



New Generation Albania

Exploratory mission on spatial urgencies along the Albanian coast.

April 2014

MISSION- REPORT

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Site Visit with head of Komuna Xarrë - Dhimiter Kote and Paul Gerretsen

Purpose of this Report

This report aims to summarize and document a series of visits and interviews that have been conducted during a six-day exploration along the Albanian Coast.

In early April 2014 Martin Sobota (architect, urban planner and principal of Cityförster) and Paul Gerretsen (urban planner and agent of the Deltametropolis Association), both based in Rotterdam have travelled along the Albanian coast under guidance and assistance of Joni Baboci the coordinator of Atelier Albania, an initiative supported by the Dutch Embassy in Tirana.

The trip was enabled by the Dutch Creative Industry Funds within the framework of an Open Call for Exploring Opportunities for Internationalization. It was inspired by a conference that the government of the new Prime Minister Edi Rama organized in August, a month before taking office of which he entitled "Next Generation Albania" where he discussed the spatial and economic agenda of the first governmental term.

Our aim is to both give an insight into the topics and urgencies at hand and help Dutch architects and planners to understand where their expertise might be needed; but also scout projects, potentials and opportunities for Atelier Albania to support Albania's development.

The report starts with a summary of the most important observations and formulates recommendations in the form of a Manifesto for the Coast and an Action Plan. Further detailed information about the trip and the interviews can be found in the latter part of this document.

11 KEY OBSERVATIONS

1. Property Deadlock

The problem of property disputes is omnipresent and renders any attempt of formal planning meaningless. It stems from a temporary law that was passed after the 1990s, Law 7501. This law fragmented and divided properties, while at the same time prevented the individual landowners full rights over their lands. Furthermore, when land was assigned to families it was not drawn on a map, but rather verbally and this brought even less clarity as well as generating conflicts between families claiming the same land.

2. Agriculture as a powerful base

The two communes based on agriculture Xarrë and Divjake surprised many with a rather positive review of their situation. Unemployment is much lower than in urbanized areas, income is decent and even the first cooperatives have started to coordinate again after decades of disagreement; attributed to 50 years of forced cooperation during the communist regime. Plot sizes are larger than expected and basic technologies such as foil tunnels are employed. Where development has seen most progression (Xarrë) a beautiful rural landscape is developing that offers most significant potential tourism. In many regions however, arable land is unused or underused leaving people to struggle to make a living.

3. Dysfunctional Sewerage

Although many cities say to have sewerage systems (e.g. Himara), the beaches are often polluted and sewage is discharged sometimes directly on the beach. Even though the water quality might not even be that bad a standard it appears circumspect and none of us would use it for bathing. A relatively simple system measuring and publishing reliable data could eliminate doubt and also raise general awareness. While at the same time create competition between communities through the aid of guided tours to the cleanest beaches, improving water quality by making it a deciding factor for tourists in the destination of their vacations.

Where systems are installed they are often not (properly) working and seem to be installed without a general urban strategy. An example of this is Vlore, which has a wastewater treatment plant, while relatively new, is barely working while most of the sewage is spilled largely untreated into the beautiful bay.

4. No Garbage Collection

A common public issue is garbage which remains a huge problem, as it directly affects the appeal of the country. The experience its beautiful environment is disrupted; rivers are polluted and carry the refuse to the sea. Although local attempts are made to clean up beaches and cities, the problem needs to be solved at the root. Often garbage is dumped into the rivers and wilderness because a collection system doesn't exist.

5. Urban vs. Natural

Although the main asset of Albania is its impressive and largely untouched nature, some coastal places have been irretrievably lost. Saranda - often nostalgically referred to as the pearl of the Adriatic - has turned into a massive agglomeration of concrete. We believe that this sin has to be accepted and turned into a virtue. Places like Saranda can cater for the young, urban, beach loving tourist and can be turned into a party metropolis with cruising boulevards and urban programming. The challenge will be to extending the season from a 1 month only to a year round destination.

6. Accessibility

In the past 10 years the general accessibility of the Albanian Coast has vastly improved. At the same time this is clearly the main driver of unmonitored construction activity. What is intended as an improvement of the conditions is ultimately a curse because the main asset is shortsightedly destroyed. Successful tour operators like Outdoor Albania base their business

model on providing guidance through uncharted and difficult territory and have contributed to establishing Albania's unique reputation as an insider's destination.

7. Only 2 Business models

The mass construction of mostly empty apartments and restaurant seems based on a few successes of the past as well as financial constraints. Apartments can be used to pay off landowners whereas hotels require serious investment. Positive examples of investments seen in agriculture are based on the vision of a few individuals that managed to convince their peers and score in the long term. It is therefore important to help discover "new heroes". We visited a Camp site in Shkoder that charged about 14€ for a couple with a car for a plot of land. The most expensive hotel we stayed was about 30€.

8. Municipal Revenue

Basically all municipal plans that have been made foresee expansions of the urban territory. The main driver is not the need for housing as there are many empty buildings and plots in the center, but to ease new construction. Building permits are the main source of revenue for municipalities and it can be assumed to some degree has been taken advantage of by some public officials. Other revenue streams such as tourism tax seem to not be applied in a functional way. Most hotel owners say it exists but fail to declare it on receipts and are even unsure of the amount.

9. 1 Month Season

Many municipalities especially when its tourism is 100% on tourism like Saranda and Durres, complain to have a season of only 1 month. Resulting in the above hotel rates. The more rural areas could develop tourism as a side business; the cities urgently need to develop other attractions like conferences, sports events, festivals, fairs etc. to extend the season.

