

Florian Nepravishtha
Andrea Maligari

MODERNISATION AND GLOBALIZATION

NEW PARADIGMS IN ARCHITECTURE, CITY, TERRITORY



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**FLORIAN NEPRAVISHTA
ANDREA MALIQARI**



La scuola di Pitagora
editrice

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Editor:

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Layout:

Vjola Ilia

Cover:

Andi Shameti

Publisher: Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism (FAU), Polytechnic University of Tirana

Press:

Printing House FLESH, Tiranë 2021

Rruga: "Sulejman Pitarka" Tirane, Albania

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La scuola di Pitagora editrice,

Via Monte di Dio, 54,

80132 Napoli - Italia

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Our publications, both as books and e-books are available in Italy and abroad.

ISBN: 978-88-6542-814-6

ISBN: 978-88-6542-815-3 (e-book)

Collana FAU

Forum for Architecture and Urbanism (FAU)

Series founded and directed by Florian Nepravishta

Number three

Collana FAU

Serie “Forum for Architecture and Urbanism (FAU)”

Serie founded and directed by Florian Nepravishta

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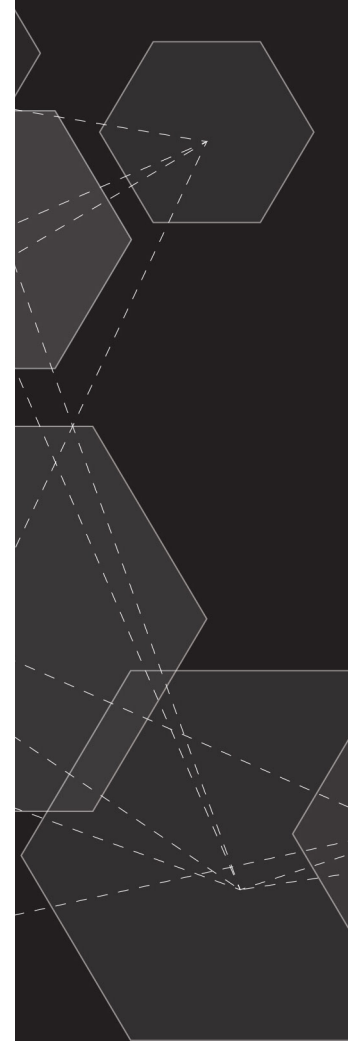
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MODERNISATION AND GLOBALIZATION

New paradigms in architecture, city, territory

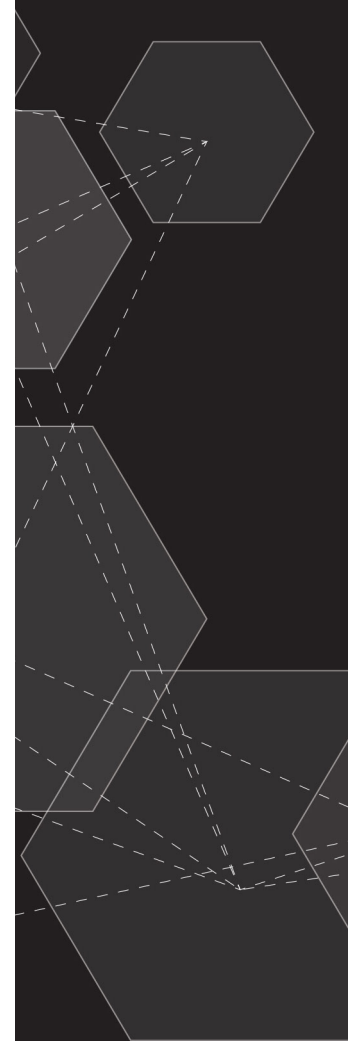


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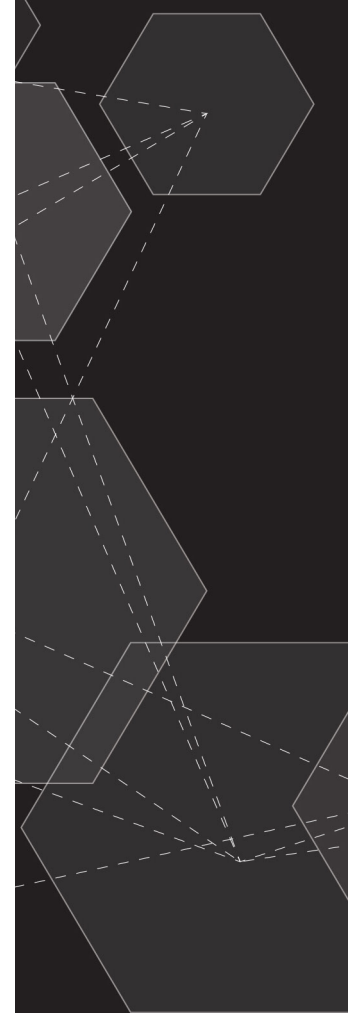
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Antonio Capestro

