

Limita(c)tion – How to use the limit as a concept tool of sustainable development in Shkodra

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Abstract

Starting to the considerations made by the famous economist Serge Latouche about the meaning of limit, the article takes in exam the southwest part of the town of Shkodra, in particular the part which is located along the lower shore of the homonymous lake, in order to create some own reflections around the concept of this important word. The idea is to understand the meaning of limit and its boundary and then produce many possibilities to discover and use them, to drag a border between what are the limitations and what are the possibilities of the selected area. For the French economist there are some different types of limit which are economical, geographical, political, cultural, ecological, moral and of knowledge and then we have to know what are those better for our situations and use them to improve the whole system that manages the urban development.

Recently, Albania is experiencing a strong economic growth which is allowing a great overall development rather quickly. This factor allows the country to gain importance and competitiveness outside the national borders, but in the other side, it has to tackle the uncontrolled and confused urban growth which is producing informal urbanization, many infrastructure problems within the cities and incognizance of the environment preservation, in particular of the landscape. Indeed, the potential of the examined area is geographically limited by the disconnection from the main center of Shkodra owing to the weak infrastructure of the territory, while his landscape is exposed to the urban informality derived by the political limits that are not strong enough to really control the edification in that area.

The aim is to raise the border of the economic possibilities of the fragment, stimulating one of the most profitable activities of the zone, as the tourism, through the creation of new infrastructure connections and facilities around the villages. This chance can initialize the communication between the fragment and the center to facilitate the exchange flow among visitor and residents. To increase the value of the fragment, it's also necessary rethink the mobility and its experience starting both from the ecological limits of the local ecosystem and from the laws of the general local plan, in order to preserve and promote a new sustainable development with a low impact multimodal mobility.

Introduction

Nowadays Albania enjoys a stable macroeconomic situation, maintained in positive by various sectors such as energy, construction, mining, manufacturing, agriculture, tourism and building. However, this latter category, in the last decade, is the cause of fast development

of the informal settlement in many Albanian areas. In particular, Shkodra with its suburbs is one of the cities which is suffering more the informal buildings due to the internal migrations in north of Albania in the transition period (Berxholi, 2000). Indeed, after Communist period, the political limits have fallen, which



Fig1 / The southwestern area of Shirokë and Zogaj source / Municipality of Shkodra

have allowed the rise of a chaotic and disorganized urban development that has led the historic centre to expand itself in all its directions, taking in part the areas close to the lake of Shkodra (Dibra, Kopliku, and Krymbi, 2015).

At this time of great growth and expansion, for the most part uncontrolled, the need but also the will of Albania is to re-qualify its territories by reconnecting urban pattern through new infrastructures. The possibility to improve the regulatory plan of the city would become an essential tool for urban and territorial management. In this case, the workshop of the XXXII PhD course held at POLIS University in Tirana has tried to tackle these issues and make concrete solutions to the problems encountered. In particular, this reading tries to put some reflections on the west side of Shkodra around the towns of Zogaj and Shirokë.

The methodology used is dedicated to an initial part of the analysis of the issues, partially faced up during the workshop and subsequently deepened in this article, using the concept of limit as a design tool. The limits are treated under four main themes related to the territory. They led to a phase of a list of possible interventions that could redefine the Shkodra's urban plan. In this case, it starts from the promotion of tourism in order to find different solutions on different plans both for landscaping, urbanism, strategic and architectural planning. The role of the intervention always keeps in mind a user centred design and an inclusive methodology.

Limits

The limit is an integral part of our relation with the project. In the operation of designing, simultaneously exists a process of projecting that is an act to look forward, overcome, but also foresee something beyond the present. It is a boundary that allows us to understand what exists at present but also all that we can shape in the future. The idea is to use limit as a strategic notion to understand and identify the boundaries between the current conditions of Shkodra and the transformation opportunities that the suburban area can offer after following the awareness of the problems encountered, in order to push further the project development beyond its potential possibilities.

In this case, the arguments of the famous economist Serge Latouche, become useful tools to treat some problems related to the territorial limits of Shkodra. He uses this term to make wise considerations especially in economical field. Setting limits here is the only way to give a radical alternative to our system of values. Its general guidelines can be even transposed into other adjoining intervention fields such as planning, whether urban or architectural. Latouche works on the idea of a cultural revolution that prefer qualitative assessment over quantitative measurements. Through his thoughts he identifies wisely several reflection points related to some important limits that affect our contemporary society. We can extract and use essentially four of them: Territorial, Political, Ecological and Economical.



