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**Durrës Seaside Promenade:  
Urban Public versus Private Space**

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## 1 ABSTRACT

This paper explores the spatial transformations of Durrës waterfront – focusing only on the seaside promenade – within a predefined timeframe: late socialist & post socialist era, covering mainly the period of transition from the centralized state socialism to a liberalized, free-market, capitalist economy, a transition phase which lasted for over two decades in Albania. Within this framework, a special concern of the paper is the examination of the impact of political, social and economic actors, the legal and institutional situation in Architecture and planning disciplines as well as the geography and landscape conditions, which have an important role in the space production and transformation process.

Claiming that Durrës City waterfront - its seaside promenade – constitutes one of the most important public spaces and elements of the city structure, this study aims to understand how the urban public space is used, (re)produced and transformed in a post-socialist political system, where the ownership and property relations highly influence the public / private use of space, as well as its unwelcoming or user-friendly features. Furthermore, the phenomenon of “space appropriation” (taking possession or jurisdiction of space and domains such as land, sea, and air; buildings, objects, etc, either temporarily or for a long term) occurring on the public space – mainly on the seaside promenade, will be elaborated from a social, economical, political and spatial perspective.

Finally, by affirming the water-edge as a place, a city asset that continuously calls for users and grabs the attention of developers, the last section of the paper will focus on recent urban interventions and developments on the waterfront aiming its re-structuring and revitalization; and initiatives to enhance the public character of the seaside promenade, and to claim its identity as a public place.

**Keywords:** Waterfront, Post - Socialist City, Space Appropriation, Public vs. Private

## 2 THE PROMENADE: COMPONENT OF THE WATERFRONT & CITY STRUCTURE

One of the main linear elements of the waterfront acting as public space – the seaside promenade - will be analyzed based on both its physical and programmatic features. The promenade, as an urban frontier, acts both as structure and connection. It becomes the tool to make a descriptive and comparative analysis referring to three different periods but focusing on the late socialist and mainly on the post-socialist era. This analysis is developed in order to understand the spatial transformation on this important urban space, thus the waterfront, and the factor affecting this transformation.

### 2.1 The Promenade: Structure and Connection

The promenade in itself is a complex element, which emerges both in building scale and the city scale. In the first one: the "architectural promenade, particularly in its Corbusian format, the design is intended to stimulate the user's gradually unfolding conscious understanding of the complex spatial sequence of the building".<sup>1</sup> In the city scale, the promenade function with the same aim, but in contrast to the building scale, it intends to reveal understanding of the complexity of space and its urbanity. As argued by Rapoport "the pedestrian based streets need to have a lot of complexity at several different scales at once".<sup>2</sup> It is the plane between the water and the costal hill range. The promenade constitutes the border between these two natural-physical elements: the sea and the hill. It is a real edge, a notorious structure and element of the urban form, as well as interface between two entities, the water and the sea, trying to "connect" them. The promenade, as

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<sup>1</sup>Baird, G, 1995, *The Space of Appearance*, the MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, p. 282

<sup>2</sup>Rapoport 1987, in Gronlund, B., "Life and Complexity in Urban space", p.19, available online:  
<http://hjem.get2net.dk/gronlund/Life and complexity.html>

an urban public space, a pedestrian based street that connects the "upper city" and the "lower city" in order to anchor the coastal space in the historical city. The seaside promenade is the part of the city where the condition of "City Confrontation Sea"<sup>3</sup> emerges.

The territory of the seaside promenade, extends towards the southern part of the city, and shares its borders with the sea on the south -west, sharing the boundary with the port on the east and the Grand City Park on the hill at the north. The "direct connection" of the seaside promenade with the city - where the greatest intensity of flux or flow occurs - is created through the square in front of the entrance gate to the port. While, on the eastern part, the seaside promenade is physically (dis)connected with the city through the surrounding Byzantine walls. The topographical features of the ground, are characterised by flat planes by the sea and inclined hillside that slopes up gradually from the east towards west, creating two consecutive peaks at the level +90 m and +120 m.<sup>4</sup> The Residence of King Zog and the Lighthouse, stand on these two hill picks, respectively. The surrounding city walls emerge and define the ridge of the hill, and historical and archaeological monuments such as the towers, the amphitheatre, etc, are attached to this urban structure. Some of the most interesting historical and cultural monuments to mention are: the summer Residence (Villa) of King Zog at the top of the hill, the Castle at a lower level, and the Venetian Tower at the lowest point close to the entrance to the port.

### 3 SPATIO-TEMPORAL TRANSFORMATION ON THE WATERFRONT

In this section of the paper, the intention is to provide with information that illustrate the condition of the city and its waterfront in the pre-socialist and socialist era; examine the important developments and actors involved in them in order to understand the causes that settled the foundations of significant transformation on the city's urban structure and space.

#### 3.1 The Waterfront Development before and during Socialism

Referring to the Regulatory Plan of 1942, the site bordered by the city wall and "Adriatica" Street (the road going parallel to the seashore line), was proposed to be principally a "green public space". The greenery would become denser towards the southwest and end up with a Public Green Park, right at the feet of the hill on top of which the King's Residence was constructed. Obviously, considering the historical importance and cultural values they had, in the Plan of 1942 special attention was paid to the evaluation and designation of the site where the Villa of the King Zog and the Castle are established. In order to preserve the historical heritage, to emphasize and make use of its presence, the master plan proposed a dense green area that would cover the whole site where these monuments are located. They would be "floating structures" on the greenery overlooking towards the sea.

The plan in figure 1 shows the urban design approach towards the Seaside Promenade, its physical relation to the city centre and the port entrance, the position of King's Residence at the hilltop, as well as the emphasis of the archeological elements (city walls, towers).

The aim and design approach towards this part of the city and the waterfront was to keep the area at the most natural state possible; to propose low-rise villa type houses for a distinct, high-income category of people. The idea behind the plan was to make this place a park and emphasize its character as such by also integrating the so far exposed ancient archaeological monuments.

