

Landscape Parks as protection valorization and territory promotion devices. The case of the Albanian Riviera and the “bubble” model

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Abstract

A “Protected Landscape” is protected area where interaction between humans and nature over time has produced an area with a distinct character as well as significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value. Taking this definition by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as starting point, this contribution aims to discuss the role of Protected Areas today and especially their potentialities in preserving landscapes under tourism pressure in developing countries. The Mediterranean coasts are full of negative tourism examples, due to the adoption of fast development strategies and the lack of attention for the life cycle of natural and cultural resources. Based on the application of protection and conservation protocols, the proposal is to introduce the concept of “bubble” for defining a new tourism model. The main challenge of the “bubble model” is to control expansion of the touristic stations and preserve the buffer areas both for their ecosystem and touristic value. The study case is the Albanian Riviera, which is one of the richest natural areas and ecological sites in Albania and considered one of the biggest tourism potentials of the country. The model proposed aims to preserve in situ the existing species and ecosystem dynamics, without trying to restore the status quo antes, and define actions to combine them with surrounding touristic development. The application of the bubble model shows the possibility of joining different objectives such as tourism development, environmental protection, territory connection and blue growth.

Keywords: landscape, parks, tourism

1 | Introduction – Tourism as positive perturbation

Until today, tourism has had double effects – both positive and negative, on the Albanian Riviera ecosystem. The entire region was abandoned during the year immediately before the regime collapse – the 1990s – and it stayed in the same or worse situation until the 2000s. The lack of maintenance and attention on the area caused the total impairment of old urban agglomerations and infrastructures, often leading to partial structure destruction. Similar considerations need to be made for the natural resources. Due to temporary flooding, landslides and other minor phenomena, the coastal area has been often covered by residual deposits which affected local ecosystems. The presence of tourism slowly stopped this degradation. “Pioneer” tourist activities represented opportunities to disclose a territory and attract future investments.

2 | Objective – A new development model

The overall objective of this contribution is to propose a new tourism development model for the Albania Riviera, based on the direct observation of the territory, but that can be later exported also outside the national border. This model aims to meet the territorial requirements in terms of tourism development, environmental protection and regional connection. Its application, in fact, allows to boost synergies between territorial components in order to re-address the tourism fluxes from areas under pressure to dead poles.

3 | Methodology

The objective is reached through the use of a mixed methodology: a qualitative analysis of this specific case study landscape and its results interpretation based on a direct observation of the territory. In a first phase, the territory is analyzed according to the landscape principles elaborated by Dramstad et al (1996), going from a territorial to a micro-scale. Those elements are, furthermore, evaluated and used to build the new model, which is tested in the conclusions with the application of protection and conservation protocols.

4 | The model components: the Dramstad et al.’s components of landscape

In this paragraph, the basic landscape elements listed by Dramstad, et al. (1996) in the book “Landscape Ecology Principles in Landscape Architecture and Land-Use Planning” are re-interpreted from a tourism view: buffers, patches and connections. This process of disassembling the territory aims to define the final

model components and envisage their behavior. The “Riviera mosaic” is composed of a number of patches which are mostly isolated from each other, surrounded by enormous buffer zones and connected by one main corridor, the National Road 8.

4.1 | Buffers

Following the Dramstad, et al. (1996) categories and landscape elements description, the Albanian Riviera territory can be considered a continuous mosaic of different dispersal and small connected patch (Figure 1). Isolation played a key role in protecting the Riviera heritage, but in the last years a tourism coastal invasion is threatening those precious landscapes. Mosaic no.9 (Figure 1, right) showed a possible strategy for «landscapes undergoing suburbanization», stating that «a biodiversity or nature reserve may be protected against damages by invaders using a (buffer) zone» (Dramstad, et al., 1996, p. 44). Considering M6 the state of art, the introduction of buffer zones assumes a key role in the model.