Fig2 / The main road that connect coastal area with the inner city
source / photo by Sara Codarin

Territorial limits

The first limit is related to territory. The boundary defines a territory in space. The evolution of the relationship between space and human being transforms common spaces into social and symbolic groups such as cities, which in turn expand themselves beyond their main boundaries to widen their geographic areas. The globalism of modern society moves the limit towards a total overrun of the natural border, changing the social organizations of the territory (Latouce, 2012).

For our discourse, the expansion of Shkodra during the transition period has created an uncontrolled suburban growth without taking into account the infrastructural limitation that has permitted discontinuities between the western lands with the inner city. The territory subject to this phenomenon is mainly located around the towns of Shirokë and Zogaj, along the lower shore of the homonymous lake.

This disconnection with the city centre poses many disadvantages. A problem concerns the limitations of daily displacement to the locals, and another one is related with a difficult relationship both with the remaining part of Shkodra and between neighbouring territories of Montenegro, that create a partial territorial solitude with relative loss of economic value in many sectors, especially in tourism. In addition, the isolation also makes disadvantages during the delivery of public utilities such as rescue activities, including limitations on active participation in political, cultural and social activities,

offered by the municipality.

The cause is associated with viability because across the length of the coast there is only one primary road. Despite it can be used in both directions, the space transit is only for one vehicle and the path finishes in Zogaj, more before of the state border, impeding the cross-border flow between the two neighbouring states and their relative socio-economic exchanges. The street is tortuous, difficult, creates traffic and risks of accidents due to its narrow width, causing problems and discouragements. There is also an exclusion of the local population from public transport service because it does not offer any facilitation. Moreover, although there is good access to the lake, there are no boat transport services that could partly solve the problem of viability in the Zogaj and Shirokë and there are not lake routes with other national or cross-boarder coastal towns that could generate an economic potential offered by the development of a touristic circuit around the lake.

Political limits

Human being, as a social animal, has always lived within a political entity that is closely tied to a space dimension (Latouce, 2012). Related with territorial limits, they are important for a good governance of society and act as a controller for good conviviality among individuals through regulatory and legal aspects.

As mentioned in the introduction, due to the drastic political changes that have influenced Shkodra's development, it



Fig3 / Harbor of the fishermen community in Zogaj
source / photo by Saimir Shtylla

has been invested by several territorial changes that have allowed to overcome some political limits in favour to confused and informal urban growth with related issues.

The intense and rapid demographic rise and very weak control of local and central government over the territory, including the high level of corruption, has led the Shkodra's population to occupy abandoned spaces or to create new buildings without planning and building permits. Many areas first intended for agricultural land, industrial area, or river and lake shores now have become residential areas with a high density of population (Dibra, Kopliku, and Krymbi, 2015).

Although characterized by a lower urban descent, also Shirokë and Zogaj are the same subjects to the phenomenon of informality. In the area of the two towns it can be possible to identify in total, 199 illegal buildings (134 in Shirokë and 65 in Zogaj) around the Shkodra Lake with no urban planning or clear inventory of illegal construction on the Albanian lakeshores (Bosina, Kopliku and Krymbi, 2015). Moreover, the problem of informal development, connected with territorial limits, has also created a lack of engineering infrastructure: road network, power grid, telephone network, water supply, sanitation and sewage, but even in those areas deficiencies are significant (Bosina, Kopliku and Krymbi, 2015).

The problem remains an active concern of the government, but it can be solved by setting right limits by the regulatory plan.

Ecological limits

The ecological limits are certainly the most important and evident in contemporary society. Through modernity, our over-economic growth collides with the limits of biosphere (Latouche, 2012). Our society is extensively exploiting the natural resources of the planet. In the case of Albania, the landscape offers a large amount of natural spaces but which are endangered by the economical growth of country. As we have described, the informality of Shkodra is putting at risk the lagoon ecosystem with a possible loss of biodiversity.

The lake and its landscape represent a great natural, scientific, economic and recreational resource. The peculiarity of the territory offers different types of conformation that pass from a mountainous landscape (including Taraboshi range) to a lagoon area, while the Mediterranean climate allows to accommodate many vegetative species and animals.

Thanks to these favourable conditions, in the area between Shirokë and Zogaj is preserved a great and characteristic biodiversity. In particular, in the natural mountainous of Taraboshi it is possible to find the natural vegetation (pomegranate, common hornbeam, juniper, oak etc.), sub-endemic shrubs, and cultivated ones (pines and cypress). It is also distinguished as a rich area of medicinal plants such as: rosewood, balsam, yellow and red primula, and in particular is rich in sage through all the Mount Taraboshi. There are also a lot of species of wildlife such as wolf, jackal, wild boar, hare, fox, squirrel, etc. Instead,

the urban part is characterized by several fruit trees (olive trees, fig, plum, chestnut, mulberry) and decorative ones located on courtyards of private houses, while many agricultural plots are cultivated with traditional fruit trees and vegetables.