10. National Parks

Although National Parks don't have a good reputation in general, it can be clearly observed that areas defined as such in Google Maps have a much higher quality of space than others. In Divjake for example this is also very important. The concept of National Park could be exploited more, including urban areas providing that they are "unique".

11. Tre Katëshet (Albanian Polikatikia or Dom-ino)

A ubiquitous eye-sore, the informal three story house has to be accepted as an integral part of Albanian culture. The vice has the potential to be turned into a virtue if it can be re-interpreted into an endless collection of autonomous art. With a basic common typology each of these houses is different and leaves the world to be discovered.

MANIFESTO FOR THE COAST:

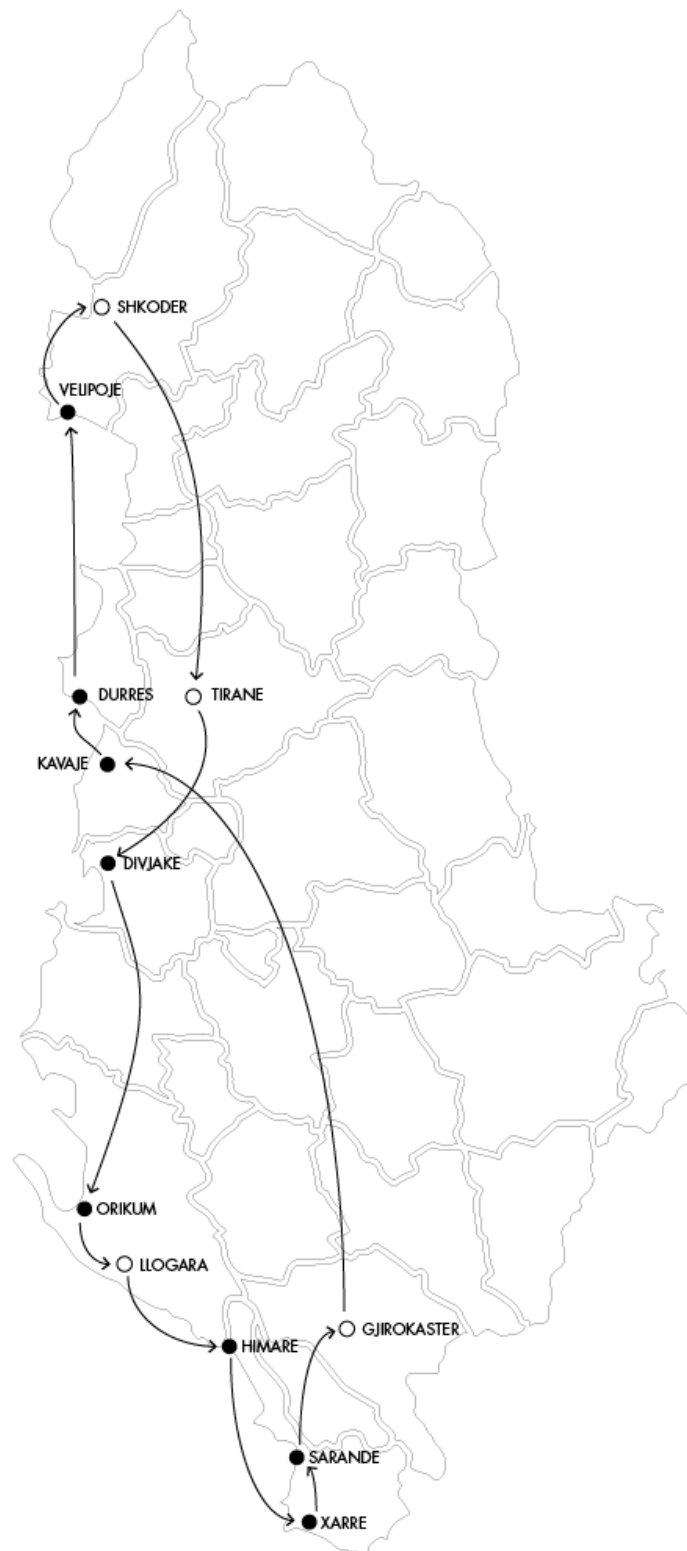
- 1. Moratorium on new construction. The existing stock of buildings is absolutely sufficient. (Alternative: Concrete Tax)**
- 2. Invest in agriculture where possible.**
- 3. Invest in activities for the October-June period.**
- 4. No sewage into the sea.**
- 5. Garbage to landfills.**
- 6. Everything should be “architected” (approach all significant investments in a designerly manner and avoid solving isolated problems)**
- 7. Foster cooperation / bring in middlemen to enable diversification, specialization and value addition of the different economic branches.**
- 8. Publish data on water quality, air pollution etc. to support intervention and make success visible.**
- 9. Publish data on number of tourist, real earnings of different business models (small hotel vs. farm etc.) to de-mystify the predominant models and establish alternatives.**
- 10. Solve the property issue to support formalization of all processes.**

ACTION PLAN

To develop a good coastal plan we recommend taking the following steps in the following order:

- STEP 1 - Draw the map – built/unbuilt – survey before planning.**
- STEP 2 - Include the mayors, engage the stakeholders and inform the population.**
- STEP 3 - Find solutions in the form of pilots & typologies**
 - a.) Pilots: in some situations the basic circumstances are good, so that advanced design solutions have a chance of being successful. These can serve as best practice for other places.**
 - b.) Typologies: basic solutions that could be used in different communities. Have a set of typologies; even more than one can be used for one community.**
- STEP 4 - Organize business cases. Help with market studies and the math. Educate people and show good examples (witnesses).**
- STEP 5 - Help local municipalities to organize and program funding.**

DOCUMENTATION TRIP & INTERVIEWS





From left to right: Efstathios Andreou, Ambassador Martin De la Beij, Martin Sobota, Paul Gerretsen

Dutch Embassy

Ambassador Martin De la Beij and Efstathios Andreou

Albania is hoping for candidate status in June after it failed to receive the status in December, and four prior tries. The new government seems to be making good progress but it depends on the member countries to decide in the membership council. Although candidate status is an important step and is expected to raise goodwill and trust in the business sector, major investments from the EU will only take place in the next step, which are accession talks.