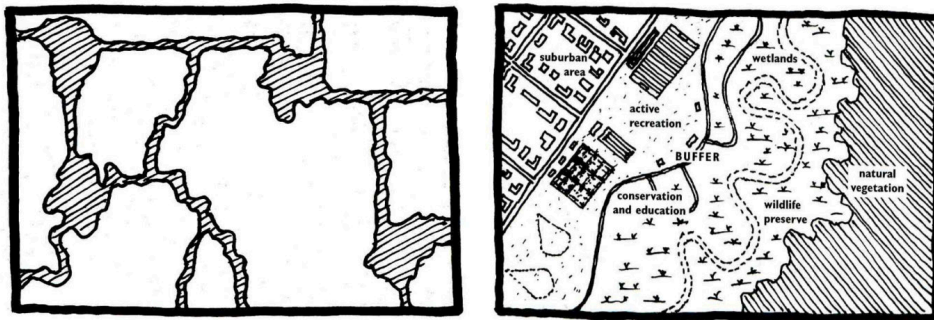


Figure 1 | Left: M6. Dispersal and small connected patch. Right: M9. Suburbanization, exotics and protected areas. Source: Dramstad, et al., 1996:43-44.

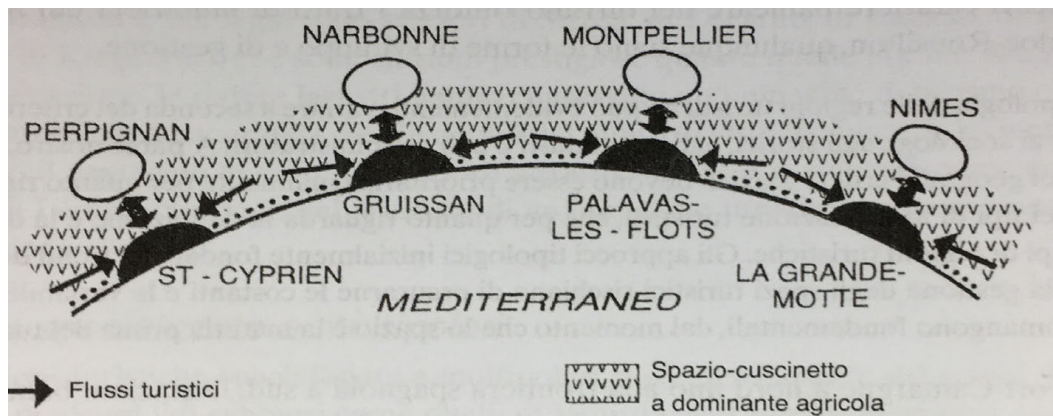


Figure 2 | Buffer areas in the Languedoc-Roussillon case study. Source: Lozato-Giotart, 2008:128.

Buffer zones in touristic territories might be found in famous cases as the Languedoc-Roussillon (Figure 2), where areas between the touristic stations are mainly characterized by agricultural landscapes. The buffers are used to keep the touristic stations apart and to avoid the creation of a continuous urbanized coast.

4.2 | Patches

The second elements to consider are the “patches”, which are «differentiated in terms of size, number and location» (Dramstad, et al., 1996, p. 19). The Riviera’s patches appear small, differently distributed and characterized by strong vocation. None of the Dramstad’s patch categories include the human presence. But being tourism an internal trigger of the coastal ecosystem, it is also necessary to consider the human presence in those new patches. This means creating new categories. Based on direct observation of the area, the proposed ones are summarized in the table below.

Table I | Riviera bubbles' typologies.
Source: author.

Category	Characteristics
Environmental resource	Area with high environmental value which is spotless and needs to be preserved in term of biodiversity (e.g. Canyon of Gjipë).
Cultural semi-abandoned	Area that is mostly characterized by old buildings and/or ancient ruins, with low density of inhabitants, and in high state of degradation (e.g. villages of Vuno, Dhërmi, Pilur, Qeparo Fshat).
Urbanized	Area with higher density of inhabitants and buildings or with strong vocation to urbanization (e.g. Saranda, Qeparo).
Touristic urbanized	Area which expansion is mostly caused by tourism and in which it represents the main (or the only) economic resource (e.g. Drymadës, Palasë beach).



Figure 3 | Riviera's urbanized patches.
Source: author.

