SARANDE | Water, forma terrae and forma urbis

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Abstract: The southern Albanian territory gathers many orographic and territorial conditions and the relationship between water, landforms and urban forms. The city of Saranda, the neighbor small settlements, the Vrina Plain, the hills, the mountains, the sea and the lagoon are realities that coexist in a single stretch of territory that develops along 23 km. This paper aims to illustrate the method of interpretation of the relationship between different landscapes describing the forms of water, the landforms and the urban forms. The analysis phase is followed by a planning part dedicated to the formal definition of the project. It intends to create a settlement pattern, which develops all along the main crest and measures the entire zone, through a path, linking the urban areas, the natural elements and the historical and architectural heritage.

1. DESCRIPTION OF THE TERRITORIAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The work of study and research on the territory of Saranda, city of the southern Albania, addresses the issues of the relation between form of the city and the way in which the city establishes relationship with nature and geographical elements of the territory. Water forms, lakes and sea, and landforms, mountains and valleys represent very important elements. The purpose is to highlight a right grammar for the urbans form, in order to establish a connection between “land” and architecture through the reconstruction of the actual town and its public places.

The first step to reach this aim includes the knowledge and the description of the places we have analyzed, their natural morphology, the way soil has been used, the settlements and the historical context in order to describe and to represent the features of the territory studied. This essential part of the work that has leaded to the production of a detailed cartography, both at territorial and urban level, including historical cartographies very useful for the forma Urbis of the area.
The part of territory considered is defined by two almost parallel crest, linked in the north to the Porto Palermo Castle and in the south to the southern part of the Vrina Plain, on the border with Greece. This space between the two crests represents an important territorial zone for its historical lands, characterized by terraces, an intense production, little residential areas (Vrine, Shën Dëlli and Xarre), and the Butrint lagoon, separated from the sea by the crest which leads to Butrint. This one, whose origins are Greek and then Roman, corresponds to an island situated along the Vivari canal, protected by two castles, one situated in front of it and the second on the sea. The Butrint archeological relevance testifies all the phases of development of this region from the antiquity to the XIX century.
The beauty of the landscape, the morphological complexity of the places and their geographical articulation are features that emphasize the unicity of these places, whose peculiarities is also that the land is inserted between the sea and the lagoon, creating a particular landscape very interesting. In this context develops the National Park of Butrint, with a variety of habitat such as marshes, rushes, woods and Mediterranean scrubs, arable farm and groves, moreover sandy coasts and rocket coasts. Another condition that belongs to this territory concerns the presence of many high ground, selected for the first settlements in the area for their geographical feature. As in Butrint, here it is possible to find archeological relevance and architecture still existing that testify the potentiality of the territory.

The project intends to create a settlement pattern which develops all along the main crest and measures the entire zone, through a path, linking the urban areas, the natural elements and the historical and architectural heritage giving them an additional value. Thanks to these elements, it is possible to consider the area as a whole where important places have been constructed in order to collect all the divergent features.

Moreover, this construction project aims to affirm and distinguish the environmental value through several constructions, reconstructions and amplifications of the three main rural areas namely Saranda, Ksamil and Butrint in order to give them at first individual forms and then try to think the three zones as unique system able to emphasize the landscape as well as the geographical position and the autochthonous agricultural productivity.

2. INTERVENTION STRATEGY

The critical issues and the potentialities of this area have been analyzed, in order to think about an intervention strategy that considers the peculiarities of this territory and the best way to take advantage of them.
Critical issues

Considering the intense anthropic process that has always characterized these places, as well as the naturalistic context in which it develops, the cultural heritage becomes even more significant. Despite the great importance of the heritage, this is often unreachable and above all unprotected. For example, the Ali Pasha Tepelenë’s castle at the entrance of the Vivari canal: this fortress is difficult to reach and is in a state of complete abandonment. The lagoon landscape is an underrated resource; there are no moorings along the coast that could ensure good navigability and could be an incentive for the enjoyment of this area. Other mobility problems are related to the extra-urban road that connects Saranda to the Vrina plain, which is interrupted at Butrint and imposes to cross the Vivari canal using a system which, although its characteristic value, is obsolete and non-sustainable. Moreover, there is no public transport system that could support the seasonal tourist flow.