Update: Since July 2014 Albania is now an accession candidate for the EU.

Based on good relations, especially between the Berlage Institute and some Dutch architects & planners and Prime Minister Rama, the Dutch embassy is funding Atelier Albania with the main aim to show good practice in the field of infrastructure development and help establish fair procedures and legal conditions. NL has stopped development funding for Albania in 2010. Only single programs such as ORIO (Ontwikkelings Relevante Infrastructuur Ontwikkeling.) are still in place but might also be terminated soon. Atelier Albania is funded through the MATRA program, which focuses on good governance. Large parties active in Albania are for example Shell, Damen Shipyards and ArkeFly; other large companies such as Royal Haskoning hesitate to enter the market unless funding comes from international donors, particularly the World Bank. Instruments such as export credit guarantees (such as HERMES in Germany) do not exist anymore (tbc). The embassy has excellent relations with Polis University that make use of Nuffic Scholarships and have in turn very good relations with IHS in Rotterdam.



Paul Gerretsen, Mayor Fredi Kokoneshi, Joni Baboci, Martin Sobota

Divjake

Mayor Fredi Kokoneshi & Urban Planner Llazar Vodo

Description

Divjake is a linear town with small-scale agriculture that intensifies in some places, comparable to a Dutch "Lint" development. It is located in a National Park surrounding a Lagoon and surprises with an intensive use of small foil-greenhouses. To the pride of the mayor, the town is built up relatively low with 1-3 stories

with a maximum of 4. Only three buildings stand out and are considered as a problem although many buildings visually surround the lagoon. The mayor describes the town as being made up of hardworking residents that brought in Dutch agricultural technology on its own initiative and increased their harvests to three per year. Parcelling is still relatively small scale and cooperatives are seen critical.

To reach the beach a path passes through a beautiful pine-forest that contains a holiday resort from communist times. It is slightly chaotic but generally in acceptable state and shape. From the beach it can hardly be seen.

The beach itself is in dramatic transformation. It moves OUTWARD 30-40m/year due to sedimentation from the two river deltas on the two sides of the coastline as well as Adriatic currents. This leaves a vast plain with pop-up restaurants and bars close to the shore.



Divjake, Waterfront and small-scale agriculture

Push/Pull

The municipality is lacking a touristic strategy and urban development plan. Earnings have often been invested in extensions to private houses that they would now like to rent to tourists. When

elected in 2011 the Mayor cancelled the existing plan because it was too dense and copy-pasted typologies from Durres/Golem. The two rivers framing the area are heavily polluted but do not form a flood threat. So far the communist water system still works and there have been no natural disasters.

Larger Whole

From the coastal strategy they expect a framework that will allow them to develop a comprehensive strategy, encompassing also the surrounding 9 villages and bringing the agriculture and natural reserve together in a touristic strategy.



Divjake Lagoon

Potentials/ Follow-Up

There is currently no concept for this vast plain or for the touristic area. Directions could be either to think of a coastal management pumping sand back and forth or to plant and develop the plain using it temporarily for festivals or sports events. There is a lot of agriculture potential in the area. The director of urbanism in the area mentioned that most people in Divjake do not have any vested interests in the few hotels that dot the coastline. The residents are mostly focused on agriculture and services.



Divjake sedimenting beach with Holiday Resort between the forest



Paul Gerretsen in conversation with Mayor Gezim Capaj at his Hotel Alpine

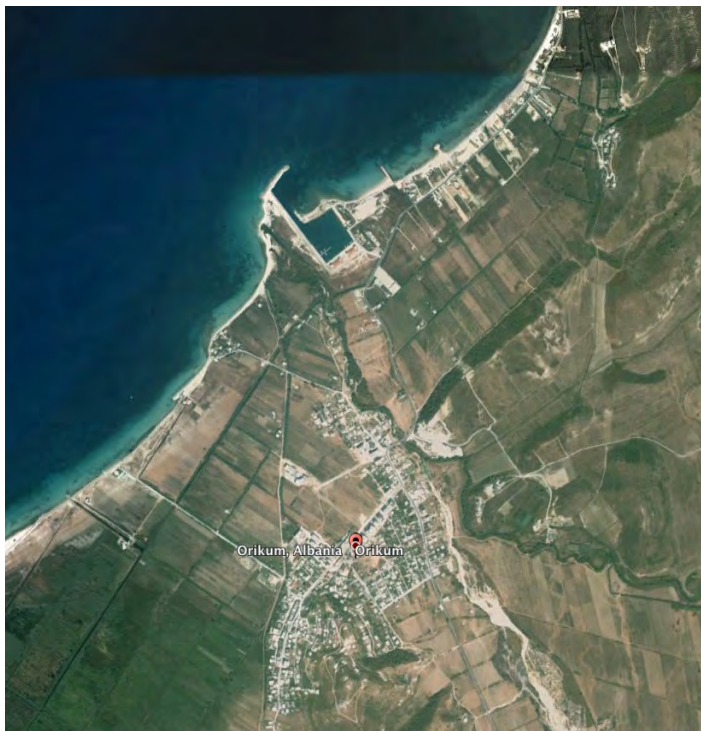
Orikum

Mayor Gezim Capaj

Description

Orikum is a small city of 13.000 inhabitants, in the relatively big municipality of 331 km² bordering on the bay of Vlorë, but also containing a mountainous area that attracts tourists with some hotels and resorts in the village of Llogora. The Mayor owns one of the hotels in that village. He tells us that there is an approved urban plan of 2009 for the extension of the city of Orikum and an unapproved plan for the city itself.