Concerning the number of patches and the type of interaction, the idea of having them organized in groups to create specific habitats meets the natural complementarity of Riviera villages. Their interdependence is fundamental in creating a more solid system. «Some relatively generalist species can, in the absence of a large patch, survive in a number of nearby smaller patches, which although inadequate, are suitable nonetheless» (Dramstad, et al., 1996: 21), (Figure 4). Those new patches behave in similar ways, creating strong interdependent connections based on solidarity and complementarity (such as the case study of the Costa Brava).

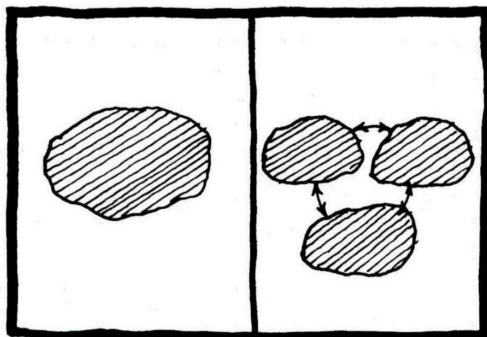


Figure 4 | Left: P12. Grouped patches as habitat. Right: Costa Brava in 1964.
Sources: Dramstad, et al., 1996, p. 23 and Barbaza, 1970:452-453.

4.3 | Connections

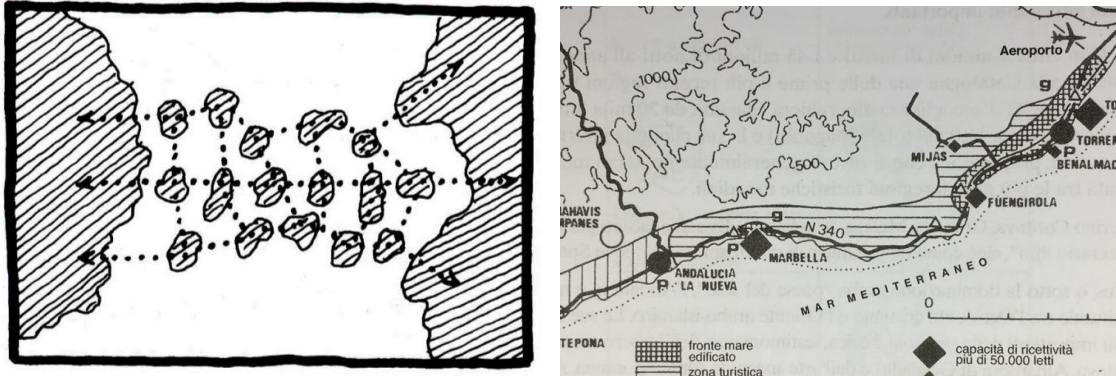


Figure 5 | Left: C7. Cluster of stepping stones. Right: Costa del Sol.
Sources: Dramstad, et al., 1996:38 and Lozato-Giotart, 2008:124.

The connection between patches is significant and a critical issue at the same time. The evolution of patches' connections or their own extension can lead to the creation of a continuous corridor (*Figure 5, left*), which is comparable with the case study of the Costa del Sol (*Figure 5, right*). The corridor assumes a fundamental role of connection, but it also acts as spinal column of the whole territory. Due to the morphology of the territory, the Riviera main road – known as National Road 8 – can result difficult to drive along and it allowed the construction of only two lanes, one for each direction. The mobility issue should be the addressed with specific attention. In fact, according to Lobosco & Lang (2016), the NR8 is not only a scenic road but a proper tourist attraction that with its “slow” travel time allows the tourist to enjoy the breath-taking views.

5 | Assembling the new system: the bubble model

5.1 | From patch to bubble

The first step is a theoretical integration of the Dramstad et al. (1996)'s concept of patches with the introduction of man as “territorial actor”. In this way, patches pass from 2-actors (territory-nature) to 3-actors (territory-nature-man). The second main reflection concerns the three-dimensionality of the patches. Keeping in mind that the model is a development tool, the definition of the patch area deals with the territory's future transformation. So, the factor “visibility” is now introduced. In fact, it has been proved that the visual impact of tourism is one of the main issues when coming to assess a touristic territory (The Landscape Institute, 2002).