Introduction

Architecture and the City have always represented a palimpsest to be interpreted and remodelled to be then transmitted to future generations as an active and dynamic testimony and an authentic expression of both a tangible and an intangible context. The ensemble of layers and transformations that have characterised the city-system through time constitute an intangible heritage since they are evidence of a culture of the urban project which poses two important challenges: the role of Urban Design today and the meaning of the city as common heritage within a framework of shared operativeness.

For this reason, Urban Design becomes a heritage to be safeguarded since it induces us always to invert our perspectives and seek concrete and operative actions based on an alternative vision.

This contribution reflects the opportunity to recover this culture of the project, starting from a heritage of knowledge and skills that are Italian in origin, historically integrated and recognisable in the transformations of some Albanian contexts, which are investigated through training and applied research activities carried out in Albania.¹ Beginning from the binomial of Architecture and the City, the adopted methodology wishes to transmit to young Albanian architects a good practice of the urban project for interpreting the instances of modernity through their own relational, spatial and semantic roots. It is expressed in a shared and participated manner, involving both the institutions and the community in a 'permanent laboratory' that produces ideas for concrete actions, that searches for an identity which sometimes may be lost and therefore must be rediscovered or even re-invented from those elements of authenticity that the city still maintains.

The role of urban design in the safeguarding and valorisation of the urban heritage

In this renewed framework, the role of Urban Design is fundamental because, without impoverishing the essential notions of safeguarding and preservation, it underlines the

importance of the project as a resource within a complex system for assessing new *modus operandi* and proposing renewed backgrounds of meaning capable of affecting the historic urban landscape and of bringing it closer to its inhabitants.

As actors in the urban scene (architects and designers, administrators, stakeholders and citizens), we must re-evaluate the project's role as heritage, understood as a process that has transfigured the assets bequeathed from the past, modifying them through new visions (Capestro, 2019).

In fact, in order to prevent the Heritage from becoming a brand or being classified as a historical and cultural icon, with its values relegated as museum pieces, it is necessary to reflect once again on the meaning of identity, authenticity, integrity, and in general on the possibility of bringing the concepts of 'urbs' and 'civitas' back together again as the expression of a dynamic process that is both identifiable and shared (Palumbo, 2019). Today, instead, these two concepts are undergoing a process of disconnection. Modernisation and globalisation have made us lose the sense of the city, which, in our globalised era, is characterised by a series of suspended fragments of disconnected devices that have lost their logical and systemic structure. To recover the practice of the project means to reinterpret the identity of that suspended fragment and to re-position it, retaking its 'deep structure' within a 'logical structure' so as to reconcile it with its citizens, thus attempting to rebuild the relationship between 'urbs' and 'civitas'.

Reflecting once again with awareness on this binomial, relying on research, education and training, as well as on shared and concrete actions, could allow us to reassess the Heritage that has been bequeathed to us as a vital and sustainable resource, not only in cultural and social terms but also in economic and productive ones, within an active laboratory.

Albania as urban laboratory

Albania presents the following *status quo*: it is a crossroads of cultures and conquests, of interventions more

often imposed than participated and has, much against its will, a rich cultural heritage that has been assimilated throughout time, as well as a significant capacity to absorb it. A practice derived not only from its historical context but also from its geographical and morphological position: the Albanian Alps behind it and an extraordinary presence opening onto the Mediterranean.