The plan for the extension is different in that it keeps down the number of stories to 3 or 4 and it limits foot print of the building to 20% of the plot, in addition a developer needs to consider an area around his development 5x the size of the plot. Orikum is itself a quite densely build city with a lot of buildings up to 8 stories. Towards the bay there is suddenly a strong division with a completely unbuilt area, only very close to the water are some small buildings that are directed towards tourism appear. Asked for the reason for this sudden change, there is no clear answer. The topography of Orikum makes that it has numerous micro-ecosystems between the sea and the high mountainous areas. It has therefore also a rich biodiversity and a variety of landscapes. There are some paths, but, apart from the trail to Caesars camping ground, they are not clearly marked. The Mayor, who is in his first mandate, explains that the three main economic drivers of the area are: tourism, building industry and agriculture, after that comes small businesses. The people of the community are law-abiding, 94% pays his or hers energy bills – a very uncommon percentage for the average administrative division.



Push/Pull

The mayor envisions tourism on a large scale being possible close to the sea and on the peninsula of Karaburun. Even though the plan permits only limited built mass, there is enough space for a big expansion. He sees possibilities for new resorts with a much higher quality and service than what is currently available.

It is hard to say what external forces are at play in the community the mayor talks of bad developers, but it is not really clear what he means by that. He does say that financing is a big problem in getting things done. There is also a project going on with the WWF.



Path towards "Cesar's Camp" with creek, maintained by sheep

Larger Whole

There is a need for better-trained staff: "There is no culture of service", the mayor complains. Also there is a need for good developers who can manage to make the quality resorts he sees the potential for. In that sense there is also a need for a good detailed plan. In terms of infrastructure a black water treatment plant is being built right now, the roads are not really a problem, but an airport might be beneficial, even though he has not really thought about that. Furthermore rubbish poses a real problem, as there is currently no real solution for that. Land fragmentation is another one of the problems that need to be tackled soon.

Potentials/Follow Up

It is clear that the municipality has great potential because of its natural setting. The views are stunning, the bay is beautiful and the variety of the landscape is spectacular. Accessibility on a larger scale is an issue. International connections are very limited and there is only one road in good condition. The marina is newly built but

relatively small and there is currently very little in the immediate surroundings of it. There seems to be great potential in making the landscape accessible for outdoor activities, with very little investment. For example a new tourist market could be opened up.

Quote of the day: *Live life a lot better with a bit less*



Cesar's Camp, a mountain plateaus 15 minutes walk from Llogora



Conversation with Director of Urbanism Mr. Stratoberdha

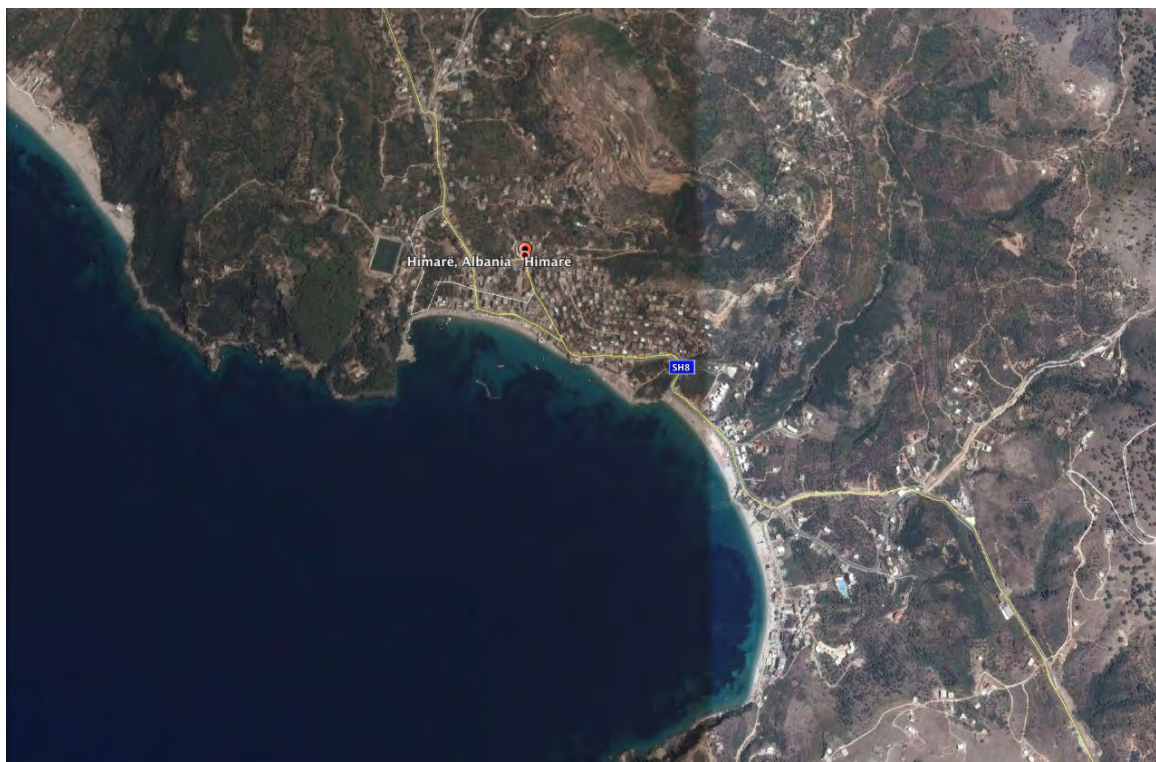
Himara

[Director of Urbanism Mr. Stratoberdha](#)