Visibility is adopted as guideline for defining edges, no longer limited to a bi-dimensional surface which was the patch, but to a tri-dimensional volume, that from now on will be referred as the “bubble”. The bubble is a closed and delimited volume permeable for temporary transition but closed in shape and function.

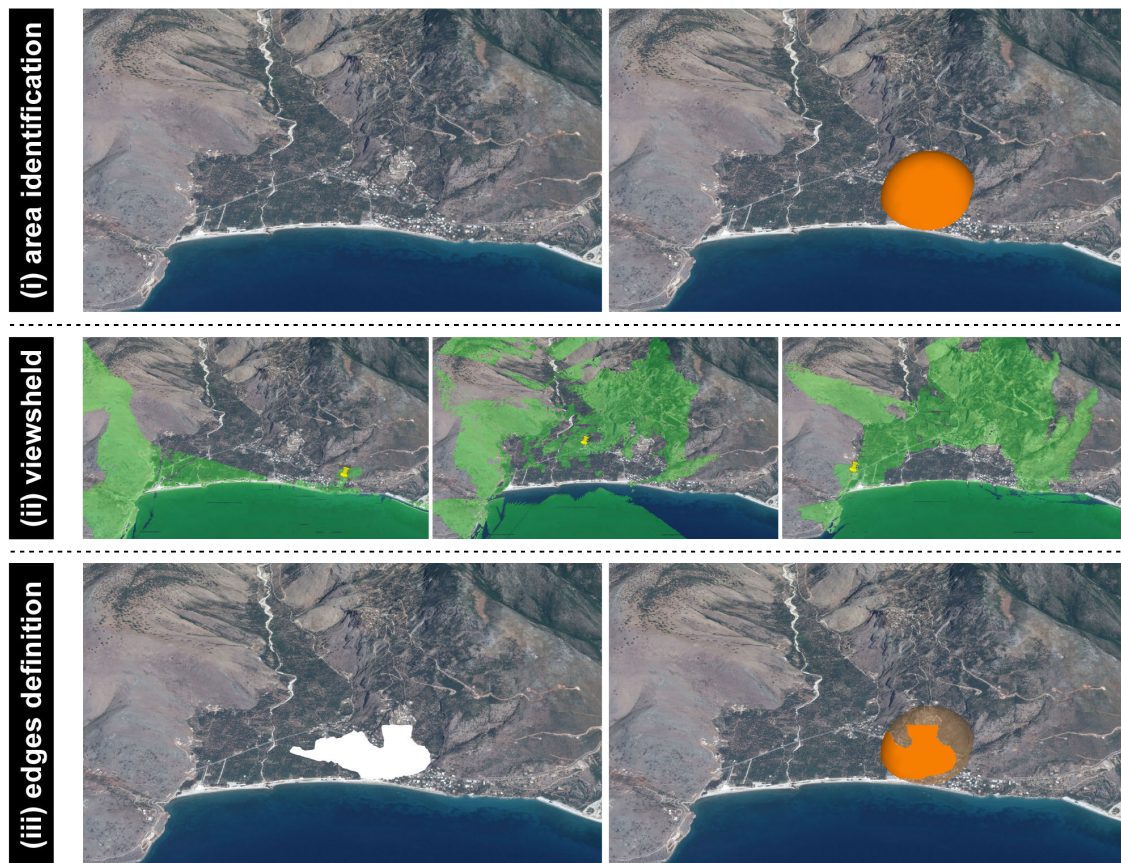


Figure 6 | Definition process of a bubble. Example of application on the area of Qeparo.
Source: author.

To define the borders of a bubble, the factor “visibility” is introduced by the GoogleEarth Viewshed tool. The process of definition of a bubble is divided into three phases: (i) identification of the gross area and definition of its vocation - environmental resource or urbanized area; (ii) selection of the main viewpoints and viewshed reckoning; and (iii) modulation of the bubble edges (Figure 6). In the Albanian Riviera, twenty small bubbles have been identified, mostly connected by NR8 and other secondary roads (Figure 7).

