitors to the area administered by the municipality of Lezha.

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