General Description

Himara is a small city in the southern Coast of Albania. It is the biggest city between Vlore and Saranda with a population of 15.000 inhabitants. The municipality includes 7 villages as well as the city of Himara. The biggest problem in the development of the city is the fragmentation of property, a problem found throughout the coast. The land fragmentation and legalization problem is the biggest problem that Mr. Stratoberdha recognizes in

Himara. Another problem they encounter is the short tourist season. According to the director the full season lasts for only two months, yet another is the high cost of developing partial local plans. The municipality of Himara would need at least 70 of these plans according to the director, and each of them would cost at least 50.000 Euros.



Bay of Himara in the south of Albania

Push/Pull

The municipality has approved a general plan. This plan envisions an expansion towards areas, which are undeveloped today. The aim is the development of luxury resorts, second apartments as well as villas by the beach. The municipality believes that by giving new construction permits they will fill the coffers of the municipality as well as generate income by creating jobs in construction as well as more commercial activities. The plan uses a coefficient of 1.2 built area/total area being developed. Something important for the municipality is an embellishment effort mainly directed at the facades near the waterfront promenade.

The Director claims that there is a lot of interest from foreign investors wanting to develop resorts and other touristic developments however they immediately leave when they hear about the big property fragmentation problems.

Integrated Plan

From the integrated plan they expect the development of a better road leading to Himara, better infrastructure and an integrated strategy for black water management including a treatment center.

Potentials

There is potential in Himara to develop tourism towards the beach as well as the mountain. Since it has villages on mountain and sea, these potentials should be considered. Mr. Stratoberdha mentions the possibility of agro tourism, organized guides for the multiple cultural spots on the municipality as well as the potential of expanding partly towards agriculture through olive trees as well as other citrus trees.



View of Himara Waterfront. The planners are planning to reduce the 5 floor-building to two and unify the facades with historical pastiche.



Martin Sobota, Dhimiter Kote and Paul Gerretsen in front of clementine orchards

Komuna Xarrë

Chairman Dhimiter Kote

Description

We met the chairman of the commune in a small hotel/restaurant (10 rooms focused on agricultural traders) on the crossroad between three of the five villages the commune encompasses. In all a small community of 7.500 inhabitants (the two biggest together 5.000 inh.) of an area of in total 300.000 ha. The Komuna lies for the largest part in the Butrint National Park, right next to the famous Butrint

Archeological site, on the border of Greece. The economy is prosperous and based largely on agriculture, particularly Mandarins, Grapes, other agriculture, some cattle stock and some fishing in the lagoon and the two artificial lakes. There is no unemployment and in certain season's people come to the area to work in the fields. Most local infrastructures have been solved during the four mandates of the mayor includes schools, running water, etc. but black water treatment still needs to be solved. Most buildings are from the first period of growth around 1995.



Komuna Xarrë, Butrint National Park

Push/Pull

The chairman has throughout the year's has restricted construction in the area quite severely. He is proud of what he has achieved, but also realizes that it is a strategy for the long term, and it is not clear whether or not this is the right direction in term of economic sustainability. "I will either go in history as the smartest man, or the dumbest, it remains to be seen." The chairman wants to concentrate on expanding the agricultural production from (for

example) the current 10.000tons Mandarins to 30.000tons (the mayor is a farmer himself). He has already had visits from a lot of ambassadors, but not from the one he is waiting for the most, the Dutch ambassador. He seeks to make links with the Netherlands to get technology and knowledge to raise the agricultural production in the area. With investments made possible by the World Bank there is already a sophisticated irrigation system in place.

In the community itself most pressure for building is from the growth of the villages themselves. There is some natural demographic growth and some re-migration. There is also limited pressure from outside, but because of the lack of a seafront, there is no real pressure from tourism. There are some ideas for hotels close to the archeological sites, but none are approved or ongoing.

Larger Whole

The chairman sees he's in a different position than most of the municipalities along the coast. He would like to articulate that position and show in the structure plan how Xarrë is a unique and different place.



Old Wire-Ferry between Butrint National Park and the Komuna of Xarrë

Potentials/Follow Up

Opportunities: It is clear that the solid agricultural base creates a lot of opportunities for the area. On the one hand, agriculture can be expanded, especially if the farmers get over their aversion of cooperation. "The time calls for cooperation." With communal investments small processing plants, storage facilities, further irrigation systems etc. could be organized. On the other hand there is a definite potential for creating a small scale but very special destination for tourism. The vicinity of the larger towns, the archaeological sites and the wonderful agricultural products could be the basis for a real example of agro-tourism. The chairman has already quite explicit ideas for a camping site with some small wooden chalets on the shore of one of the artificial lakes (Liqeni I Bufit) – and maybe a golf course (!). He says he needs thinkers to come up with the right kind of development. There is already a small budget reserved (saved over the years) for a project that could set an example of how tourism could be integrated with the agricultural nature of the area.