Albania is an Urban Laboratory because, although being a relatively small country, it is varied. The resulting differences could constitute its wealth if this multiplicity of layers, some of which are of Italian origin, were re-covered through interpretative keys capable of attributing added value to the said differences to re-establish a 'deep structure' within a logical and systemic structure. In particular, Albania presents a remarkable potential linked basically to three factors:

- The first is of a cultural type – This country, which for a few years now has been free from its previous condition of closure to Western Europe, due first to the Communist regime, and later to the economic crisis of the Nineties, would seem to be undergoing a period of 'awakening' and 'euphoria' that allows it to react to change with force and determination;
- The second is linked to its heritage – The natural and urbanised territories of Albania present a very rich architectural, urban and landscape heritage that offers excellent potential in terms of tourism and of future investments;
- The third regards its geographic location - Albania has always had a strategic position in the Mediterranean as a place of interaction. Historically, this nation was a bridge between East and West, not only for Italy. Thanks to this position, as a land of conquest and relationships, Albania could play an essential role in the Mediterranean basin since it already is a part of these relationships, which only need to be rediscovered. Furthermore, in this context, Italian urban design could represent a starting point.

Albania has been re-emerging within the European scene for some time, although it is not yet actually a part of it. Thanks to its collaborative presence, its networking capacity, and its wish to reaffirm its identity in a transnational context, it represents a significant presence in the Mediterranean with substantial potential for the future. This attention to relationships, to the 'concept of vicinity', also emerges in the Albanian participation in the 2021 Architecture Biennale.

"Know thy neighbour" is the advice given by the contri-

bution, an invitation to surpass barriers and "discover the gift of connection", to satisfy and increase the sense of belonging as a common value linked to the place but also to the community, as exchange and sharing of diversity, that hidden desire that globalisation has forced us to repress and which the current situation reintroduces as an urgent theme, extending it to the environment as a whole, understood as a complex system to be reinterpreted as an ensemble of ecosystems .

On the other hand, the importance of a landscape that permits a process of osmosis between the various scales of relationships had already been pointed out by Leon Battista Alberti: "The city is like a large house, and the house, in turn, is like a small city, one would not be wrong to affirm that the limbs of a house are small dwellings themselves [...]".

Every individual building component must be conceived with care: "It is, therefore, necessary to study these elements with the greatest care and diligence, since they are fundamental for the overall work; and make sure that even the smallest parts are perfectly executed [...]" . Leon Battista Alberti referred to architecture and the city as the basic elements supporting social welfare, designed and developed with 'care' to bring back 'urbs' and 'civitas' together again reinterpreted in an amplified scale of relationships. A lesson that is as relevant today as it ever was.

The theme of the vicinity, wishing to be part of a community of living together as in an ordinary house, could be an element of strength that historically is already a part of Albania. It could be valorised in the Mediterranean context today.

Albania could metaphorically be interpreted as a 'House for all' since it has this tradition of hospitality that is very similar to the Greek 'xenia', a right-duty to host which serves to reaffirm the sense of belonging to a place and opening to vast interpretative horizons. An ethical value-enhanced today by nuances, some of which are sustainable, concern mutual aid and the need to stress one's identity in a transnational context.

The three interventions presented here all stem from this set of reflections: the search for harmony between scales of relationships to be reinterpreted within the context of an Urban Design that derives from historical and morphological roots the values of innovation and regeneration as both premise and promise of new contemporary identities. The three project proposals regard interventions at the urban architectural scale in three important Albanian cities: Tirana, Lezhë and Durrës.

Tirana

Tirana has undergone numerous transformations and urban planning projects at both the urban and sectorial scale, which has not always resulted in a shared expression between the 'urbs' and the 'civitas'. There is, however, a common theme in the Urban Design inherited from Italy, which has attempted a systemic, organic and unitary interpretation of the city that still exists today.

The first substantial change took place during the first decades of the 20th century, with the first urban strategic plan by Armando Brasini (1925), which connected the ancient nucleus and the modern city by way of a monumental north-south axis. In 1939, Gherardo Bosio radically modified the city's design, ascribing to it a 'modern' appearance as a garden-city with low buildings and a greater density in the centre, yet well integrated into its environmental context. After Bosio's plan, which had acted on the level of urban environmental and architectural quality, fifty years of Communist regime (1944-1991) and a long period of transition characterised by an unstable and unregulated political scenario.



Figure 1. Architecture and the City_ An Urban Centre for Tirana: plan (previous page) and general view. Concept by Saimir Elmadhi (Project developed as part of the activities at the Architectural Design Laboratory III – Academic Year 2018/2019).