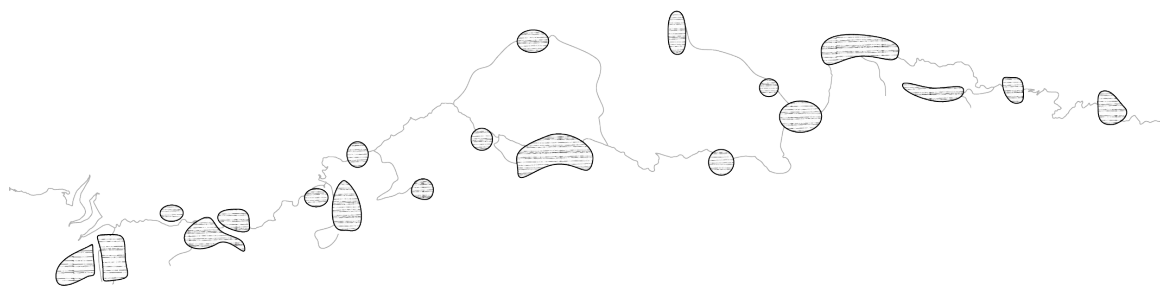


Figure 7 | Riviera's bubbles.
Source: author.

A large territory characterized by isolated cultural and natural resources can end up in a joint area dominated by one main economic driver: tourism. This behavior will definitely lead to the collapse of the area due to a single typology of development. The preservation of small-scale bubbles is comparable to the segmentation of the touristic offer.

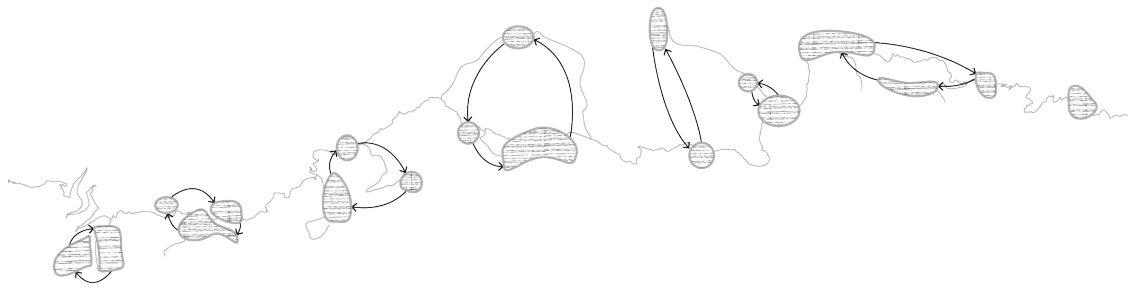


Figure 8 | Riviera's bubble interaction based on complementarity.
Source: author.

Interaction between bubbles is based on a principle of complementary and solidarity function. The combination of the three, or more, bubbles is perfect in terms of the tourism market (segmented activities and targets) and territorial organization. The main accommodation facilities might in fact be located in a side, easily connected by the NH8, activating dead poles as the old village and restoring the local heritage; while the activity offer can take place in the bubble richer in natural resources, for sport and adventure, and in the tourism developed one for night life nightclubs and daytime sea activities.

5.2 | The buffer zones



Figure 9 | Riviera's bufferzones.
Source: author.

The areas between bubbles is considered a “buffer zone”, which is not thought of as a physical obstacle, but rather an area where transition is allowed as much as touristic and agricultural activities with zero environmental impact (Figure 9).



Figure 10 | Single bubble's bufferzone and the zoning plan of Mariscadero, Chile.
Source: the author and Silva, et al., 2017:11.

Buffer zones have two different scales: territorial and local. Figure 10 (left) shows the Riviera's buffer zone at territorial level, which is basically the area between bubbles, but specific buffer zones can also surround a single bubble in order to strengthen its edges (Figure 10, right).

5.3 | The connections

In order to complete the model, it is necessary to investigate the element connection. Since the main transforming actor is tourism, the Miossec's model (1977) about tourism space is now introduced. His model is formed four phases. In the first two, a discovery and consolidation phases allows the creation and connection of “timid touristic stations”.