The lake is also an important biodiversity reserve: the flora is made up of various species (willow, ash, poplar etc.) that are ecologically linked to fauna. By ichthyologic studies it is possible to see that the lake has 700 different species of microalgae, 60 species of fish classified in 17 families (carp, muggins, eels, etc.) including 15 endemic species, and 280 species of birds, 87% of the fauna in Albania (Mariç, 2002). The area between Shirokë and Zogaj is the part of territory where it is still possible to enjoy the natural landscape. This territory is characterized by small fishing villages, inserted in an intact natural environment which, in the summer, become privileged places for holidays in the middle of nature. Compromising the ecosystem with unsustainable human practices means ruining an important part of the Albanian territory. The human interventions over the land cover change on opening new agricultural lands, informal constructions, cutting of shrubs and trees for fuelwood, uncontrolled grazing and summer fires, have led to a heavy degradation of the landscape, erosion and loss of biodiversity as well. Shirokë and Zogaj, are still subjects to illegal settlements that increase the urban area to the detriment of the natural surface of the landscape, while the lack of adequate infrastructure such as sewers can create problems such as pollution and eutrophication of water. Also the fishing, although it is done in a non-intensive local environment, is inefficient and needs to be regulated and organized. These precautions must include: prevention of fishing during the natural reproduction period; limitations of catching; support of sustainable traditional fishing (Grazhdani, 2014).

Economical limits

The economical limit is closely linked to the ecological limit, and the balance of the first directly affects the second (Latouche, 2012). It needs to pay attention in a concordant use of the economy without transforming it unconsciously into a negative tool that could clash with the ecological and political limits.

For the Albanian territory, tourism is the parameter that outlines the boundaries of the economical limits. In recent years, Albania has seen a large increase of tourist flows. In 2016 they rose 23%

more than 2013. In fact, the region offers different types of tourism that pass from the cultural heritage to the different landscaping experiences. In the examined area of Shirokë and Zogaj - represented by a low density and a weak economic base - tourism is the key to promoting the internal growth. Thanks to its intrinsic natural features, Shkodrë provides great potential through its landscapes and lagoon locations widely used by local citizens.

Its resources show clear potential for a modern application of the concept of territorial heritage and they provide a useful basis to conceive the landscape as good to be preserved and valued through a careful reading and interpretation of selective accumulation processes that have worked in time and in the continuous interactions between environmental issues, dynamic settlements, life and work practices of local societies and cultural and symbolic values. (Meini, 2008). However, the territorial boundaries - due to the disconnection with the centre and the political limitations that are still late in the provision of adequate communications infrastructure - become a major impediment to the local economy, limiting revenues for people of the area.

The potential of the area lies in the manufacturing production derived both from the great tradition of textile crafts (kilim) and various local products, among which a large part comes from fishery products, that is one of the most important sources of income for Shkodrë. In addition, the area surrounds a long section of the river and offers many bathing spots for tourists, which can still insert into a not anthropized landscape, but not properly unmanaged and valued.

Intervention plan

Concreting the considerations set out above on the limits of Shkodrë, it is possible to trace an intervention line and to put sustainable solutions for the upgrading of the area under consideration. The first strategic step is to start from the economical limit - using tourism as a development tool - in order to trace the guidelines to better manage even the other limits.

Tourism becomes the driving force to change the area, but it must be implemented in a sustainable way and shared with local population by public administration.

The political factor has the task to break its existing limits and become more responsible to implementing Zogaj and Shirokë's regulatory plans.



*Fig4 / Mountain biking as a different experience for tourism of Shkodra
source / photo by Albert Dickson, Flickr*

For this thing, it is necessary to incorporate the concept of 'Design for All' in design processes. It is a conceptual methodological tool that uses a holistic approach aimed at enhancing human being and its various specificities (Accolla, 2009). DfA means creating a solution for everyone, namely, a shared experience of a system that encompasses several types of utilities, with emotional, physical and cultural differences, usage, etc. So you need to have an overall vision of all points of view, to implement a participatory design with citizens.