It lasted until the turn of the century, had a strong impact on the form of the city, conditioned as it was by a quantitative rather than qualitative expansion process (Nepravishhta, 2019; Giacomelli and Vokshi, 2012).

From the early 21st century, the Urban Project seems to be aimed toward a new direction that alternates between the re-discovery of the country's roots and the search for a new identity. The various projects demonstrate this at the architectural scale which were undertaken as a result of the competition for the reconstruction of Skanderbeg Square (2008), as well as by the latest proposal by Studio Boeri (2016), which offers a perspective view of the city (Tirana 2030).

In the context of these interpretative horizons, some of which have Italian origins, this contribution developed as part of the teaching and research activities that I carry out at the Catholic University "Nostra Signora del Buon Consiglio" in Tirana belongs.

In particular, in 2019, the theme of the re-defining of Skanderbeg Square through the inclusion of a new structure within a unitary layout. In order to promote a cultural and civic recognition process, it was decided to develop a project of specialised architecture devoted to spaces

and activities for an Urban Centre as a reference and active participation hub for the urban transformation processes involving Tirana over the past few years.

The themes of architecture explored in the urban component take on territorial directrices as the origin of the architectural form, capturing the square crossing flows and absorbing them, with a new value, in a gateway of access to the square and the urban fabric.

Lezhë

The city of Lissus, founded in the 4th century B.C. as a colony of Syracuse, had the function of controlling the access to the valley of the river Drin, one of the few ways to enter the Illyrian hinterland.

Having passed under various dominations, including the Venetian, the city is linked to Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu figure, the Albanian national hero. A prominent personality during the 15th century, he was capable of preventing the Ottoman advance toward Europe for decades and reunited the various Albanian principalities, thus helping to consolidate the Albanian identity. He died at Lezhë and was buried in the church of Saint Nicholas.