In order to understand the spatial transformation during the socialist system, it is important to identify some features inherent in the system. First, the concept of "private property" did not exist in the sense that the owners did not have the rights to get profits on their property (by selling, renting, etc), it was state or collective property instead; second, the state had total control over the economic source and investments; finally, decision making processes were settled in such a hierarchical way that central government could monitor and control them. Furthermore, the issues of city expansion, its primary function, functional zoning, investment allocation and distribution among sectors (economical, industrial, social, housing, etc) were all state concerns, facts that basically constituted the fundamentals of socialist urban planning.

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<sup>3</sup>Jumsai, 1993, p.210 in Bas Butuner, F., 2003, *Waterfront Revitalization: A new challenge for Urban Development*, Master Thesis, METU, Ankara. Accordingly, the relation between water and city emerges as "Water Confrontation City", "City on Water", "Water City".

<sup>4</sup>Preface of Proposal for the Architectural and Urban Design Project of the Seaside Promenade- Durres, 1983, Archive of Institute of Urban Planning Studies, Tirana



Figure 1: Part of the Regulatory Plan 1942 (Central Technical Archive of Construction, AQTN- Tirana)

Figure 2: View of Durrës City in 1916 (Hoti, A., 2003, DURRËSI: Epidmani-Dyrrahu, GUIDE, Tirana, p. 41)



Figure 3: The Plan of the Seaside Promenade, 1983 (Archive of the Institute of Urban Studies and Projects, Tirana)

Figure 4: The Archaeological Park on the Seaside Promenade, early 80s (City Postcard)

Consequently, the socialist city was designed according to a theory and was developed based on this theory. Within this process, the role and task of the state was to manage all resources essential to accomplish this project and get the final product - the socialist city.

Within this framework, it is important to mention that the guiding principles of architects and city planners regarding urban development had a great influence on the production of space and city itself. While it is remarkable to see that specifically the elements that constitute the waterfront have been subject to great spatial transformations. The promenade itself, as a fundamental component of the waterfront has been analyzed considering both its physical and functional features, which appear to be strongly related to planning strategies and property relations under state socialism.

### 3.1.1 The Seaside Promenade: a Place of Monuments and Ceremonies

The seaside promenade has continuously been an area that had a strong sense of place and good recreational potential. Before going into detail, explaining the content and arguing on the approach of the architectural and urban design project (waterfront development) for the seaside promenade, it is of great interest to mention the legal and executive aspects, which relate to the central planning features of the socialist system. In this respect, from the file of reports and all attached documentations to the architectural and urban design project for the Seaside Promenade in Durrës<sup>5</sup>, it can be derived that: the terms of reference / design task / project requirements were compiled by the Executive Committee of the Party in the district of Durrës. The design process involved a complete team of experts, who were representatives of: the Institute of Urban Planning Studies and the Office of Urban Planning in the city of Durrës. The Institute of Urban Planning Studies (Instituti i Studimeve dhe Projektmeve Urbanistike -I.S.P.U.) was/is a national institution, under the administration of the Ministry of Construction, specialized in the sphere of territorial planning and urban

<sup>5</sup> Ministria e Ndertimit, Instituti i Studimeve e Projektmeve Nr. 1, Sektori i Urbansitikes, 1983, "Studimi Urbanistik dhe Arkitektonik i Shetitores Bregdetare, Durres - Parashtese e Projekt Idese"

planning studies of national, regional and local level. At the present, this institute acts also as a consultant to the Territorial Adjustment Council of the Republic of Albania.<sup>6</sup>

Even though of a smaller scale than the Master Plan / Regulatory Plan, the Waterfront Promenade Plan was a comprehensive project that involved and necessitated the collaboration of professionals of different disciplines such as: urban planners and designers, architects, civil engineers, projects manager, specialists of traffic and circulation system, geological / hydrological / seismological engineers, landscape architects, cost estimators and economists. The fact that the planning process involved a considerable number of institutions, the central and local government, a heterogeneous group of professionals, and that the Technical and Scientific Council in the Ministry of Construction controlled it, to later be approved by the Council of Ministers, is the true evidence of a centralized planning strategy under state socialism. According to the authors, the aim of this study/project was the development the waterfront, which at the time constituted the only interface and space of confrontation between the city and the sea and its transformation into an area of residential and social character rich in urban and architectural language and expressions that would fit to the context. The seaside promenade was intended to be designed as a user-friendly environment and functional territory equipped with necessary landscape elements, parks and gardens, as well as recreational activities, all open to the used of public.<sup>7</sup> Even though the city had the tendencies to develop in the inland rather than closer to the water, the people traditionally have considered the seaside promenade as the main public space of the city. As a result, taking into account its physical characteristics such as location, relation and role in the urban structure and the proximity to the water, as well as its functionality the seaside waterfront appears to be the most living urban place/ public space in the city.

Public space, then, implies public domain, collective social use and multi- functionality. It is physically characterized by its accessibility, which makes it a factor of centrality.<sup>8</sup>

The project site extended from the port entrance, at its intersection point with the boulevard leading to the centre, till the road turn, and then along the seaside till the place called "Currila". It covered a surface area of 312 hectares with a costal line length of 1100 ml. It is interesting to mention of an urban intervention to the seaside promenade that had taken place in 1960's. That scheme proposed widening (by 60 m) and extending (in length, by 900 m) the promenade towards the sea.<sup>9</sup>

Evidently, this operation re-structured the promenade, changed its physical morphology and inevitably set the ground for the creation of a new relation between the sea and the land. The seaside promenade is a site outside of the Byzantine city walls, overlooking the sea. There were some buildings of social function and architectural qualities that had emerged since the 1930s till the early 1980s, and some others of good construction conditions of 2 to 4 floors, all integrated in the design of project. Among the buildings of the Italian Era (30- 40s) valuable to mention are: Hotel Iliria at the intersection of the road going along the city walls, leading to the top hill, at the Residence of King Zog and the road taking to "Currila" bay at the north, the tobacco factory, and a number of villa type houses. In addition, there were a few constructions of social character, which had taken place during the socialist period. They were: the open-air swimming pool, the new archaeological museum, the "House of Military Officers" - facility of the Ministry of Defence, the orphanage, a high school, primary schools and a series of private houses of 1-2 floors, located on the inclined plane of the hill. The upper part of the hill was characterized by dense vegetation, constituting thus a green park for the city.<sup>10</sup>