It must take into account those who have the desire to use the whole system, trying to eliminate all possible barriers that hinder people from achieving their goals. In the case of Shkodra, this methodology must be interesting to public administration, as it is a useful tool of communication both to listen and receive the needs of people who really live the territory. Knowing their problems means putting in place this practice to enhance inclusion, social cohesion and sustainable development.

Thanks to this concept method, it is possible to draw a clear urban plan that is useful even to think some limits between the residential and the natural parts, in order to stop the unauthorized development and preserve biodiversity. This plan wants to include the natural resources protection and development of the area, such as forests and shrubs and their wildlife, the lake shore with its water, flora and fauna, fisheries, coordinated with the development of tourism and long-term urban development. For these

things, in the logics of user centred methodology, the plan would be prepared by a group of multidisciplinary experts and with the broad participation of local residents and all interested parties. It is also useful to draw many guidelines on the urban planning regulation, so as to pay more attention both to the aesthetic and spatial appearance of dwellings, in order to preserve and give continuity to the identity of the local heritage by creating interaction between the existing historical buildings with the possible future constructions.

The old vernacular buildings have a great cultural heritage that must be protected and valued as an instrument of local identity. Being an area not yet densely populated, it is important to maintain a constructive limit in order to preserve the characteristic existing natural landscape.

To improve interaction between individuals and create social integration between local citizens but also among potential tourists, a possible intervention is to improve the pedestrian areas and also to provide several squares or common areas.

Today, innovative forms of socialization can be implemented in the process, such as the "localhood" phenomenon, namely an online and offline network to exchange ideas, goods and knowledge among neighbours, but also with visitors. This is a great way to connect people with neighbourhoods, so much so that it has been included in the new tourism vision of Copenhagen 2022.