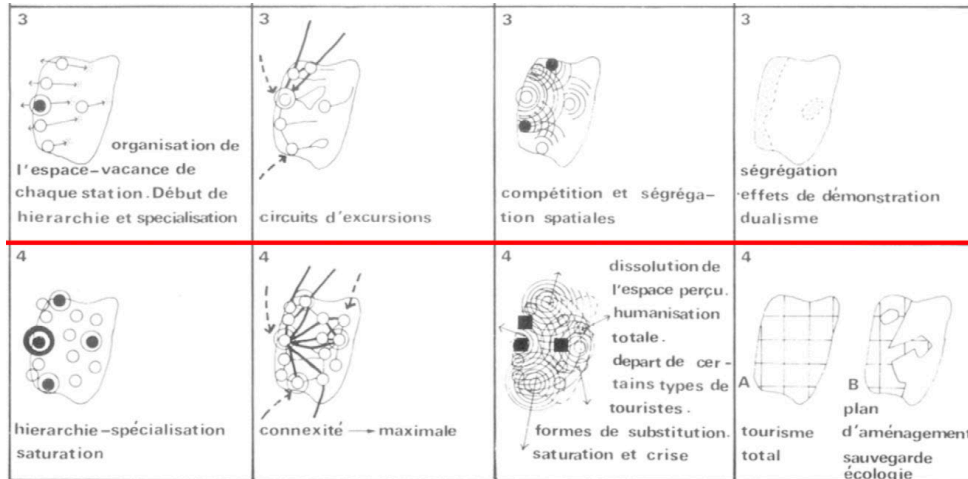


Figure 11 | Miossec's model, phases 3 and 4.
Source: Miossec, 1977.

In the last years, those stations are slowly organizing their activities, starting a spontaneous process of segmentation, entering the third phase of the model (Figure 11). If this process is not properly organized, what is likely to happen is an overlapping of functions and further saturation. The fourth phase is described as «a consolidated pyramidal system of hierarchical stations, connectivity of communication channels tends to maximize recreating landscapes cluttered with structures that the tourist flees to» (Miossec, 1977, p. 46). In order to avoid this possibility, the infrastructural system should be organized on a hierarchical basis, with a main road crossing the region from north to south, secondary roads interconnecting the bubbles and a third category linking the themed itineraries (hiking, climbing, etc).

6 | Conclusions: the application of bubble model through Riviera Protected Landscapes Park

This final paragraph analyses the possibility of making the whole Riviera a protected area, adding a layer of security to the already existing legal restrictions (Figure 12). The establishment of a complex park is a possible interpretation of the bubble development model.

From a technical point of view, the IUCN [International Units for Conservation of Nature] category V “Protected Landscape” perfectly meets the Riviera needs, joining the necessity of protecting both natural and cultural heritage and introducing economic activities as a tourism boost to local development. It is also in line with Albanian Law for protected areas (Republic of Albania, 2008). A Protected Landscape is protected area where interaction between humans and nature over time has produced an area with a distinct character as well as significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value (Stolton, 2013: 478). The bubbles could be perfectly interpreted as those areas with distinct features, which should be protected by two action: natural resource conservation and cultural heritage valorization.