Quote of the day: *Instead of consuming wealth, Albanians should learn to invest in things that produce wealth.*

Corruption used to be 1 kg of citrons



National Coastal Agency

Director Mr. Auron Tare

General Description

On the 3rd of April we met with Mr. Auron Tare, the director of the newly created National Coastal Agency. The discussion revolved about general topics regarding the past and present development of the coast. Mr. Tare believes that there is a lot of work to be done in order to fully develop the coast. However he does not believe that the methodology should include a strategic coastal plan. Mr. Tare believes that such plans have been done again and again without any real results. Rather than strategic plans that remain on paper, Tare supports direct actions on the terrain. We met him in Butrint where he was donating to local families 10.000 olive trees which were found abandoned in a government reserve. These trees according to him would provide each family an extra 3000 Euros yearly after they would start producing olives after three years.

Mr. Tare has had a long experience in the Commune of Xarrë, where he was for 8 years the director of the national park of Butrint. During his tenure as director the national park enjoyed resurgence in its quality of tourism. It still is one of the prime historical and cultural spots in Albania, bringing a lot of daily tourism mainly from Greece through the city of Saranda. Furthermore Mr. Tare claims to be one of the first individuals to help the villagers of Xarrë develop a currently very successful agricultural economy. Nevertheless Mr. Tare does not believe that agriculture has enough potential to serve as a driving economic force.



Joni Baboci, Genti Koloj and Martin Sobota

Saranda

Director of Urbanism Genti Koloj

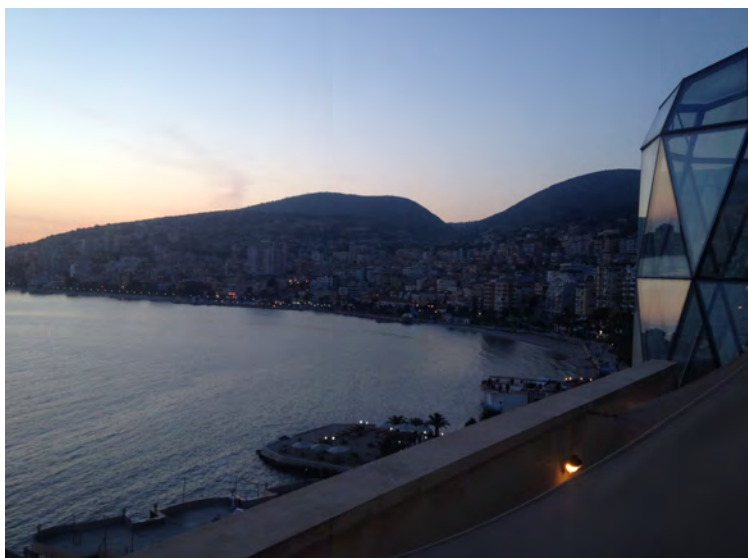
General Description

Saranda is a relatively large, extremely developed city. The municipality administrates an area of 8 square kilometers. Between 2003-2010 more than 70% of the yearly income of the municipality came from building permits. However for the last 2,5 years no building permits have been given. Currently the income of the municipality is approximately 3 Million Euros. The director stated that they are currently being paid only 50% of their full salary

because of the lack of funds. Their two main forms of income are the tourism tax and the infrastructure tax (which is given when new building permits are issued.) Their tourism tax is 100 leke/day/bed however because the season is very short - only two months - the funding is not enough to cover the expenses or any possible small investment. Basically tourists only come for 1 day trips to the archeological sites of Butrint and Finiq through ferries mostly from Greece and leave within the day. The economy is mostly based on tourism and the building industry - this means that the residents have pretty much nothing to do for 10 months at a time.



Entering the city of Saranda

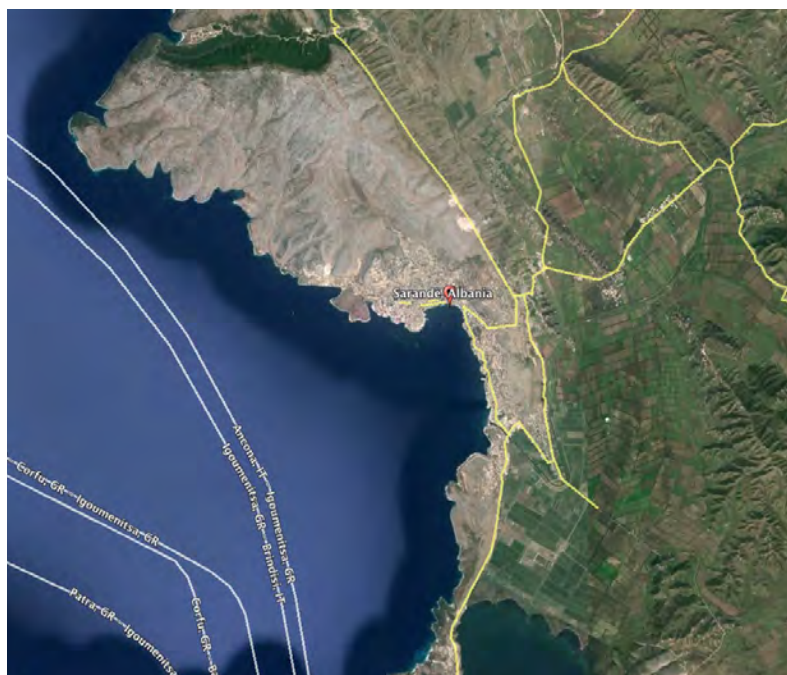


Night View of Saranda & Bay 1

Push/Pull

Their vision is to develop mass tourism daily in the city of Saranda and elitist luxury tourism outside the urban area of the city. The current plan they have mostly calls for reorganization and requalification rather than for new buildings. They have a big expectation from the territorial reform, and believe they might get the communes up to Xarrë and Ksamil in their administration.