Zogaj



Shirokë



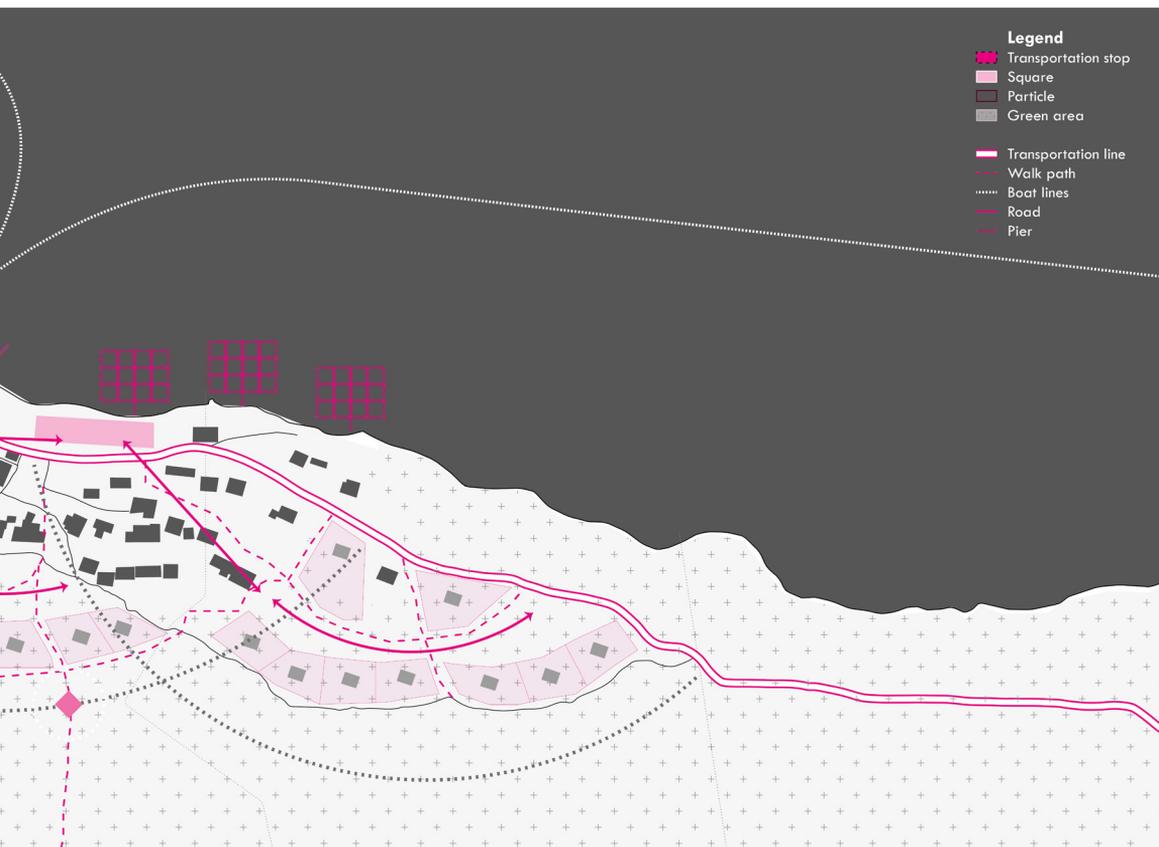


Fig5 / Intervention plan of Zogaj source / the author



Fig6 / Intervention plan of Shirokè source / the author

Also, refreshing the area can increase the demand of visitors and attract the attention of foreign capital that may invest in the development of the area or the use of local activities. A potential source of income is undoubtedly fishery but it must be well managed and regulated so as to not clash with the ecological limits of local fauna.

It is possible to develop new structures for fisheries communities in order to make the activity more sustainable and to protect endemic species during the breeding period. Fishermen can manage production with a fish farming and market place as an economic resource without touching the ecosystem. This small scale economy can become a growth value also for the local gastronomic services.

To make all this possible and feasible, the southwest area of Shkodra needs to be reconnected to the rest of the city, facilitating the exchange between internal and external residents. There is only one way of communication that needs a great rethink to increase the flow of people that would primarily facilitate local people.

As we know well, the mobility of people and goods has been vital to urban life since cities emerged more than 7,000 years ago (Ratti, Resta, Sagarra, Santi, Strogatz, Szell & Tachet, 2017). Indeed, the success, prosperity, and liveability of cities are directly related to the effectiveness of their mobility systems and therefore it needs more attention.

At first glance, the idea could fall on creating a wider and branched infrastructure with many parking lots to enabling viability in both directions, increasing the flow of cars. But the mobility satisfied by private vehicles is an inefficient transportation mode because move only 1.3 passengers per vehicle on average, causing the road congestion with immense economic and societal costs (Ratti, Resta, Sagarra, Santi, Strogatz, Szell & Tachet, 2017).

In addition, a recent article dealing with the relationship between rising roads and traffic, explains that with the rise of new driving areas, there are no improvements of flows but only traffic increases because it encourages people to use those new spaces that did not exist before (Duranton and Turner, 2015). The possibility of increasing automobile flows would immediately be in conflict with the ecological limits of the landscape and its ecosystem which, on the other hand, should be protected through more targeted and more conscious interventions on sustainable mobility.

Instead an appropriate hypothesis is to improve the main road and encourage the institutional service to stimulate people to use more public transport, which would not only shorten traffic congestion but would, in the long run, encourage people to use predominantly public transport and reducing the demand of cars with consequent reduction pollution.

Therefore, it is possible to use the service both to include the local population, but also to provide a tourism support service. Along the coast are identifiable at least four strategic seaside spots that may become stops to spread visitors' flows along the beaches.

Pointing to this type of mobility associated with a multimodal system could be the key to the inclusion of the area with the city centre at remarkably low costs. In fact, the idea is to make pedestrian and bicycle routes accessible throughout the territory, including the coastal area and the hinterland part of the country.

In this case, we will have a limited ecological impact because we would use existing paths. In the territory there are already natural routes that have been created to connect coast Anamalit, two historical cities currently abandoned, but with great cultural and touristic potential. The implementation of these paths through a cycling/pedestrian network can create a different mobility experience that can ideate an innovative sustainable tourism. The territory offers both a great opportunity for excursions and many beautiful lakeside sceneries that can be supported by strategically located spots along the paths (Berra, 2011).

In addition, plan of large reforestations, controlled grazing and fire protection would create a more pleasant environment for inhabitants and visitors.

By constructing different types of itineraries (ranging from mountain biking, hiking to traditional relaxation and wellness paths), we can create a different experiential activity based on the type of fruiting speed we want to use. A different experience can be further associated with an aquatic route through the creation of bird watching sectors, areas for the repopulation of the lake's ecosystem, but also a service with relative points of attraction in the cities of Zogaj and Shirokë that would increase the accessibility of the zone by reducing in part the isolation around the lake with other the national and cross-boarder coastal towns and the problems caused by traffic.

Conclusions

At present, the municipality of Shkodra, in particular the southwest area of Zogaj and Shirokë, has several urban management issues but also has great potential that have not yet been fully exploited. The public administration has to be aware to the territory's boundaries in order to take them as a starting point to improve the development area.

Taking into consideration these limits, it is possible to draw up an intervention plan that can respond to the various needs of the analysed area. Moreover, the implementation of participatory design between citizens and the municipality becomes a useful tool to make municipality aware of the real problems of local communities, making functional designing and addressed to social inclusion.

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