One of the most important and dominant features of the "seaside promenade" in the early 80s, was the "archaeological park" bordered by the retaining wall in-between the sea and sidewalk, and the road leading to the northern bay. In reality, this park was an open space where some archaeological findings were exposed. It is important to mention that in the report it is underlined the fact that at the actual condition (talking about early 1980s), the archaeological park failed to play the role it was designed for. This was one part of the seaside promenade that under design or planning directives as well as spontaneously, in an illegal or

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<sup>6</sup> Draft of the Law on Urban Planning in Albania, 2002

<sup>7</sup> Preface of Proposal for the Architectural and Urban Design Project at the Seaside Promenade- Durres, 1983, Archive of Institute of Urban Planning Studies, Tirana, p. 1

<sup>8</sup> Bordja, J., 1998, "Citizenship and Public Space", last accessed in August 2005 (<http://urban.cccb.org/urbanLibrary/htmlDocs/urbanLibrary.asp?gIdioma=C&gDoc=A011C.html&gPDF=A011-C.pdf>),

<sup>9</sup> Ministria e Ndertimit, Instituti i Studimeve e Projektmeve Nr. 1, Sektori I Urbansitikes, 1983, "Studimi Urbanistik dhe Arkitektonik i Shetitores Bregdetare, Durres-Parashtese e Projekt Idese", p.2

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 5

uncontrolled way, did undergo essential transformations in the years that followed, but always perpetuating its function as a public space characterized by different levels of urbanity, influenced by economical, social and political factors.

The predominant "functionalism" in modern urban planning soon disqualified public space in assigning it for specific uses. In some cases it was mixed up with highway administration, or submitted to the requirements of "public order". In the more auspicious cases, priority was given to its "monumental or urban embellishment" value. Or it was connected with commercial and sometimes cultural activities. In less fortunate cases, it was used as a mechanism of social segregation, either to exclude or to concentrate by way of price accessibility, social image, etc.<sup>11</sup>

The architectural and urban design project for the Seaside Promenade - Durrës 1983-1984 (see fig.3) expressed it in different terms would be a waterfront development project, whose considerable part was implemented in the coming years. Several factors and considerations influenced the fundamental design criteria of the seaside promenade. They consisted in the significance of the location and the relation settled between the seaside promenade and the city. Then, it is the magnificent features and values of the landscape where the sea, the promenade, the archaeological park, the buildings and structures, the cultural monuments, the green park and the hills of the city merge. In addition, it is the great importance the seaside promenade has as a recreational area within the city. Finally, the contribution and role it plays in structuring the interface in-between two entities: the sea and the city. Whereas the design principles<sup>12</sup> consisted in the:

- Survey and classification of the existing buildings, and the integration in the project of those having historical and architectural values, those housing important functions and being in good conditions. (In this respect, taking into account the architectural and construction values of the Tobacco Factory, as well as its size and location, the renewal of this industrial building was proposed and its transformation into a structure that would house social activities);
- Proposal of new residential buildings as housing blocks, which would be located on the territory "bordered" by the Archaeological Museum in the east, the sea (the seaside walk) on the south and west, and the park on the north;
- Construction of more buildings of social character aiming the harmonization between the old-existing and new ones, and also paying particular attention to the natural conditions of the site (sea, topography, landscape, geological features and seismic constraints);
- Further development and the transformation of the archaeological park into a Grand Open-air Museum of great educative values exhibiting pieces of history and informing about it (this park would also function as an important recreational public space; as a significant element for the connection of cultural monuments-the city walls with their fortresses and the amphitheatre-with the new archaeological museum);
- "Enrichment" of the seaside with structures hosting recreational and commercial activities (such as cafes and restaurants, a pier in the sea for anchoring the boats, extensions of the seaside-walkway retaining wall towards the water, stair platforms);
- Economizing with space that would lead to an acceptable ratio of territory usage by proposing residential buildings higher than 5 floors (the heights of buildings varied from 4 to 10 floors);
- Creation and designation of public open spaces, which would accommodate social activities, green spaces, playgrounds, etc;

A very essential and significant documentation attached to the file of Architectural and Urban Design Project for the Seaside Promenade in Durrës, is the detailed cost estimation and economical analyses report. Among the notes in the report, it would be of interest to mention two, which inevitably have affected the spatial transformation and actual appearance of the waterfront. Those regard the tendency and supported idea to construct housing blocks of lowest cost possible by proposing and promoting prefabricated concrete panels construction. Furthermore, the documentations prove the exclusion of the proposed intervention (one of the options) to widen up the seaside promenade - walkway by 100 to 150m from the shore, with the earth fill attained from the excavation to deepen the water basis within the port territory.<sup>13</sup> These proposals were not

<sup>11</sup> Bordja, J., 1998 "Citizenship and Public Space", last accessed in August 2005

(<http://urban.cccb.org/urbanLibrary/htmlDocs/urbanLibrary.asp?gIdioma=C&gDoc=A011C.html&gPDF=A011-C.pdf>)

<sup>12</sup> Relacion i Studimit te Shetitores Bregdetare Durres (Report on the Urban Design Project for the Seaside Promenade)

<sup>13</sup> Reçencë mbi Studimin Urbanistik dhe Arkitektonik te Shetitores Bregdetare, Durres, 1983 (Remarks on the Urban Design Project for the Seaside Promenade, 1983)

defined as impossible interventions, but rather as long-term goals, which lead to the conclusion that "planning in the socialist country was comprehensive and it also controlled the financial-economic basis of urbanization".<sup>14</sup>

Finally yet importantly, regarding its significance in the design project for the Seaside Promenade, attained and controlled by the central government in a socialist system, it could be argued that the construction of the "Monument of Resistance" was of great importance (see fig.6). The promenade traditionally constituted the most essential, even central public space for the coastal city of Durrës. The memorial of Mujo Ulqinaku, the first warrior to die on April 7, 1939 - the day of Italian occupation, symbolized / embodied the resistance of Albanian people against the enemy. It stood monumental on the axis of the promenade - this space of confrontation between land and water, right on the "entrance" to the promenade, where it met the port.