There is an organization of hotel owners however it mostly works as a price fixing monopoly. Most hotels are part of this organization - especially the more expensive ones.



Bay of Saranda

Integrated Plan

Their expectation of the central government is very high. They believe that the central government should have a vision about what to do with the coast and especially Saranda. Furthermore they believe the central government should finance and heavily invest in the city. They believe that up until now the central government has abandoned the city of Saranda. If some standards do not come from above, they have no possibility of applying them to the city itself. Since the community is small they need an external authority to direct change.

Potentials

While black water is not a problem as it has been solved two years ago, the organized sewage system might have energy generating potentials. Saranda should aim for diversification in the economy. The small port and its location close to Corfu and Greece can definitely help in this.



Main Square of Kavaja with Auto scooter, Partisan Monument and Cultural Center

Kavaja

[Major Elvis Rroshi and friend \(of AR.DA. Construzioni\)](#)

Description

Kavaja is a linear city located within the Tirana Region between the main coastal highway and its main street. The Mayor is in his first term and has won the elections because “he is a successful business man”. He has initiated a project for a remodeling of the city center and hired Italian architects for it. The city lives mainly from remittances and has

some manufacturing industry for textile and shoes. Driving through the city shows a very pleasant focus on the dense main road with all activities linked to it. The center is formed around a square with a mosque, a cultural center and a small park. Further into the urban fabric, the structures become open very quickly. An industrial market hall is just being completed that reinforced the impression of an industrial city. The city has a beautiful modernist stadium.

Push/Pull

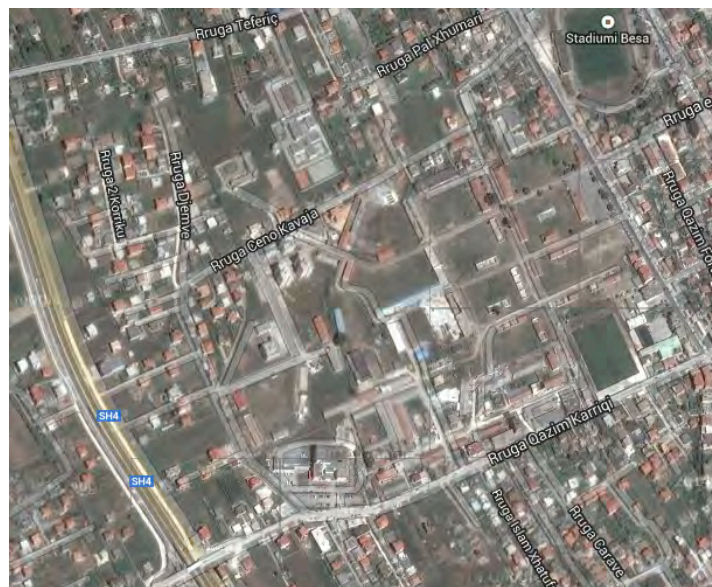
The vision of the mayor focuses mainly on the coastal strip that would be added to the Kavaja municipality when the territorial reform (joining of smaller municipalities) will be completed. He is planning to develop tourism resorts that he expects to employ up to 100 people each. It is a modest opportunity to lower the very high unemployment of the 48.000 inhabitants of Kavaja. Furthermore there is a large former military area, planned to be transformed into social housing, apparently through private development.

Larger Whole

The mayor has little vision for Kavaja on a larger scale, except for the new territories to be won through the territorial reform. These areas however are largely untouched pine-forests (woodlands) with beaches and represent a very valuable asset, especially considering the uncontrolled development in Durres/Golem.

Potentials/ Follow-Up

Kavaja would be an ideal for an example for an industrial hub of the Tirana-Durres region. It is located close to the port of Durres, along a highway and already has an industrial base, because developing a few resorts will not bring the desired employment.



Former Military Area foreseen for Social Housing



Adhurim Quehajaj, Mayor Vangjush Dako, Joni Baboci and Martin Sobota discussing the Land-use Plan of Durrës

Durrës

Mayor Vangjush Dako & Director Urbanism Adhurim Quehajaj

Description

Durrës is the second city of Albania and located about 40km away from Tirana on the coast. It is built around Albania's main Port and has seen dramatic developments in the past 20 years. The entire coastline, especially the flat beaches towards the south have been built with masses of 6-9 floor buildings leaving hardly any beach. The city center has recently been upgraded in some parts, based on a winning competition entry by an Italian office. The design is only partially implemented. Parts of the waterfront have been developed but the quality is dramatically poor. Also recently the sewerage system of the city has been upgraded/ installed, although it is reported to not work properly due to management problems. The city collects its garbage to an improvised area within the northern plain.

The city has a land use plan that is roughly being followed. A major item that is foreseen is a second industrial/port area in the north.

Push/Pull

A regulatory plan, supported by the World Bank has been developed and approved but all construction is currently stopped, due to the moratorium. This has helped also to stop illegal construction but has hindered industrial development. The demand for development is still strong but there is little demand for development in tourism like hotels because of the high land

value, approx. 30% of the Real Estate Value and the need to actually purchase the land. The land use plans do foresee hotels etc.

