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Conclusions and Recommendations

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Albania has huge potentials in terms of tourism development and the country's hopes of economic growth greatly rely on the development of this sector. The number of visitors has increased at least 10-15 times compared to 15 years ago. However, the number of visitors in the coming 10 years must double, at least, in order to reach its objectives and complement/compete with the experienced neighboring countries in the region.

During the last years, the Albanian government has shown an increased interest in applying intelligent strategies for improving infrastructure and services as well as a new marketing and branding campaign. The existing government has even organized several international planning and design competitions to generate ideas and undertake the necessary improvements to boost tourism and economic development. This aim and effort includes, among others, the region between Vlorë and Sarandë, known also as the Albanian Riviera in South Albania, which is one of the last pieces of the European coast that is not yet touched, not to mention the high historic and landscape values there.

This goal corresponds to the academic and scientific research of Polis University and its partner Ferrara University, Italy and the respective specialized units: Studio Metro_POLIS (urban landscaping design) and Sealine Laboratory (coastal planning and development).

During 2014, this coalition participated in

two international competitions focused in this region, reaching the position of finalists and/or winners. Indeed, this work has not been a mere design and planning exercise, but a pure scientific project in the framework of the joint International PhD between POLIS and UNIFE. The analysis, findings, conclusions and graphical illustrations are summarized in this publication with the purpose to document the research and disseminate it for scholars, professionals, broad public and authorities. We highly appreciate the commitment and passion of PhD researchers and staff. Some of the main findings and recommendations are stated below.

1. Albania has an amazing natural landscape and natural potentials. Some of these places are virgin, undiscovered, and unknown to Europe and the rest of the world. Nowadays, as the country is classified globally as one of the top 10 touristic destinations, a high risk exists that such areas might be developed under the growing pressures for construction and infrastructure. However, time-consuming expensive plans here do not help much. Instead, an intelligent process of planning through programming of strategic interventions might also prove to be more useful and achievable also in terms of the government's political mandate.

2. However, if the country destroys the existing landscape-natural potentials because of aggressive investments, it will lose once and forever the most important asset which constitutes precisely what



*Fig1 / Porto Palermo panoramic view
source / internet*



attracts visitors and tourists. Although contradictory in appearance, it is of absolute priority that any development implemented there must be aware of and aim to protect and promote the existing natural values. This is of enormous strategic importance.

3. Yet, such areas cannot remain totally isolated and ignored as it would be a waste of opportunity. Despite being amazing landscapes, they are also important economic assets for the wellbeing of the local communities and for the country in general. Therefore, it is essential that any intervention there must be strategic and based on the logic of acupuncture. While Access must be ensured through a network that allows easy communication (both motorized/sea and biking/pedestrian) but maximally protects the existing territory and its landscapes. In the meantime, certain strategic developments can happen in the intersections of such networks to energize services and boost sustainable development.

4. It is clear that access must first serve the sea-sand tourism and expand further towards cultural, religious, agricultural and mountain tourism. This can increase the chances of socio-economic impact, improve the absorbing capacities of the coastal areas, and expand the tourism industry towards inland areas. From this perspective, the government must make strategic and hierarchical infrastructural investments and let development happen according to the networking logic and sustainable concepts mentioned above.

5. The area must be seen as a network of 'settlement islands" scattered in the territory, but still forming at least 5 main territorial morphologies, with individual identity and historic traditions of cooperation. These "islands" can also create a critical mass of people and efficient services for tourism. Then, the access network of roads, paths and natural itineraries must make sure to connect 3 levels of settlements: i) the existing villages and towns; ii) the coast and beaches; iii) historical villages, castles and archeological ruins usually up in the mountains or on top of the hills.

6. The islands must be connected with the existing national road, while each "island" must consolidate normal internal communication and access. Within each "island" there must exist a set of public spaces, meeting squares, paved streets or vertical stairs and so on, to encourage a normal and attractive life within the existing settlements. This can relieve coasts and beaches from encroaching and help the revival of historic and existing villages/towns.

7. The intervention in Riviera must also consider a good horizontal public transport that connects all the main living centers. The road must be improved but not transformed into a highway. It must maintain its natural character and not encourage the private use of cars but, instead, have a well-scheduled public transport, accompanied by cable cars or pedestrian pathways connecting the main villages with the coast and/or historic



*Fig2 / panoramic view of Ksamil Bay
source / PhD international workshop students*

village and castles. In addition, most ports and existing beaches must also be connected via sea transportation. Than main cities, Vlora, Himara, Saranda must also be connected with main ports of Corfu and Igoumenitza in order to integrate the area with the neighboring Greece, Italy and Montenegro. The port of Vlora can be more focused on military transportation of goods as well as ferries. Himara could be a port used mainly for visitors in the summer and goods in the winter, while Saranda can be focused on the fishing industry and ferryboats for tourism. A network of yachting ports and boats can boast more life and diversify/prolong the stay of victors.

8. The new blue corridor highway can pass behind the mountains (Vlora river valley) and connect Vlora, Borsh, Saranda for an easy and quick access which would also relieve coastal roads from traffic pressures. Connection from Borsh to Tepelena and Gjirokastra can be further improved to shorten the travelling time for visitors and local communities. A regional airport can also be implemented in Saranda for direct international travelling, perhaps in cooperation with the existing Corfu airport, improving also the sea transport.

9. The mountain regions and inland can serve as an economic support area for backing up and feeding coastal region with all necessary agricultural productions, labor force and services. Cultivation of local and bio products, combined with traditional culinary and local customs-cultures will increase the chances for

the diversification of touristic menus. These steps need to be followed by a capacity-building program to train the local population, and credit schemes to encourage in-line entrepreneurs. Establishing professional schools of agriculture and tourism can help build such capacities. Seasonal cultural, sport and conference events can enrich "vacuum" seasons and keep busy the area all year long. Planning events like these is essential for the success of the development of tourism.