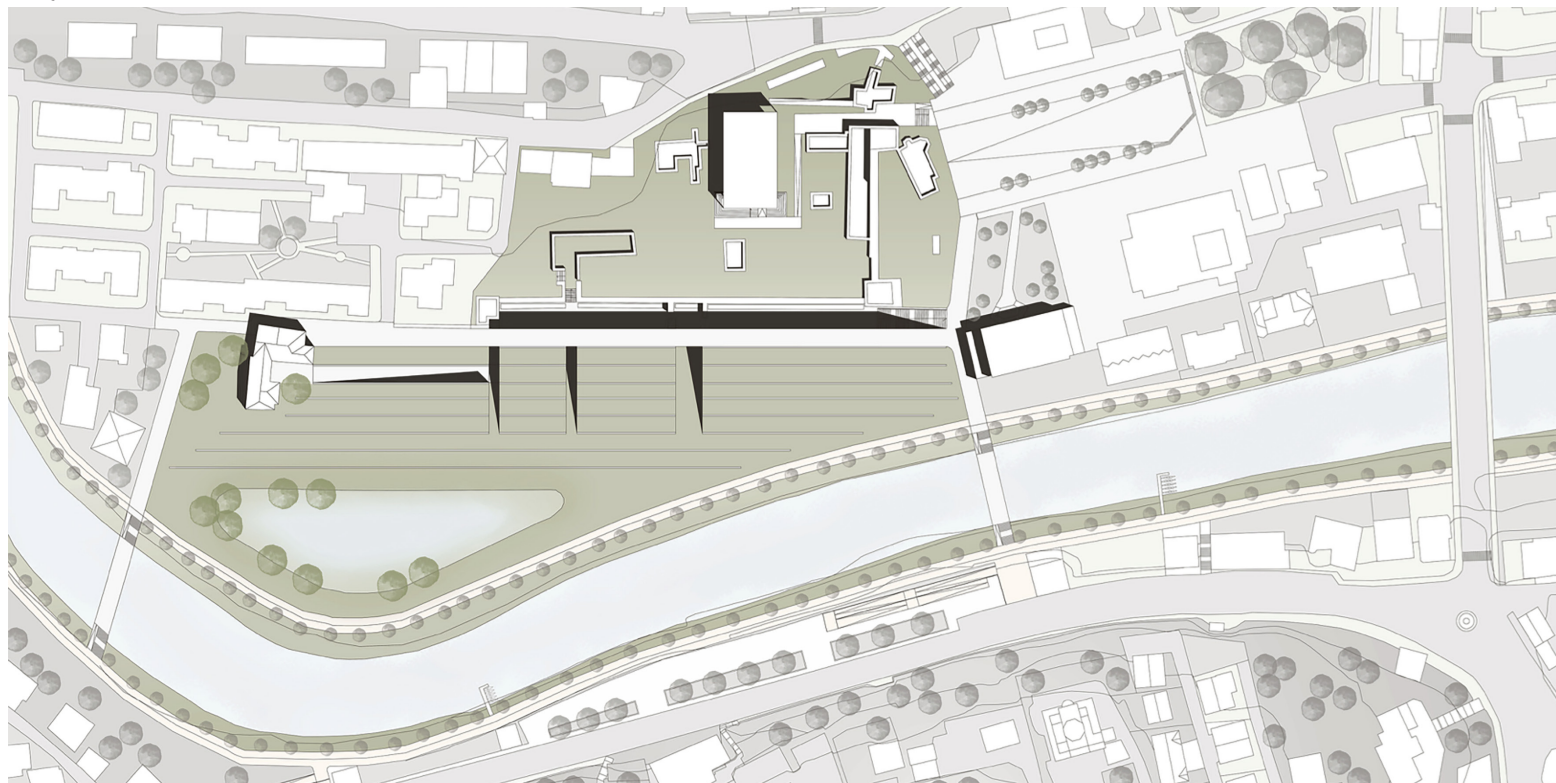


Figure 2. Albanian Projects_ Lezhë, the Museum of the City: master-plan and general view. Concept by Sabina Djala (Project developed as part of the activities at the Architecture and the City Laboratory – Academic Year. 2019/2020).



Figure 3. Albanian Projects_ Lezhë, the Museum of the City: general view. Concept by Sabina Djala (Project developed as part of the activities at the Architecture and the City Laboratory – Academic Year. 2019/2020).

The Skanderbeg memorial, built by the Communist regime on the ruins of the church, was inaugurated in 1981. It is the city's main monument and stands in the vicinity of a park where remains from Illyrian, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman constructions coexist. The area is adjacent to the river Drin, historically important in terms of communication and production, and today source of a potential system of urban and landscape reconnection and valorisation. In a context where both an archaeological and a natural park coexist, several inappropriate sections (un-

kempt areas and private agricultural land) separate the intervention area from the city. The project's proposal attempts a reinterpretation of the historical and morphological systems of the area through a "Historical Museum of the City", a vehicle that combines an active knowledge of the site and a new space for social interaction so as to initiate a process of regeneration and relaunch the role of this city, opening it to the territory and the Mediterranean basin, considering its crucial historic position on a hillside only 3 kilometres from the sea.

An underground space, built-in front of the ancient walls of the city of Lissus, makes it possible to carry out this new vocation as both museum and place for social interaction by offering an immersive experience that brings together the archaeological and environmental themes to new uses for the community and the city.

Durrës

The city of Durrës has a great wealth of historical and archaeological remains, both in the urban area and throughout the territory. Its history goes back more than 2,500 years to the time when it was founded, in the vicinity of a previous Illyrian settlement, by the Corinthians and the Corcyraeans. They chose the location because of the presence of a bay that offered a safe haven. The particular features of the place are well described in the Map of the Archaeological Risk for the City of Durrës:" Among countless vicissitudes derived from the passage of time and the dynamics of power, which involved Greeks, Illyrians, Romans, Byzantines, Normans, Angevins, Venetians, Turks and Albanians, and up to the current process of intense building expansion which resulted from having become in a very short time the most important Albanian port, as well as one of the most important in the Mediterranean, the city has continued to build layer upon layer on the same site, in a continuous dynamic relationship between the work of men who build, transform and destroy, and the action of nature on the environment - the hill, the marsh, the variations of the coastline, as well as earthquakes.

Today, this Adriatic city which was born to be a gateway between East and West, is called once again to play its fundamental role as a hinge in the communication axis that will connect the Balkans to a reunited Europe, and to disseminate the values of its millenary culture, safeguarding the treasures of its exceptional archaeological and historical heritage with pride and responsibility, also through tools involving restrictions to building activities in the areas with the greatest archaeological density [...]. The building and economic development of the past few years have multiplied the cases of discoveries concerning the historical and archaeological stratigraphy" (Santoro, 2005).

