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## Furnishing Gorica Neighborhood with Public Spaces and the Problem of Upgrading the Historic Centers

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The City of Berat, of which Gorica and Mangalem are two of its most notable neighborhoods, forever looking at each other from opposite sides of the Osum River, became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008. Such prestigious affiliation promotes the city's monumental and historical values and makes it the subject of an extensive nomenclature of preservation and restoration, laws, values, and practices. In other words, being UNESCO World Heritage Site puts the city on a map. Such affiliation has triggered an increase in domestic and international tourism, which demands an imaginative upgrade of Berat's urban infrastructures, both on an architectural and urban scale. Most of the vernacular buildings are currently being transformed into hospitality structures, while the streets and public spaces are furnished with additional public functions. These upgrades must respond to the larger flux of people and different kinds of activities and mobilities on the one hand, and enhance the city's historical, vernacular, and monumental values on the other. The project presented here responds strategically to this condition by proposing a network of small urban spaces or mini plazas at key junctures of the existing road network of Gorica quarter as well as a vehicular artery above the urban assembly of the neighborhood. The Gorica quarter is considerably younger than the other two important quarters, Kala and Mangalem. It is between 300-400 hundred years old and has about 200 historic houses of the first and second category, several distinctive buildings constructed between the two World Wars, as well as two reconstructed



Figure 1: The City of Berat.



Figure 2: View towards Gorica neighborhood.

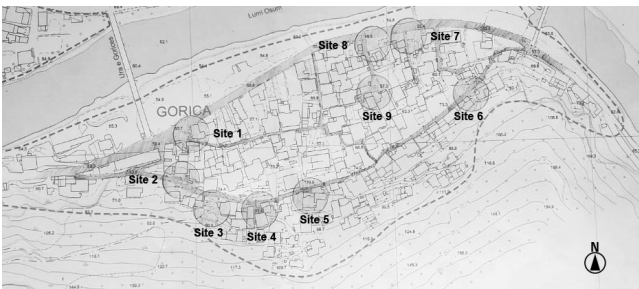


Figure 3: Mini public places in the urban fabric of Gorica quarter.

churches. Unlike the other quarters, Gorica faces north, which makes it rather an unfavorable location, especially in winter season. But what lacks in orientation and direct sun light is compensated by a dramatic urban and topographic configuration. The Gorica quarter is located at the bottom of a hill and is an integral part of the amphitheater-like silhouette of the city of Berat. The best views of the Mangalem quarter, which is the most well-known and photogenic part of the city are offered from Gorica neighborhood. Gorica's urban ensemble has a distinct silhouette, streetscape, and topography. Its main street is of a crescent shape that crosses the Gorica quarter longitudinally, and it is characterized by an architectural diversity and variety of large traditional houses with *çardak* surrounded by gardens. Our proposal aims to improve or emphasize several existing mini public places in the urban fabric of Gorica quarter and create new ones. After we surveyed the Gorica quarter we stra-

tegically selected a few potential places as possible public mini squares with panoramic balconies. We envision these places not only as passages, in the way they have been functioning until now, but also as spaces for living and as an infrastructure for urban events. These places are designed to work *scenographically*, like urban stages that frame urban encounters among people and tourists. These stages have “accidental” or irregular shapes; they are enclosed spaces on three sides and open on the fourth, with a direct view toward the Mangalem quarter. As William H. Wide says, “smaller places, with a reassuring ‘sense of enclosure’ and attractive and busy edges are normally the best.”<sup>1</sup> Local traditional materials and trees and shrubs will be used in their design. Being easy to reach and part of the existing infrastructure, these small squares have the potential to be popular meeting and mingling places.

The other objective of the proposal is to introduce different kinds of *urban furniture*, like in-built seating, fountains, signs, niches, and lighting along the pathways of the quartier. The urban furniture helps the daily activities of the citizens, orient and inform the tourists both spatially and chronologically about the form, history, and culture of the town, and they enhance the Gorica quarter as a *whole* unified unit, by marking its itineraries, its urban texture and spaces.

The Gorica quarter is traversed by two main longitudinal streets, one is the main street and the other a riverside street. We envision a third longitudinal street as another artery above the urban ensemble, a two-way street between the urban ensemble and the green area above which took shape after WWII. This artery was first proposed in the Italian General Plan of 1942 and can be reintroduced as a viable solution in redirecting traffic and in providing the citizens and tourists with vehicular access to the quarter. In this proposal we also propose the *repair* and modification of several, more recent buildings that do not dialogue well with Gorica's urban ensemble as well as the reconstruction of a group buildings burned down by the German army in September of 1944. What was summarized above is the practical ambition of this proposal. The latter relates, however, to a larger theoretical problem,

<sup>2</sup>John Ruskin, *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1849), pp. 162-82, in Jorge Otero-Pailos, *Historic Preservation Theory*, (Sharon, Connecticut: Design Books, 2023), 54