Figure 5: Picture of the Seaside Promenade and the Monument of Resistance in 2010s ( <http://www.panoramio.com/photo/66659197>) Last accessed on March 2012.

Figure 6: The Monument of Resistance at the present time, 2004-2005 (Photography taken by Valentin Stanaj)

### 3.2 Transformations on the Waterfront after Socialism (1990s – on): The effect of public and private interests in shaping the space

The waterfront is an important urban element and urban place that in the post-socialist urban condition and under the market forces, was and still is undergoing drastic transformation and development processes. As a result of new relationships settled between the property (land and capital) and the owners (landlords and developers) monitored by the state and law, involving also urban designers and architects, the space; specifically the waterfront is experiencing the "demonstration of the current cult of the iconographic landmark building"<sup>15</sup>, which is in search of a spectacular image capable of attracting tourism and business. In a market economy, which is characteristic of post-socialist system in Albania, "the use of the parcel is auctioned off to the highest bidder, and the value of the land capitalizes this maximum income". In addition, "considering capital and land in the economic context, certainly explained many facades of the urban question"<sup>16</sup>, which constitutes an argument presented by Günay, when inquiring the issue of urban development and architecture in capitalist countries, which perfectly fits to the actual urban condition of Durrës city and its waterfront.

#### 3.2.1 The City in a Post-socialist System

This part of the research on the transformation on the waterfront focusing on two consecutive political systems and specifically during and after socialism, intends to give a general picture of the condition the city was after the demise of communism and the emergence of a new system post-socialist, pro-capitalist one. The last 50 years of Albanian history have been characterized by political, cultural, and social change of

<sup>14</sup> Enyedi, G., 1996, "Urbanization under Socialism", in Andrusz, G., Harloe, M., Szeleyi, I., (eds.), *Cities after Socialism, Urban and Regional Change and conflict in Post-Socialist Societies*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford UK, p.111

<sup>15</sup> Frampton, K., 2004, "Megaform as Urban Landscape and other Strategems", Interview by Declerck, J., Ryan, M., Tattara, M., in *Tirana Metropolis* Berlage Institute Research Report, Rotterdam, p. 25

<sup>16</sup> Gunay, B., 1999, *Property Relations and Urban Space*, MFY, METU, Ankara, p.4

extraordinary intensity, which Albania wilfully was self-isolated from; and to which it suddenly found being brutally propelled and powerfully attached. During this period the idea that change corresponds to a dialectic development in society and culture has been substituted by the notion that the present is a period dominated by pluralism, a condition in which diverging trends-and the idea of change itself- instead of evolving according to a unidirectional movement, tend towards a kind of "conceptual stability" in which the representation of things is no longer normative or hortative, but descriptive and neutral. This is a condition in which the world is no longer perceived through the transparency of ideal models (such as the idea of a dialectic future vis-a-vis the past), but through the opaque sum total of its own fragments, unbound by any one consequential structure.<sup>17</sup>

The post-socialist cities, including those in Albania, underwent very crucial transitions after the 90s. The most fundamental changes, which inevitably influenced the production of space, were the shift from the central to free-market economy, as well as the appearance of private property notion against the state ownership pattern. In a more emphasized way than other contemporary cities, the post-socialist ones seem to "display a chaotic behavior, which is part of a process of reformulation of orders rather than a sign of their disappearances".<sup>18</sup>

In order to understand the process of transformation and to create a better "image" of the post-socialist city, it is of interest and help to mention once more the three distinctive features of the socialist city, as stated by Harloe referring to Szelenyi. Accordingly, the socialist city: first, achieved industrialization with relatively low rates of population growth and low spatial concentration; second, the urbanism level was not high, which in fact meant low diversity and economizing with space that lead to low inner-city densities, and less urban marginality; finally, the socialist city had a characteristic ecological structure.<sup>19</sup> What is so obvious in the urban and spatial transformation of the post-socialist city at the present is that the above-defined aspects of socialist urbanization are under a process of dissolution since 20 years now. The transition of the Albanian society from a socialist system to a still undefined, but definitely pro-capitalist one is very critical. It deserves further detailed studies. This condition can be defined with the term Kenneth Frampton uses: "Interregnum". This state is characterized by:

...a universal misdistribution of wealth and education, which invokes a number of casually interconnected factors, from the demise of socialism to the rise of fundamentalist religion, from the ruthless exploitation of non-renewable resources to the pollution of the biosphere, from the globalization of the economy, to the decline of the nation-state, from the commodification of the spectacular to the dissolution of the rooted culture.<sup>20</sup>

Within this framework, the notions used by Sargin, of recent phenomena and developments "exploitation, land-allocation, commodification, private ownership", which critically engage with issues of contemporary needs "emancipation, appropriation, use- value, public ownership"<sup>21</sup>, give a more complete picture of the process of production of space and the challenge of urban development in Albania, at the time speaking. Durrës was one of the Albanian cities to experience the crisis of transition that had already invaded most of the East European Countries in the most extensive way. Its post-socialism condition, so similar to many other countries and cities that had the same fate, could be clearly described through this paragraph, which actually depicts the state of Pogradec city in Albania, so explicitly "spoken" by Sargin:

[the city] ...since its first days of political "re-becoming has been offering inbetween conditions where such polarities as planned vs unplanned, historical vs ahistorical, collective vs individual, liberated vs commodified, stand together and create their liminal spaces, either in the form of post-industrial or local simulacra.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Aureli P.V., and Zenghelis E., 2004, "Tirana Metropolis: The City as Archipelago", in *Tirana Metropolis* Berlage Institute Research Report, Rotterdam, p. 19

<sup>18</sup> Zaera P., A., 2001, "ORDER OUT OF CHAOS, THE Material Organization of Advanced Capitalism", in Mapelli, E.G., (ed), *Urban Environments*, Willey Academy, p.179