The concept of the project originates in this cultural and historical sedimentation. Through a series of interventions, some of which underground, it intends to valorise the relationship with the site through an itinerary of discovery, a maieutic operation that, almost with the sensibility of an archaeologist, brings back to light the historical layers, and especially its 'genius loci', activating through a permanent laboratory accessible to the community the knowledge and valorisation, in a contemporary key, of the site.

To sum up, with the aim of reconstructing the relationship between 'urbs' and 'civitas', the project proposes a "Study Centre for Archaeological Sites in the Mediterranean Basin" in order to recover the concept of heritage as a vital organism and as a resource for urban regeneration.

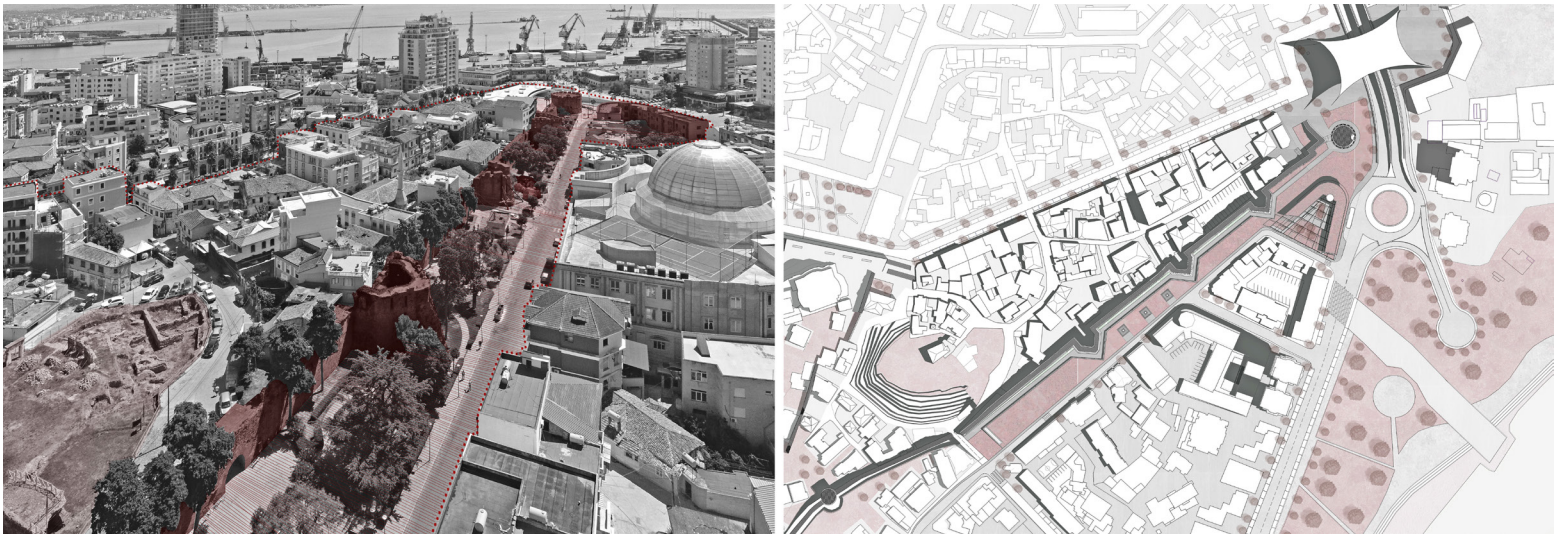


Figure 4. The ancient walls of Durrës. Project for a Centre for Archaeological Studies in the Mediterranean Basin: Masterplan and internal view with project. Concept by Julia Demirai (Project developed as part of the Undergraduate Dissertation – Academic Year, 2020/2021).

