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hyperNatural landscapes

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ALBANIAN RIVIERA

Observatory of Mediterranean Basin

Albanian Riviera

An alternative model of Progress and Development
for a Next Generation Albania

A Project of the
Joint International PhD Program

POLIS University Albania / Ferrara University Italy

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An alternative model of Progress and Development for a Next Generation Albania.

A Project of the Joint International PhD Program
POLIS University, Albania / Ferrara University, Italy

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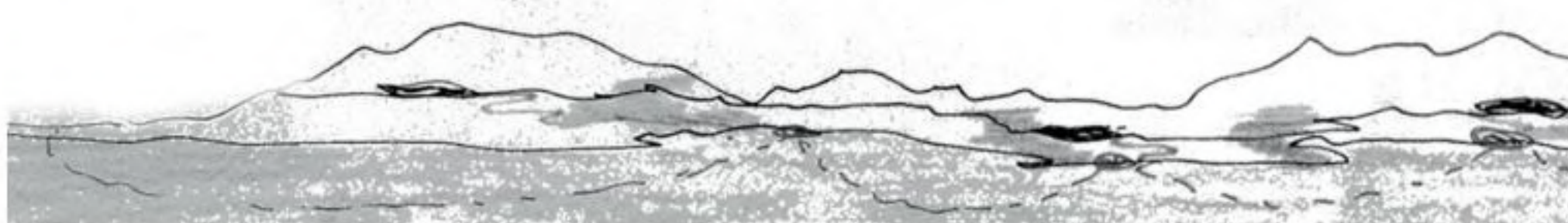
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hyperNatural landscapes

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During the introduction (1.2) we discussed landscape transformations provoked by tourism and the necessary infrastructures to support it. In this contribution, we introduce the topic of 'new landscapes': the concept of what we call *hyperNatural landscapes*.

The need to bestow a name, to find a neologism for these landscapes is a way to explain the attempt to change attitudes while addressing some fundamental issues like great territorial transformations induced either by tourism or by the realization of new infrastructures, defence or reclamation works.

hyperNatural landscapes

In the above-mentioned cases, the landscape suffers the consequences of the undergone transformations, and the 'new landscape' is the outcome of other phenomena which are normally considered as a necessary and inevitable damage, an impediment, a balance alteration to be restored. These interventions wound the landscape, and the most common approach is to find remedies -ex post facto- through mitigation and compensation works.

We would like to go beyond such an attitude, which seems to derive from a sense of guilt towards Nature, in order to face territorial transformation processes (with a special attention to the design phase) with a different and open mind-set. The precondition to such a change of attitude lies in the avoidance of the ideological dimension of the discussion. In fact, when the clash between different positions shifts to an ideological level, it usually detaches from the actual matter.

When speaking about realizing infrastructures, the point of contention is between who wants to safeguard nature and those who would want to destroy it: it never refers to the actual needs, benefits and costs that building an infrastructures implies.

It would be necessary that, once decided to realize an infrastructural work and carry out all the appropriate evaluations, such transformations were conceived as actual improvements: a brand new landscape is about to be designed, and it will change and replace the former one.

transformation as consequence

Let us focus on the construction of infrastructures, the creation of defensive, reclamation and renovation territorial works, and all those works necessary for tourism development. These represent important contemporary issues (with different weights and impacts depending on the country) and an existing condition within the Albanian context. In fact, Albania is expecting a consistent growth of touristic presence during the next few years, and with this consideration in mind the country is getting ready (e.g. Albanian Riviera); it will have to safeguard its territory with defence works, thinking in terms of resilience (e.g. IPA funding for the provinces of Vlora and Fier, after the recent floods); to carry on reclamation and rehabilitation works of large areas, such as disused productive sites, extraction quarries, areas for the deposit of contaminant materials. These are all opportunities to be exploited in order

Fig1 / the New Highway Tirana - Elbasan under construction from KLM 2+850 (distance counting starting from Tirana) up to the Entrance of the Krrabe Tunnel KLM 15+650 / source AKTOR

to develop the "hyperNatural" attitude and re-design the future landscape as something new and original.

against the concept of compensation

If the idea of mitigation, compensation, restoration becomes the dominant one, it means that we move away from the assumption of producing a damage towards the idea that we need to make up to such damage by doing something else. The fact that something is being implemented in order to improve a situation is not envisaged, creating an infrastructure for providing a service and by doing that -together- the landscape could be improved, by taking care of it, changing it, enriching it.

Moreover, if it is assumed that a damage is being done regardless, the measure of its entity threatens to fade into the background.

The point is: when building a functional infrastructural work, a touristic infrastructure, a damage to nature is surely being provoked; so we design and build being persuaded of producing a detriment and it does not matter how we proceed, mitigation and compensation interventions will be realized by doing something else.

against the concept of re-naturalization

The concept of re-naturalizing a place or a landscape comes from the idea of compensation, of restoration. It is not yet very clear what this means in operational terms, if not referring to the prosaic opposition between natural and artificial. If in a certain area of the territory one exaggerates with artificial works, this has to be compensated by re-naturalizing.

Questionable in its essence, the idea of re-naturalizing an environment is also reassuring for the reference to a return to the past, to what was there and to how it was, and it is certainly better than anything we can imagine as a future perspective of evolution.

landscape disclosure, the sea

A further contribution for developing an alternative approach in addressing the issue of landscape and its transformations as a result of infrastructural territorial and touristic processes may come from the disclosure of those landscapes transformed by man, but not yet recognized as anthropic. The sea is one striking example. And the sea for some nations, such as Albania, holds an exceptional importance. In industrialized countries with a high population density along the coasts (as for the Adriatic conurbation in Italy), the sea all along the littoral is actually an urbanized territory, but yet hidden.

Disclosing these kind of landscapes is the prime move towards effectively operating in the direction of responsible, inasmuch unavoidable, change.

We must open up to the idea that even the sea represents a territory to be taken care of, rich in resources and potential. The sea and the seabed are crossed by infrastructures; it is exploited for fishing and fish farming; for oil and gas extraction. Historically, coasts have been lines of defence, and the matter of resilience against climate change can

Fig2 / aerial view of the Elbasan metallurgical complex built in 1974 and called the "Steel of the Party"
source / internet

Fig3 / the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), under construction, will connect with the Trans Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) at the Turkish-Greek border at Kipoi, cross Greece and Albania and the Adriatic Sea, before coming ashore in Southern Italy / source internet

only be effectively faced if we consider such environments, in their process of evolution, as a result of the continuous interaction between humans and nature.

perspective vision

In conclusion, we are facing the opportunity to think prospectively, and not retrospectively. In the Albanian case, such an attitude would seem a natural way of behaving, because a lot has to be done and it represents an opportunity for Albanians to decide, plan, and schedule which direction to take, toward what kind of future, and above all in what manner to proceed.

The alternative is in between tackling the problems and finding the solutions case by case, facing each emergency one at a time, and creating single-purpose infrastructure projects in response to singular needs, or addressing the whole issue of landscape transformation which needs to be adequately equipped, maintained and protected by building a set of works in an integrated and coordinated way.

This latter approach combines different skills in fields as various as landscape architecture, environmental engineering, geology, agronomy, fish farming, and so on.

research by design

Only in the project practice - avoiding ideological issues and misleading terms from the very beginning - such different competences and disciplines can really match and collaborate according to a pragmatic and disenchanted attitude. The very essence of the landscape issue arises from the design process in which real necessities and clear objectives are posed. In this perspective, the proposal for the "Vlora's seascape" has been a further step of research in the attempt to better define the idea of *hyperNatural* landscapes and its implications.