<sup>19</sup> Harloe, M., 1996, "Cities in the Transition", in Andrusz, G., Harloe, M., Szeleyi, I., (eds), *Cities after Socialism, Urban and Regional Change and conflict in Post-Socialist Societies*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford UK, p.26

<sup>20</sup> Frampton, K., 2002, "In this Interregnum", in Henket, H. J. and Heynen, H., (eds) *BACK FROM UTOPIA, The challenge of the Modern Movement*, p. 80

<sup>21</sup> Sargin, G.A., 2004, "Hybrid Spaces: hybrida, hibrida" in Sargin, G.A. (ed), *Hybrid space*, METU Press, Faculty of Architecture, Ankara, p.5

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p.5

The reasons of experiencing such difficulties during the transition period, for the city of Durrës are various. First, there are economical ones: the fact that the entire industrial sector was undergoing critical difficulties, even failures and destructions. This directly affected the port activity, thus the city sustainability and economy itself. Second, the fact of the city being an important administrative centre, and the proximity to Tirana - the capital city of Albania-made it experience more intensely the political transformations and its consequences compared to other cities. The third reason is related to the fact that by being a port city, thus a gate to the water-land, which before and immediately after the fall of the communist regime was considered to the highest degree as the desirable "wonderland", it underwent through the deep social crisis generated by the occurrence of "exodus". The phenomenon of "exodus" (1991) or the "escapade" of thousands of people to a "wonderland" they had dreamt of for 45 years but never really seen was their most courageous expression and position against the political system in Albania, and the total crisis floating over the country at that time. The post-socialist situation of the city of Durrës is reflected on a contrasting image of it that appears as such: on the one hand there is a historical past with great cultural importance, strongly connected to topography and landscape which is well defined by geophysical trends, and on the other hand a contemporary urban condition which is extremely degraded.<sup>23</sup>

### 3.2.2 The Seaside Promenade: Urban Public versus Private Space

The development of the city in a resettled continuation within a time span of more than 3000 years now, has produced a rich urban system whose components: monuments, artefacts, urban tissue and fabric are the evidences of various civilizations and cultures overlaid on a particularly beautiful and favourable landscape.

The city area on the hill – the natural park - overlooking the port and the sea is under continuous pressure of development and constructions due to the geographic and morphologic conditions. Besides, this specific section of the consolidated city is rich in archaeological resources and historical values. This heritage and the preserved sources could increase the quality and significance of the place, and transform it into a valuable asset of tourism development. Even though there is a trial to raise the awareness on the importance of the archaeological site the actual condition offers facts that go completely against these initiatives. In most of the cases, the new constructions not only are they unable to establish a dialog between with the urban features and elements, but sometimes, they emerge on archaeological sites, destroying thus the cultural treasure. On the contrary, it is important that the exposed monuments become an integral part of a new urban system, which would accompany whoever visitor or resident in the drift through the promontory park and along the seaside promenade.

Throughout this analysis, the transition from a centralized state socialism to a liberalized economy of capitalism has been refereed to and underlined as the crucial factor that generated transformation of the space and change in the physical layout of city and identity of its components, elements of the urban form.

Within the scope of the study and analysis of the spatial transformation on the waterfront before, during and finally after socialism, we encounter the natural tendency of designing and utilizing the seaside promenade mainly as a public space, or in order to define better: as a place open to use of public. Referring to the pre-socialist era, the site including the promenade was perceived as a park, where the greenery and the natural relation between water and land dominated and were strengthened. While analysing the characteristics of place during socialism, the attitude of designing the space for the public by controlling the process through central planning, and the tendency to enrich the public space by providing facilities that would house social, educational, cultural and political activities fitting to the ideology of the system was observed. These buildings along the promenade are museums, schools, swimming pools and residential blocks, as well as monuments and spaces of parades (see fig.7). Quoting Andrusz `the change in content and function applies equally to those squares and boulevards, which catered for the "mass spectacle". The monumentalism of the space and the rituals conducted in them were designed to create feelings of security, permanence and pride among the people and their rulers`.<sup>24</sup>

Whereas nowadays, the seaside promenade in particular, becomes furnished and ornamented with the actually ephemeral "structures", such as the inflatable Disneyland castle, or roller – carrousel (see fig.8).

<sup>23</sup> Pavia, R., 2000, "Foundation Studies" in *Un Piano per Durazzo -Durrës Master Plan*, p.199

<sup>24</sup> Andrusz, G., 1996, "Structural Change and Boundary Instability" in Andrusz, G., Harloe, M., Szeleyi, I., (eds), *Cities after Socialism, Urban and Regional Change and conflict in Post-Socialist Societies*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford UK, p.65

Monuments and ceremonial space are replaced by the ordinary. Referring to Andruezs: "the great men who guided the destiny of their states, from the top of plinths and mausolea overlooking the squares", if not replaced, they are challenged by small men feeding the population from the ambulatory stands.<sup>25</sup> The new system defined either as post-socialist or capitalist one, provided different scenarios to be put in play on the stage of public domain. A recognizable change in the city in the post- socialist state was "the conversion of the urban landscape of socialism, its squares and monumental places, to commercialism".<sup>26</sup> In addition, according to Harloe,

...with the explosion of consumerism and the provision of leisure, recreation and cultural consumption by the market, new values are placed on activities previously subsidized by the state.<sup>27</sup>



Figure 7: The Monument of Resistance and a newly constructed high-raised building (Photo by Blerti Kroj, in "Tirana Metropolis", Berlage Institute Research Studio Tirana: A Modern European Capital Report)

Figure 8: A carousel on the Seaside Promenade Site, 2012 (personal archive)

Based on the Marxist analysis and approach towards space, Gunay claims that "it is produced within particular relations, which give to space a form, a function, a social signification"<sup>28</sup>, since "Space is a material product, in relation with other material elements".<sup>29</sup> Moreover, he argues that property plays a decisive role in the production of urban space by acting as "an institution governing social relations, evolution of power conflicts and generation of symbolic values".<sup>30</sup> As a consequence, in the transition condition, when the state has not yet positioned itself as a "dominator of the public space" by controlling the real property or as a "regulator of the capitalist society" by adjusting the property relations, a conflict between public and private emerges. This phenomena best materializes on the public space, and specifically on the waterfront promenade, where the pressures of development and resistance as well have been extensive, leading to a contradiction between public and private property and space.