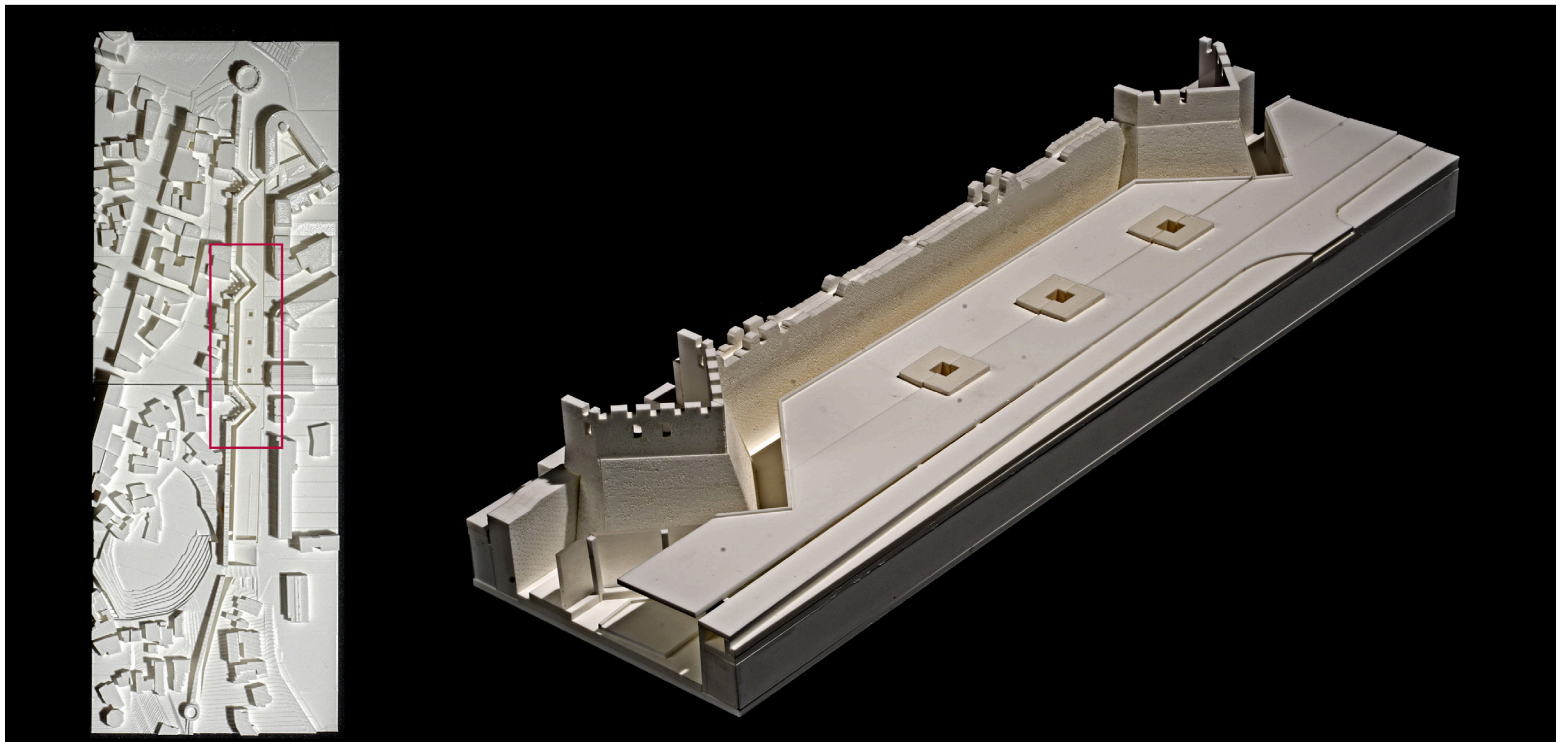
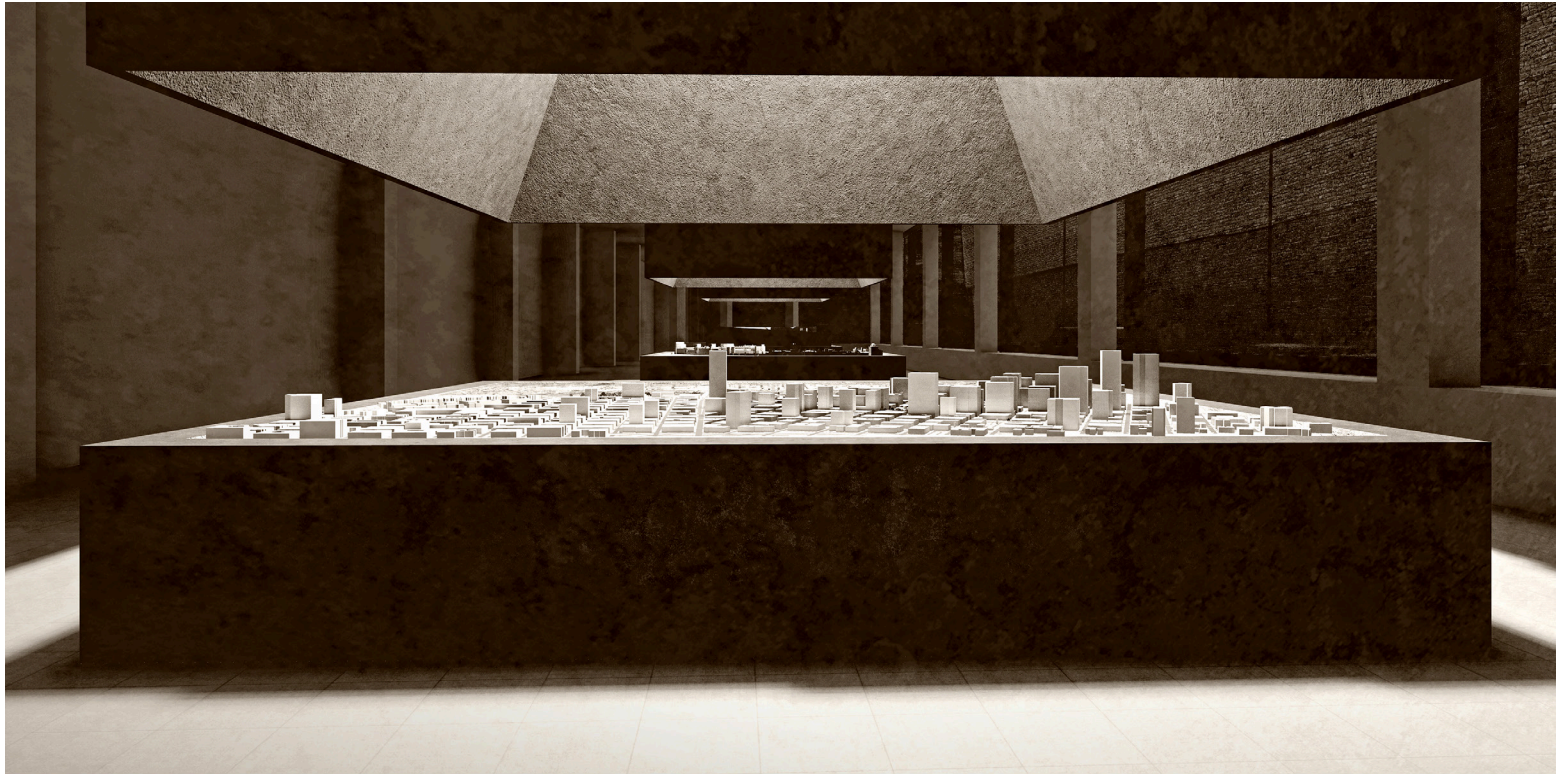