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, “Restoration,” from *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle* (1854-68). English Edition, *On Restoration*, (London, 1875), in *Historic Preservation Theory*, Ibid., 61

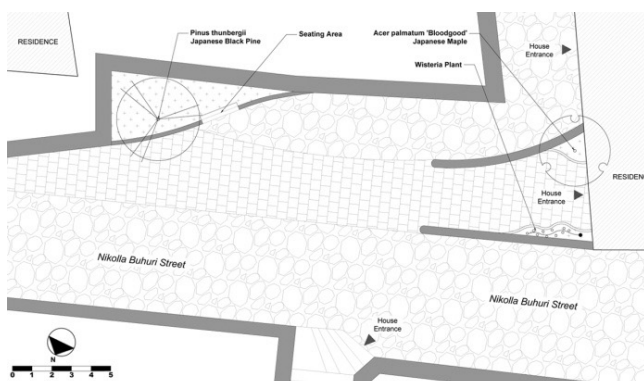


Figure 4: Site 2, Conceptual Proposal





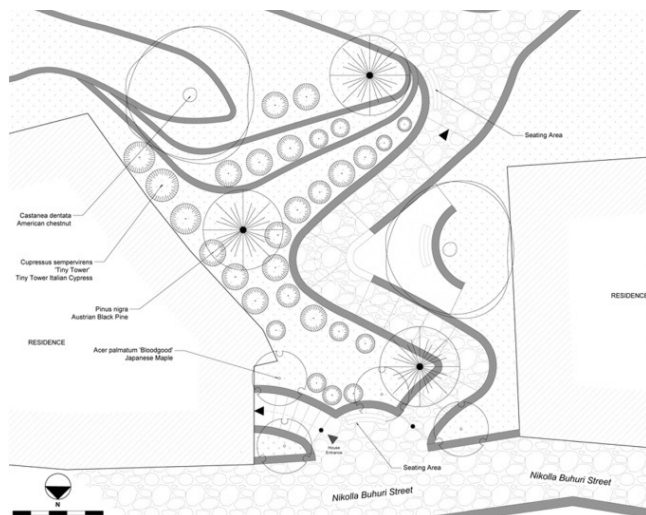


Figure 5: Site 3, Conceptual Proposal

which has to do with the restoration and preservation of the historic centers in modernity. The necessary modern or contemporary upgrade of heritage object or site threatens the preservation and restoration of the very values that makes the city a Heritage Site in the first place. Indeed, the very practice of repair, preservation, and restoration can be seen, in a long run, as a slow “destruction” or violation of the monumental and artistic values of heritage. John Ruskin went so far as to condemn restoration altogether, as a betrayal of the original character of the building. For Ruskin there should not be restoration, but only preservation. Yet, how can the original character be preserved without, however slightly, intervening in the time of author or the post-author, second time, to use some of Cesare Brandi’s terms? Ruskin is intransigent in his position, by stating that it is better to leave the monuments to ruin than restore them: “We have no right whatsoever to touch them. They are not ours.”<sup>22</sup> Yet he also claims that if we “take care

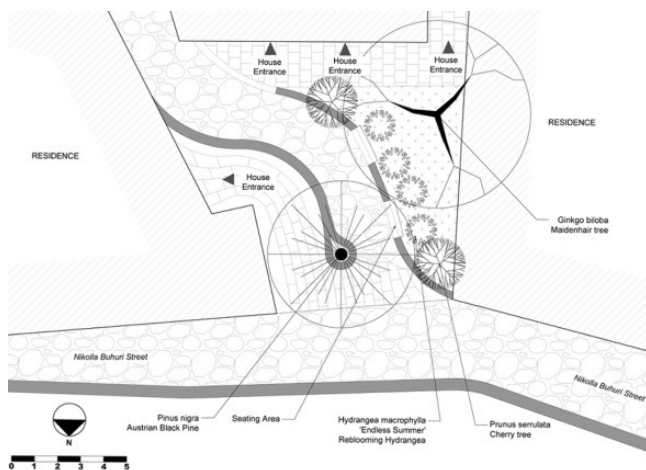


Figure 6: Site 4, Conceptual Proposal



of [our] monuments, we will not need to restore them.”<sup>23</sup> Viollet-le-Duc was the opposite of Ruskin, and claimed that “to restore a building is not to preserve it, to repair it, or rebuild it; it is to reinstate it in a condition of completeness which could never have existed at any given time.”<sup>24</sup> For Viollet-le-Duc there should be a rational approach and an epistemology of restoration that enables the stylistic restoration or completion of the monument.