### 3.2.3 The Phenomenon of Space Appropriation

In the previous sections of the paper, it was argued that in the early 90s and during the state of difficult transition, a negative reaction towards the previous political and economic system that lasted/dominated for 45 consecutive years was painfully evident. This approach had severe reflection on the space. In the framework of property relations, the feature that had characterized the socialist system and represented it to people was "state property" and "the common socialist property". As a consequence, with the demise of the

<sup>25</sup> Andrusz, G., 1996, "Structural Change and Boundary Instability" in Andrusz, G., Harloe, M., Szeleyi, I., (eds), *Cities after Socialism, Urban and Regional Change and conflict in Post-Socialist Societies*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford UK, p.65

<sup>26</sup> Harloe, M., 1996, "Cities in the Transition", in Andrusz, G., Harloe, M., Szeleyi, I., (eds), *Cities after Socialism, Urban and Regional Change and conflict in Post-Socialist Societies*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford UK, p.13

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p.9

<sup>28</sup> Gunay, B., 1999, *Property Relations and Urban Space*, MFY, ISBN: METU, Ankara, p.8

<sup>29</sup> Castells, M., 1977, *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach*, in Gunay, B., 1999, *Property Relations and Urban Space*, MFY, ISBN: METU, Ankara, p.8

<sup>30</sup> Gunay, B., 1999, *Property Relations and Urban Space*, MFY, ISBN: METU, Ankara, p.9

system, people revolted and reacted in different ways towards what so far had been known and considered as public space, which in fact was state property. In a condition where the property ownership was entirely vague, the reaction towards the "idolized" and "divine" state property emerged in the form of its destruction, re-possession, appropriation, and invasion.

Within this context, in the early 1990s to intensify even more during the period 1995-1998, the phenomenon of appropriation of public space on the seaside promenade occurred. There could be different ways of space appropriation, but this specific case had the greatest impact on the economy of the city and the space, for the fact that it appeared as an "invasion" of the so far recognized as the best representative public open space of the seaside in the port city of Durrës. Thus, in the state of unclear definitions of property relations, many legal-illegal structures emerged on the waterfront promenade. Thought not surely planned, these constructions followed a spontaneous but logical layout and sense of development, regarding both their positioning on the site and program. These constructions were basically 1 or 2 (with rare exceptions of 3-4) storey buildings working as bars, cafes, restaurants, and hotels (please, see fig.9). Apart from physically occupying the place with the construction itself, the functions they offered temporarily appropriated the open space as well, the walkways, the terraces on the sea, etc, by having chairs and tables outdoor, leading thus to a new form of space appropriation. From the economical point of view, these activities were among the first expressions and practices of free market economy, working as small businesses, thought most of the time being illegal. Another way of description of the new phenomena emerging in the urban space is "the appropriation of public places by market forces".<sup>31</sup>

If we were to define the concept of "appropriation", various definitions of (urban) sociologists would contribute to a great extent. In this respect, referring to Graumann "appropriation is the act or process of taking something as one's own or making one's own", which in our case study appears as "the improper or even illegal taking possession of things, mainly of ownerless goods or unclaimed property".<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, appropriation is related to the concept of "territoriality". Proshansky argues that the persons establish "authority, mastery, or control of a given space by behaviour and activities designed to meet the challenges and complexities of the space".<sup>33</sup> Remaining within the framework, the concept of "appropriation of space" is a much wider and intriguing one. It is both a social and political question.

The appropriation of space phenomenon (by means of man-made structures) on the seaside promenade was a sort of "taking possession or jurisdiction of space and domains (land, sea, and air), buildings, objects either temporarily or for a long term, which occurred through the actions of: "occupation / marking off as possessed-dispossessed, as property-expropriated; fencing in; lawful, legal, illegal occupation; violating rules, norms; buying, selling, leasing, renting".<sup>34</sup> This statement leads to the conclusion that appropriation of space is an ephemeral phenomenon, argument that is further supported by Proshansky, who declares: "appropriation of space is a process based on time duration and continuity".<sup>35</sup> All complex human processes are ongoing events whose consistency emerges from a balance of changes over time in a context of modifying stable structures that establish form and substance for these processes. For this reason, it is far better to view the appropriation of space as a process in which appropriations require continuing "re-appropriation" in order for the efficacy and value of the appropriation or its designed consequences to be maintained.<sup>36</sup> This relates more to the collective appropriation of space by community, inhabitants, individuals of different ages and social status, tourists, etc. As already mentioned before, though not constructed based on a coherent plan made by architects or urban designers, the structures on the waterfront promenade achieved a conscious perception and social appropriation of them by people who took the traditional walk on the public space. The position of the structures and the relation among them and the water - the sea, created a different atmosphere on the seaside promenade. It appears that for any significant appropriation of space, design and construction alone are necessary but not sufficient conditions. Graumann

<sup>31</sup> Costa, X., 2001, "From Hashish in Marseille to Eoromed", in *Making the City by the Sea, Forum and Workshop Marseille 200*, p.21

<sup>32</sup> Graumann, C. F., 1976, "The Concept of appropriation and Modes of Appropriation of Space" in Korosec-Serfaty, P., (ed), *Appropriation of Space- Proceedings of the Strasbourg Conference*, p.113

<sup>33</sup> Proshansky, H. M., 1976, "The Appropriation and Misappropriation of Space", in Korosec -Serfaty, P., (ed), *Appropriation of Space - Proceedings of the Strasbourg Conference*, p. 34

<sup>34</sup> Graumann, C. F., 1976, "The Concept of appropriation and Modes of Appropriation of Space" in Korosec-Serfaty, P., (ed), *Appropriation of Space- Proceedings of the Strasbourg Conference*, p.124

<sup>35</sup> Proshansky, H. M., 1976, "The Appropriation and Misappropriation of Space", in *Ibid*, p. 35

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p. 35

argues that: "people will appropriate places and streets, only to the extent that their individual capacities are ready".<sup>37</sup> This statement strongly related to the political, economical and social situation of Durrës city during this period. In fact, there was an extremely contradictory condition, specifically that of 1997.<sup>38</sup> While, the facts demonstrated an entire national economical collapse, this space continued to be appropriated by structures, people and activity. While rates of unemployment were extremely high and income per capita were at the lowest levels compared to other East European Countries, it was so common to see people, mainly youngsters driving Mercedes and spending time and money in the cafes and bars, right on the place where their concentration was at the highest rates: the promenade, as the "public space".

