

LAND INSTRUMENTS: THE CASE OF DURRES

INTRODUCTION

Spatial Planning or the concept of Regional Planning had been implemented in Albania even before the '90's, but under the conditions prevailing in a socialist system with a centralized economy, this concept had as its main objective to maintain the state. It meant preserving a demographic distribution and unchanging rapport between the urban and rural population. The latter was encouraged to dominate and the figure of 65% of the population living in rural areas expressed this intention. Since socialist planning did not consider the necessity of sufficient natural resources as a fundamental reference point, it brought very different living conditions to the regions of the country. The consequences of this unbalanced development are very profound and continue to affect conditions today. After the great political and economic changes, the concept of spatial planning changed too, considered as a strategic process of planning and a regulator for balanced development. However, during the transition period, Albania has not followed a clear institutional policy regarding the preparation of regional plans and specifically for the compilation of spatial planning at national level. In the meantime, other new events occurred during the transitional period, making spatial planning more complicated. The free movement of population looking for a better life encouraged the migration from the less developed northeastern and eastern areas to lowland coastal areas. In addition, the movement of people from rural centers to cities caused great concentrations of population in big cities. Because of this movement and the replacement of the governmental developer by the private one, the trend towards fragmented construction has increased with no regard for public land, arable land, and tourist areas. A new geography of built up areas has been created. The massive introduction of private means of transportation, causing a massive increase in traffic, with an undeveloped road network, has created severe problems in urban and interurban traffic and has influenced the degree of air pollution and environmental deterioration, influencing the inadequate support for living standards improvement.

FACTS

The existing documentations in planning studies in Durres are:

Master Plan for the Port of Durres approved in 2000 (now under revision process by Royal Haskoning -Dutch company); Old Durres Town Master Plan -2006/2007 Prepared by the University of Pescara-Faculty of Architecture-DART-Italy; Territorial context map; Boundaries of central Durres Town map; Proposed planning layout map; Planned residential density map; Functional standards map; Infrastructures & sustainable transport system map; Map with 6 strategic projects; Transformation regimes map; Strategic Project on western waterfront; Strategic project on the south dock tourist port; Strategic project on Byzantine walls and on King Zog Palace; Strategic project on Epidamos street urban axis; Strategic project on the Railway Station-Martyrs park urban axis; Urban Master Plan of Durres city still in force (initially covering an area of 2,800 ha; enlarged to 7,800 ha in 1999).



FIG. 1: Durres City



FIG. 2: Proposal for the Regulator Plan of Durres, (Central Technical Archive of Construction-AQTN, Tirana), 1987

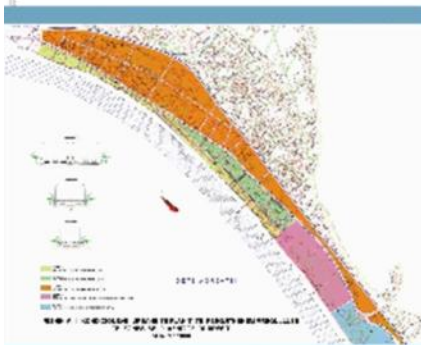


FIG. 3: Plan of the Coastal Area 2005 (Urban Planning Office, Municipality of Durres)



FIG. 4: Plan of Ilirai Square, Durres

ANALYSIS

The last Regulatory Plan of the city of Durres was approved in 1987. In spite of all drastic transformations that have occurred in Durres since 1990, and their reflections on the space, the municipality of Durres did not attain a comprehensive Master Plan and started preparing Partial Urban Studies. In all these years, the process of transformation and the uncontrolled construction had already invaded parts of the city, transforming their spatial appearance, structure and identity. This phenomenon occurred particularly in the city centre where the pressure of all actors involved in the procedure of planning, and most importantly of all that of property (land and capital) owners, and eventually the rent and profitability were higher. The main purpose was to "freeze" the development in central areas presenting values and having potential within the city, until urban studies and master plans were prepared for them.

In July 2005, the municipality of Durres launched the international competition for a city center plan. An Albanian-Italian group edited the new plan titled Integrated Urban Plan of the Old City of Durres. This plan defines the possible development of the territory focusing on the increasing welfare of citizens, the reduction of inequalities, the reduction of risks (seismic, hydro-geological, urban and environmental pollution) and the preservation of the rights of the present and future population.

FINDINGS

In 2005, was approved the plan for the reassessment of urban criteria of the Coastal Area Master Plan, which simply proposed a "zoning" that defined one only urban criteria - the height (of 6, 8 and 10 floors). This zoning affects the prices of the land in the area. However, the constraints will assure that local government will get additional incomes, through secure tax collection and finance in the city's infrastructure. The new plan provides the link between the new developments with respect to existing volumetric. For each of the basic urban unit is placed a limit value that should not be surpassed: a max value for residential density (inhabitants/ha) and a max indicator of construction territory (inhabitants/ha). According to the plan, the max density allowed would be 320 inhabitant/ha. The application of this plan will expand the opportunities for investment in public infrastructure, public green spaces, schools, parking. In addition, it predicts where would be the new public transport lines like trams. The plan will protect the archeological and cultural heritage of the city. Although this plan has very important objectives, there are some difficulties implementing. Putting the density constrains will not help all the inhabitants and will be unequal. The residential units have a very high density. This exclusionary zoning means that those people that did not have money or chance to build a high building will be forced to leave their homes. The constraints will also affect the price of land, will lead to the "waiting game" for higher prices and will misbalance the supply and demand of land market. In addition, the proposal for defining the perimeter of the historical center will block all the constructing activities around the perimeter causing financial damages to the builders and those inhabitants willing to build. However, through these constraints, different deceivers will not destruct the precious heritage of Durres.

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