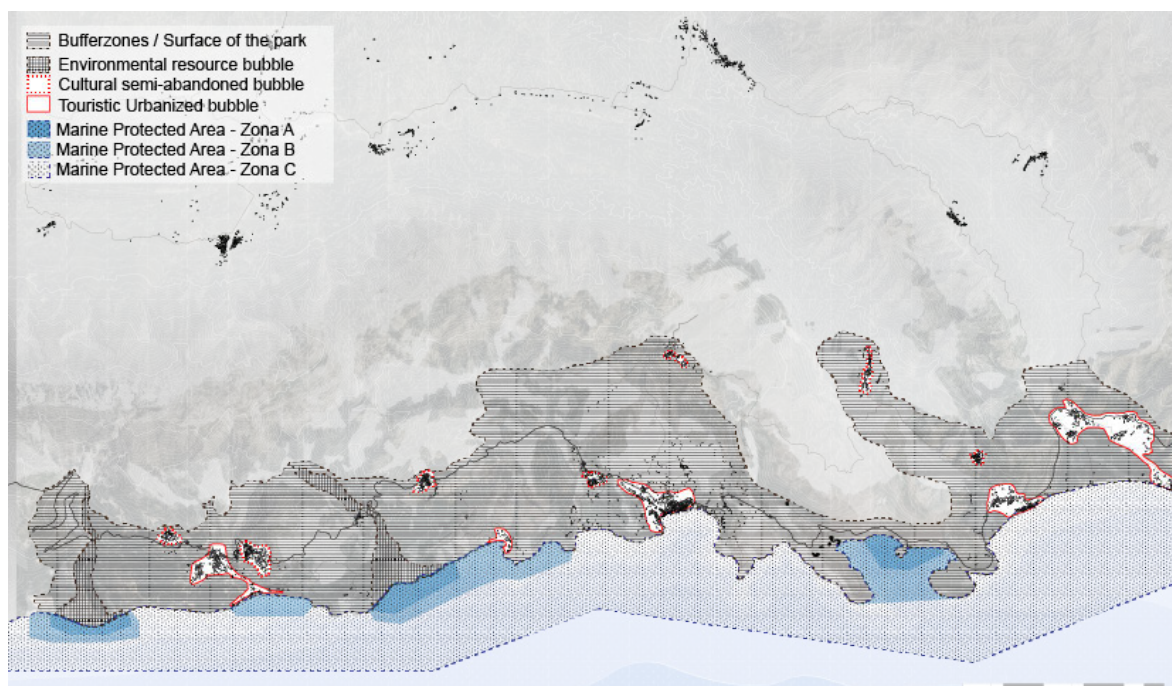


Figure 12 | Riviera Protected Landscape Park map.
Source: author.

Once the model's elements have been identified, the bubbles belonging to the “environmental resource” undergo an environmental assessment. If they are at risk, another level of protection can be applied. The entire bubble or a portion can be further protected by additional protection categories. A similar argument should be used for the water resources, which protection strategies should be extended to the sea (Kelleher & Kenchington, 1992). The control of water traffic is fundamental in the monitoring of tourist fluxes, to provide a better organization of the tourist activities and at the same time protecting the water heritage. The two main activities' incomes – tourism and fishing – are used for maintenance and further investment, allowing the self-sustainability of the area.

The issue of built heritage follows two entirely different trends. On one hand there are the Touristic Urbanized bubbles – those urban centers developed mainly for touristic reasons on the coast – and on the other hands, the old ancient villages – with their historical buildings – which are living a process of abandonment. Two strategies are needed for correcting such trends, which will otherwise lead to an unstoppable exploitation of territory resources. The common goal is the reduction of tourism pressure, which can be easily met investing more in the existing heritage, boosting a process of recovery and valorization instead new constructions. The old villages, in fact, have a great hidden potential, in terms of position and touristic development. Most of them are located slightly above the sea level, offering an interesting view of the Riviera. Their heritage is built with local materials and technique, providing the rural taste contemporary tourists are looking for.

In this sense, the “bubble model” proposal joins the awareness concerning the impossibility of stopping the “touristification” process and the positive and profitable experience of eco-tourism. With the differentiation of bubble categories, few are left to the touristification process (Vlorë, Sarandë, Himarë are already big touristic centers), while others are strongly monitored and protected in order to guarantee valorization of natural resources and establish a “virtuous cycle” tourism-landscape.

Acknowledgements

This contribution is based on the author's PhD thesis defended on the 1st April 2019 and titled “From isolation to ‘pleasure periphery’: the Riviera perspective. A tourism model for South Albania's coastal landscapes” (supervisors: Prof PhD Luca Emanuelli and Prof PhD Besnik Aliaj; external expert: Prof Ricard Pié), in the framework of the IDAUP International Doctorate in Architecture and Urban Planning program of University of Ferrara and POLIS University, Tirana.

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Workshop 2 | L'obiettivo della sicurezza di città e territori



W 2.1

LA SICUREZZA DEI TERRITORI FRAGILI

Coordinatori: Paolo La Greca, Massimo Angrilli, con Adriana Galderisi
Discussant: Francesco Curci, Giuseppe Fera

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Roma-Milano
ISBN 9788899237219

Volume pubblicato digitalmente nel mese di aprile 2020
Pubblicazione disponibile su www.planum.net | Planum Publisher

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