Potentialities

The landscape and the morphology of the Vivari basin is perfectly integrated with that of the Ionian Greece and is characterized by many bays, crystalline waters and the imposing mountains in the background. The uniqueness of these places lies in the fact that the land interposes between the sea and the lagoon, differentiating and often homologating the territory creating a landscape of particular interest. In this context, Butrint National Park fits in. It includes a wide variety of natural, semi-natural and artificial habitats such as fresh water marshes, reeds, forests and the Mediterranean scrub, terrace-orchards and still coastline with rocky or sandy shores. These habitats are characterized by a wide variety of animals and plants, including endangered species on a global scale. The peculiarities of the area allow the development of tourism characterized by numerous activities such as fishing tourism, hiking, camping or birdwatching. Another distinctive trait of the landscape is the presence of numerous plateaus from which it is possible to observe the various parts of the territory. An example is the hill of Lekursi, which in the past has been an optimum sighting point. Even the hill on which Butrint rises is a place from which is possible to have a complete view of the Vrina plain.

Strategy

In order to build a strategic vision of the sustainable development of the area based on the exploitation of local resources and the elimination of critical issues, different types of interventions in different fields will be applied. In the light of the results of the survey, an intervention strategy has been work out. It aims to the redevelopment of the rural heritage, a peculiarity and a distinctive trait of this territory. Even though this resource is subject to environmentally protective restrictions, it is not valorized and almost inaccessible, isolated from the main centers, exceptionally connected only through a network of rural paths. The aim of this intervention is the upgrading of the sites of interest by building a linear settlement system which develops all along the main crests and measures the entire zone, through a path, linking the urban areas, the natural elements and the historical and architectural heritage giving them an additional value. Thanks to these elements, it is possible to consider the area as a whole where important places have been constructed in order to collect all the divergent features.

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This system consists in a network of slow mobility paths that will allow alternative and eco-sustainable transport such as electric busses and bicycles. The layout will start from the center of Saranda. It will continue along the SH81 to reach Ksamil, that will be an hub. From here, the route divides, guaranteeing the possibility to reach Butrint or to continue along a cycle and pedestrian path that goes through the whole Vrina plain.
This way the problem of traffic congestion of tourists on the road that connects Saranda to the marinas will be reduced. This system will lead to five junctions and recharging stations for the e-busses along the peninsula and two in the plain, near the centers of Vrina and Shën Delli.

3. SARANDA

The city of Saranda is recognizable for its theatre shape, arranged on terraces that adhere to the slope of the basin native to South / East with which begins the stretch of coast between Albania and Corfu. It also marks the beginning of a settlement system and of a natural scale that ends with the town of Butrint.

The city’s first plan dates back to 1925 and takes into account the vocation of the center for tourist-commercial activities. The following urban plans recognize in the city of Saranda a tourist and non-industrial city, expecting a tourist development to the west and a commercial to the east. The center of the city remains unchanged, albeit regulated by norms that govern its settlements density. The city will lose strategic-military value after the conflict.

The 1940 plan envisaged the realization of all the buildings of which the monumental core of the Fascist foundation was composed, as well as the presence of public buildings such as the school, the mosque, the Catholic church and the museum. On the route that connects the harbor with the hill we can find the new market and theater cinema.

In the 90's, planning has left room for spontaneous and intensive urbanization, which was a feature that characterized the economic boom.

The consequence of this spontaneous expansion is the lack of relation between the form of the city and the territory, the relationship existing only in the oldest nucleus. Anyway, an analysis of the types of buildings,
distributed in a homogeneous way depending on the function, has been made: industrial, receptive, and residential (in line and semi-intensive).