Figure 5. The ancient walls of Durrës_Project for a Centre for Archaeological Studies in the Mediterranean Basin: models. Concept by Julia Demirai (Project developed as part of the Undergraduate Dissertation – Academic Year. 2020/2021).

Note

¹Catholic University "Nostra Signora del Buon Consiglio", Faculty of Applied Sciences – Master's Degree Course in Architecture (double degree title with academic staff from the University of Florence) and Centre for Research on Mediterranean Architecture.

²For further information on this subject see the catalogue of the Venice Biennale, "Biennale Architettura 2021. How will we live together?", vol. National Participations and collateral events, Albania "In our home", pp. 6-7.

³L. B. Alberti, *De re aedificatoria*, L'architettura, from the Italian translation by Giovanni Orlandi, Milan 1966, p. 64. In Ettore Janulardo, *Forme urbane e dell'abitare*. Note su Leon Battista Alberti, BTA - Bollettino Telematico dell'Arte, 27 April 2016, n. 804 <http://www.bta.it/txt/a0/08/bta00804.html>

⁴Santoro S. 2005, "Archeologia urbana, carta del rischio archeologico e programmazione della Tutela", in *Carta del rischio archeologico della città di Durres*. Metodologia di realizzazione e istruzioni per l'uso, S. Santoro and A. Monti (eds.) ,p. 2.

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Finished publishing from
La scuola di Pitagora editrice
Via Monte di Dio, 54
80132 Napoli - Italia

October, 2021

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ISBN: 978-88-6542-815-3 (e-book)