Official and approved plans developed by HYDEA Studio of Italy foresee the establishment of a secondary industrial area/port at the northern end of the Durrës plain, after the protected mountain range. There are also plans to develop more small-scale “elite” resorts on the foot of the mountain range by SINES Group, within the protected area. These resorts usually consist of a main high building and some lower rise building with organic shapes.

The city is also considering to artificially extend the beach by approx. 50m. In the course of this extension also an artificial peninsula is foreseen. The financing appears to be thought through property sales of the new land. The status of these plans is unclear.

Larger Whole

The theme of “Durana” (the reading of Tirana & Durrës as one Metropolis) is an accepted reality but collaboration doesn’t happen at a significant scale. This is reflected for example in the fact that Tirana has just decided to move its train-station out of the city center. This further weakens the existing connection that anyway has strong competition by Pullman busses that run on a much higher frequency.



Bay of Durrës

Potentials/ Follow-Up

The mayor was in touch with Francine Houben during the Next Generation Albania Conference and offered her to design part of the waterfront. Her financial demands however were too high. The mayor invited us back to talk about a possible involvement.

The city has a serious parking problem. Already on a normal weekday-off season it is almost impossible to park a car. The train station is not only connected to Tirana but also to the rest of the coast. This has great potential to distribute tourists along the coast. Durrës could become a hub. The main potential lies in the current position of the

harbor, at the center of the city, very accessible and facing south. It is advisable however to first establish a firm urban structure and regulations before developing this “joker” for a second (and last) chance. It is important to consider an alternative location in any urban development plan.



Durres waterfront with newest developments on pier and recently installed public furniture

Komuna Velipojë

Chairman Pashko Ujka

Description

Velipojë is on the most Northern point of Albania, bordering Montenegro with the river Buna as its border. There is not a direct connection with the neighboring country, but there are distant plans for a bridge or ferry. The commune lies in the delta of the river Buna, with mainly flat land, bordered in the east by a coastal mountain range that closes in on the sea on the southeastern side. Along the sea there is a very long sandy (supposedly curing, because of the high levels of Iodium) beach facing south (all in all a beach of about 15km). There is a lagoon half way down the beach that separates the busier area around the village of Velipojë and a quieter stretch towards the neighboring municipality of Lezhe, with the port town of Shengjin. The population of almost 10.000 inhabitants, grows to a 20-fold on a regular summers day. Visitors are mainly from Albania, particularly the city of Shkoder. International tourists are mainly from Kosovo and some from Russia.

We meet the chairman of the commune in the one beach bar that seems to be open. The area around the bar is well maintained (even the beach is being cleaned at the moment we arrive – it almost seems as though it is in honor of our visit), in sharp contrast to the rest of the village. A long new pedestrian boulevard separates the built up area from the beach, and stops cars from entering onto the beach.



Paul Gerretsen, Pashko Ujka and Martin Sobota in front of Velipojë Beach Promenade

Push/Pull

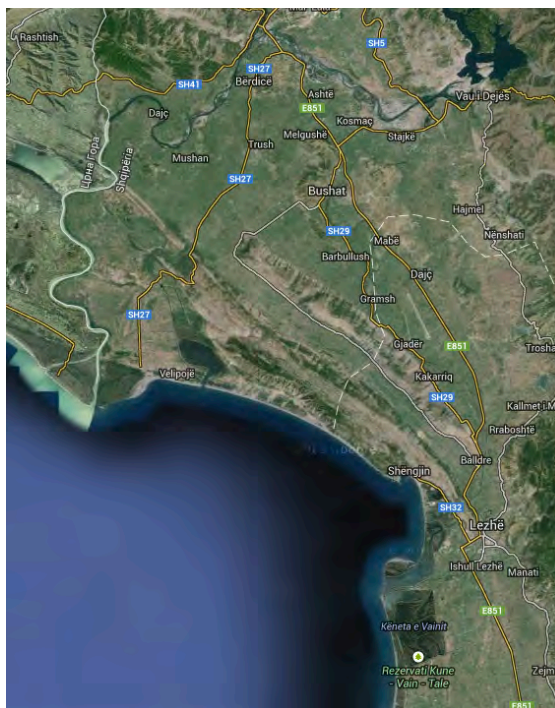
The village seems to wildly expand with apartment buildings and some hotels, the area has little structure and some streets are wide and well paved while others are full of holes completely unpaved. A sewage system paid for by European money (approx. 16mEUR) has been installed recently filtering black water and then releasing it to the river rather than the sea directly.

Larger Whole

There are plans for a sweet water harbor in the mouth of the river Buna. The river is not navigable up to the Lake Scutari, but could be made so quite easily as said by the chairman of the commune. There is also a master plan made by an Italian company.

Potentials/ Follow-Up

Velipojë seems well aware of its potential tourism and through the sheer size of its beach has the profile to become a mass tourist destination. Shkoder as an urban center with rich cultural heritage can offer a very good complimentary program and is already now one of the major tourist destinations of the country. The proximity to Montenegro could also help to reflect upon the model of tourism to develop.



Bay of Shëngjin & Velipojë with Shkoder in the North

From a planning perspective the situation is dramatic. Velipojë is the only place we visited that has recently seen major investments in its infrastructure. The results are disappointing and are a clear call for integrated and coordinated planning. The development potential of Velipojë should be able to mobilize sufficient resources to be used as case study and develop planning methods and stakeholder integration concepts.



Beachfront section with worker cleaning the beach. Small park with pavilions, further in the back there is a major hotel complex in natural reserve

This report has been prepared in collaboration of CITYFÖRSTER, Paul Gerretsen and Joni Baboci. If you have any questions or remarks, please do not hesitate to contact us:

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