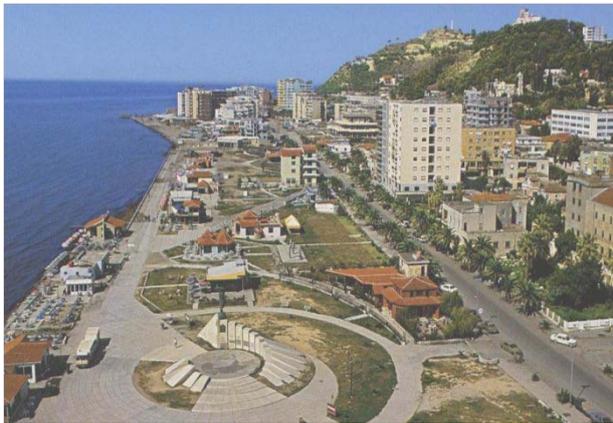


Figure 9: Appropriation of Space - the Seaside Promenade, Durrës, 1995-2000 (City Postcard)

Figure 10: The Seaside Promenade "cleaned out" of illegal constructions, year 2001 (Photo by Valentin Stanaj)



Figure 11: Landscape Project for the Seaside Promenade, 2001-2002 (Urban Planning Office, Municipality of Durrës)

Figure 12: View of the Seaside promenade, Durrës ( <http://globeattractions.com/durres/> , last accessed, March 2012)

It was mentioned earlier that the appropriation of space is both a social and political issue, as well as an ephemeral "event". Therefore, the state continuously encounters the necessity to take position and react towards this phenomenon in the different ways of its appearance. The case of appropriation of the seaside promenade, as a public space, in Durrës was extended in several years in time. In year 2000, the municipal authorities and exclusively the political power, took the decision of pulling down the illegal constructions on the waterfront promenade. The slogan of this action was "Bringing back the Identity of Public Space" (please see fig.10 & 11). During the process of order re-formulation and renewal of the promenade and after, "emptied out" and vacant space was available. Yet, Graumann raises the argument that "having space available, e.g. as private or state property without utilizing it (in the broadest sense of theoretical, aesthetic, practical activities) is not appropriating it".<sup>39</sup> He further elaborates on the idea that generally, "whether and how space is appropriated by relevant activities depends only partly on its physical characteristics, however

<sup>37</sup> Graumann, C. F., 1976, "The Concept of appropriation and Modes of Appropriation of Space" in Korosec- Serfaty, P., (ed), *Appropriation of Space- Proceedings of the Strasbourg Conference*, p. 121

<sup>38</sup> The period coincides with a national economical collapse as a consequence of "pyramid system" - money investment.

<sup>39</sup> Graumann, C. F., 1976, "The Concept of appropriation and Modes of Appropriation of Space" in Korosec- Serfaty, P., (ed), *Appropriation of Space- Proceedings of the Strasbourg Conference*, p. 120

well they may have been designed. The kind of appropriation is largely due to the level of actualization which the individual potentialities have already attained".<sup>40</sup>

In the conclusion to the discussion on the "appropriation of space", it is possible to say that in the analyzed case, there are two types of space appropriation: one physical that in other term could be expressed as "invasion of public space" by illegal constructions, which nevertheless continued to generate "appropriation of space" by public-people. The second one is crucial in defining the complexity of space and urbanity of the place.

### 3.2.4 Restructuring and Development: Commodification of the Waterfront

In the previous section, the phenomenon of "space appropriation" was examined and questioned. The initiative of claiming back the public character and identity of place went along with other urban development on the waterfront, and urban interventions aiming its re-design, re-structuring and order re-formulation. During this process, what prevailed was:

...the hegemony of form was restored, but the desire, in a pluralist culture, to remain in the forefront of the market place, prevailed and the problem of architecture's accountability in making the city was passed over. As a result, in a society that celebrates the demise of our post-democratic, global anti-culture, the primacy of form is now being misrepresented with self-referential and narcissistic "landmarks" that turn their back on the city.<sup>41</sup>

Influenced by this drastic transformation, the call goes to architects, designers and perhaps even more to those who administer or manage space, whose crucial interest and concern should be "the continuing attempts of individuals and groups to maintain and enhance their appropriations of space over time in the face of changes in physical settings, the emergence of new priorities and value demands, and changes in individuals or group itself"<sup>42</sup>, in order to design and produce living and valuable places, which make the city. Both in architecture and urban planning, the activities of the professionals involve the "manipulation of space", as defined by Stringer. Space constitutes, independently of any consideration of property, an important resource of every person, individual and thus, society. Stringer further argues: "the results of manipulation of space can readily be shown to have implications for people's activities. In this sense, architects, planners and their clients, whether knowingly or not, often exercise power over others. This is a political matter".<sup>43</sup> This is an idea that further supports the argument of strong relationship among property (land and capital), law, state and politics, planning theory, urban design approaches and architecture, and finally society and urban space.