The aim of the project is to re-qualify and give a new face to the seaside promenade. The goal is to build new spaces and new centers for culture, leisure and bathing tourism.

In this regard, one of the significant points of the current walk was chosen as a project area, where today there is a dismantled factory. Here has been created an urban square surrounded by new public and private buildings. The measure of the new waterfront is now given by the wooden structures occupying the space in front of the beach, which constitute the new urban front that will be appreciated by the sea.

Lastly, there will be a new reorganized pier designed to accommodate small boats where a timely element will balance the building located in the West.

The heart of the project, the urban square, is therefore a solution to a different fabric litter, as well as solving and connecting the different altimetric dimensions that characterize the area. The green area overlooking the archaeological site of Saranda is re-organized, while the remains of the ancient Synagogue are protected and valorized through the design of a roof with accommodations for its use.
4. **KSAMIL AND VRINA PLAIN**

Moving southward from Saranda, along the ancient route that connected the greek roman city of Saranda to the ancient Butrint site, there is ksamil. This city is a morphological and naturalistic interesting place, located on the narrowest point of the peninsula. It develops at the depression of the ridge that separates the most beautiful part of the Albanian Coast in front of Corfu to the lagoon’s internal waters.

Ksamil is a residential and tourist area recently constructed, a so-called informal common city, not planned, developed according to a low density system of independent buildings that does not identify an own urban structure but that hardly relate to the earth shapes. Blades, cannels, and heights dictate the linear, serial or winding-up structure of the single urban episodes and give them the peculiar features that determine their identities, uniqueness and recognizability.

The aim of the project is giving to Ksamil the center that organizes civic and religious functions, furthermore rearranges and identifies individual residential parts. The volumes define a road-square, transversal and direct connection between the sea and the Vivari lagoon. Exclusively pedestrian, this square is a plate that orderes, concludes and defines the informal growth of the urban fabric of the city. At the same time, the volumes define the pertinence area of the two religious pre-existences, the Orthodox and the Christian churches. These spaces are concluded and identified by high towers that relate to each other in the void creating a space with a strong tension. It also attributes the city an important nodal role within the infrastructure of a slow widespread rural tourism. Due to its unique location, the project becomes an exceptional vehicle exchange point to connect the road infrastructures to the port. Here it is possible to continue going south, using the pedestrian-cycle path or the electric public transport or renting small boats moored in the port of ksamil, that allow you to reach the most picturesque places of the lagoon.

![Project plan of Ksamil, Saranda Principi fondativi e Forma Urbis, 2016](image1)

![View of the New center of Ksamil, Saranda Principi fondativi e Forma Urbis, 2016](image2)
Butrint is at the end of the peninsula. This site has strongly influenced the development of the entire Vrina plain, a land that preserves the natural and anthropic historical signs. The settlement system of this area is strongly conditioned by its geological characteristics. Since the Bronze Age, although it was a marshy area, it has hosted some small proto-urban settlements of which today we find ruins. In the fascist period, this little hospitable area for urban and agricultural functions has been subjected to a great remediation. Today the land is strongly marked by an orthogonal dams system that ease agriculture and breeding and allowed the construction of villages and urban centers. The Vriva plain is characterized by small urban settlements located on the top of each hill that emerges on the lowland where we can find both archeological remains and fields intended for agriculture and livestock. Here the design proposal concludes the territorial requalification. The aim of the project is to integrate the archaeological area with the necessary accommodations to improve the quality of the sites from a functional and architectonic point of view. This process starts from the revitalization of the Belvedere and the reorganization of services at the entrance of the archaeological site, to the hierarchy of the villages located on the plain. These small centers will be integrated with volumes located on the highest point of each hill establishing a conceptual and visual connection with Butrint. These buildings will host a low-density tourism through the typology of the diffuse hotel. The last step is to give back the landscape feature through the reintegration of the cultures of orange trees that recuperates the peculiar characteristic of this territory.