These were the two great oppositions of the nineteenth century, and as it often happens with radical oppositions, they also meet at some discursive juncture. This juncture is the concept of the whole, namely, that *what must be eventually and absolutely preserved is the whole, as a whole unit, the image of the whole*. Whether this whole should be the memory and character of the monument, or whether it should be the form and style of the monument is where these two positions differ. However, there are other architects, theorists, and restorers that came later, like



<sup>23</sup>Gustavo Giovannoni, “Le Miglioramento dei Nuclei Interni: La Teoria del Diradamento,” in *Vecchie Città ed edilizia nuova*, (Torino: Unione tipografico-editrice torinese, 1931), pp. 248-80, in *Historic Preservation Theory*, trans. Cesare Brignani, 171

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

Camillo Sitte, Camillo Boito and Gustavo Giovannoni, and the following generation of Giulio Carlo Argan, Roberto Pane, Brandi, and Giovanni Carbonara who, despite their differences, occupy a moderate position between Ruskin and Viollet-le-Duc, because they recognize the theoretical and practical complexity of the problem of restoration and preservation in modernity.

At the very heart of their work is how to preserve and restore an historical monument – whether this is a building or an urban landscape – under the modern conditions of continuous change and transformation. Sitte, for example, believed that it is possible to combine the image and experiential character of the town or city with vehicular and infrastructural requirements. Giovannoni also emphasized the combination of the preservation of the formal structure of the existing streets and buildings with the repair and surgery of the existing fabric. Such interventions may consist of the removal or demolition of certain fabric and its replacement of with “little plazas,” which function both aesthetically and urbanistically on the one hand, and as “small lungs” that help the dense existing fabric to “breathe...” What pulls together the approach of these different theorists, is, again, the recognition of the challenge and necessity to maintain a coherent image of the whole, of the unit, both as form and as character.

What we propose here is similar to what Sitte and Giovannoni propose, namely the introduction of small plazas within the structure of the city, yet *without* extensively demolishing parts of the city, but through contouring these plazas within and across the circulatory structure of the city, as well as by providing a peripheral vehicular access to the town. Yet what is the image or the form of this city that we should preserve and restore?

Berat has what we would characterize as a *form without parts*. One could argue that Mangalem, Gorica, and the Castle, among others, are its parts. But they are far from being parts that form a whole, which, in Albertian terms, nothing can be added on or taken away from. There is no formal relationship between, say, Mangalem and Gorica other than the fact that there is a river between them. Together they do not form one whole but rather a com-position of two things: Mangalem + Gorica, being always more or less than a whole. Mangalem could very well exist without Gorica and Gorica without Mangalem. They are not parts but more like *zones* or *patches of figural inten-*

*sity* whose form is not determined by their extensive border or contour. It is only upon entering and walking in these zones that one could start to read its form. Upon entering Gorica, for instance, one is immediately trapped in narrow streets bounded by crooked and tall blank stoned walls, occasionally punched with a door, and ending with flying cantilevered volumes with rows of windows above – a dramatic experience of involution and oscillation between contraction and expansion, between pressure and release. But these are not streets in the sense of a skeleton or a spine organizing the town – they often end abruptly into dead ends or front doors. Or in the sense of a public space vs. private one, there is a minimal interaction between the interior spaces and the streets, other than the one provided by the doors. These streets are more like bowels or intestines that have only one function: to “upload” or “download” people to and from the houses. These bowels often end with multiple steep steps and abrupt platforms that enable access to the front doors of the houses. Sometimes these steps and platforms are accommodated inside the houses and continue in the exterior spaces either as part of the *çardak* or as stairs within interior spaces. These cracks, tunnels, and chutes bring people in the upper floor, toward the light. Berat has only one formal idea: *the transformation of topography into light*. Both Mangalem and Gorica (which never receives any actual sunlight) are kaleidoscopic forms, but not for viewing Osum’s valley or Tomor – though that is a desirable byproduct, for the tourist..., but about receiving light. *The form of Berat, is the form of light.*

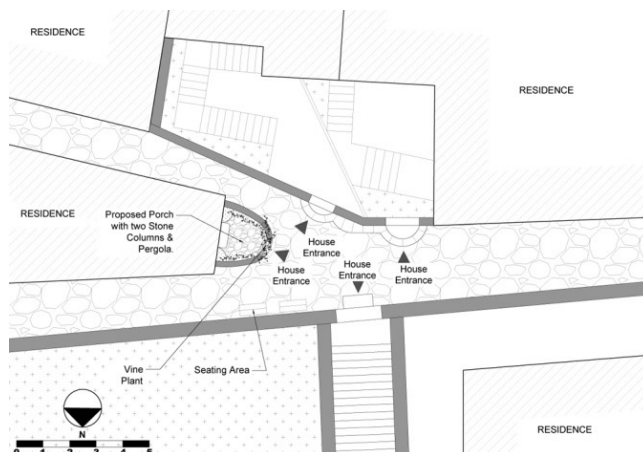


Figure 7: Site 5, Conceptual Proposal