Contemporarily, the phenomenon of waterfront development is analyzed and discussed within the framework of the most recent spatial transformations occurring on the water's edge worldwide, and the emergence of the (post)modern waterfront. To elaborate on this issue, we might refer to Harvey who argues that the occurrence of waterfront revitalization or development is the spatial reflection of "the uneven development, both between sectors and geographical regions"<sup>44</sup>, a result of "a new regime of accumulation coupled with quite a different system of political and social regulation"<sup>45</sup>, which are characteristics of capitalism, as well as the demonstration of the globalization process that exemplify the features of postmodernism. Based on these facts and declarations, it is possible to argue that it is through the processes of *commodification* and *spectacle-isation* that the so-called: *postmodern waterfronts* have been created. Harvey claims that the "fleeting qualities of a postmodernist aesthetics, celebrate difference, ephemerality, spectacle, fashion, and the *commodification* of cultural forms".<sup>46</sup> Beside, the demands of consumer society, the spontaneity of the postmodern life style, generated the necessity "to accelerate the turnover time in consumption", which "has

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Aureli, P.V., and Zenghelis, E., 2004, "Tirana Metropolis: The City as Archipelago", in *Tirana Metropolis*, Berlage Institute Research Report, Rotterdam, p. 21

<sup>42</sup> Proshansky, H. M., 1976, "The Appropriation and Misappropriation of Space", in Korosec - Serfaty, P., (ed), *Appropriation of Space - Proceedings of the Strasbourg Conference*, p.35

<sup>43</sup> Stringer, P., 1976, "A Participatory-relational Theory for Architectural Psychology", in Korosec- Serfaty, P., (ed), *Appropriation of Space- Proceedings of the Strasbourg Conference*, p.121

<sup>44</sup> Harvey, D., 1989, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, p. 147

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p.147

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p.156

lead to a shift of emphasis from production of goods. to the production of events (such as spectacles)".<sup>47</sup> Because of the physical, social, cultural, commercial, spiritual and material features inherent in them, the waterfronts generate extensive flow of investments and spontaneous revenues. This process converts the place, in this case: the waterfront; into a commodity, which needs to be developed, used and ultimately exploited.

The waterfront redevelopment, being a phenomenon that began in early 1960s in the United States and contemporary in England, blossomed in 1970s, accelerated in 1980s and nowadays continues to spread all over the world, as a planning issue has been reduced to a "waterfront package project", thus a commodity, which is produced to be copied and further consumed in different place and geographies of the world. The post-socialism urban developments in Albania have caused the "contamination" of Durrës waterfront development by the features common to various worldwide water cities. The ingredients of these "waterfront formulae" are well defined: "a festival marketplace, an aquarium, office buildings, condominium apartments and perhaps a hotel".<sup>48</sup> These operations and projects, including the one in Durrës, intend the design of places that would compete in the global market of capitalism and would fulfil the demands of the consumer society. Looking at the urban context, the model that started to be applied in Durrës waterfront constitutes of a mix of residence, work, leisure, entertainment and mainly commercial facilities, most of them to be included in the new pier structure -Pista – an artificial land construction over water.



Figure 13: View of Durrës waterfront from the Port Pier, 2012 (personal archive)

Figure 14: Closer view of the Pier – Pista (still under construction, in 2012) from the Seaside Promenade (personal archive)

Looking at the world-wide examples, their results and impacts on the social space, we encounter the fact that the insertion of these project-types did not always generate positive and successful results in various countries and cultures, unless their waterfront planning approaches "paid close attention to the local sense of place and waterfront-related uses".<sup>49</sup> In most of the cases, the waterfront emerges as historic, cultural, environmental, recreational, residential, working, or as eclectic, mixed-use water's edge. Consequently, their development includes a series of critical issues that are environmental problems, urban design approach subjects, historical and social concerns, property matters, etc, which sometimes find solution and reflection on the architectural style of the built environment.

The role of the authorities that financially support or manage these projects is very crucial and determinant for their success or failure. Local governments, chamber of commerce, and various institutions manage some redevelopment schemes publicly; whereas some others are managed privately (by companies, investors etc). Considering the importance of the place, in the case of Durrës, as an important public space as well as an urban element, the cooperation and partnership between the public and the private entities, seems to be the most appropriate collaboration model that can assure some success in the waterfront development process.

### 3.2.5 Waterfront Revitalization Project – the Folded Landscape

Time-wise, the starting point of the waterfront revitalization process was October 2008, when the Municipality of Durrës - the client of this project - and Ave Consulting - the engineering group, invited a team of 3 young architects to 'become the designers' of the project. Public works in Albania are usually

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p.157

<sup>48</sup> Gordon, D., 2002, *Waterfront Planning*, Queen's University Kingston, Ontario Canada; in IESBS, (available online on EBSCOhost)

<sup>49</sup> Breen, A and Rigby, D, 1994, *Urban Waterfronts: Cities Reclaim Their Edge*, New York: McGraw Hill, p.14

developed through some tender procedures. The funding for both design and implementation of the project was obtained from the city budget. Thus, this project was a public investment on a formerly privately appropriated space. Within this framework, it is crucial to mention the actors involved in the process:



Figure 15: View of the Seaside promenade – Shetitore pas Pistes, looking southeast direction, October 2010 (personal archive)

Figure 16: View of the Seaside promenade – Shetitore pas Pistes, looking northwest direction, October 2010 (personal archive)

1- the client, thus the Municipality of Durrës, and its representatives, including the mayor and vice-mayor who were following the process with the highest interest; they represented the public interest; 2- the private sector - represented by the businesses / services (bars, cafes, restaurants, please see fig.15 &16) that were appropriating the public space for the their own interest; 3- the designers and collaborators: architects, urban designers, landscape consultants, engineering team of different disciplines (civil engineers, road engineers, electrical engineers etc).

While, the role of the client was mainly positive and decisive, though sometimes intrusive as well, up to the point of affecting the design decisions, the interest of the private sector and its impact on the urban space was usually refraining and resistant. This project and the process it went through, is actually a good example for illustrating the urban development challenge, in between public and private domain. One part of the project was altered during the process to give more importance and space to the public use, while the other part of the project – the Pier Front Square - will never be implemented, since some time after the approval of the landscape design (waterfront revitalization project) the construction of the Pier (Pista) was accelerated and a 2/3 storey high construction emerged. The private interest seemed to have overcome the ‘resistance’ of the public domain.

The spatial and urban landscape re-organization, the revitalization and the re-programming of Durrës waterfront, was conceived as a composition of four public spatial experiences, four atmospheres which are derived both from the form and the experience (society, behavior) inherent in the very ‘unique’ and specificity of the place’s elements. They emerge having strong references to the ‘spirit of the place’. Specifically, the ‘Folded Landscape’ project (see fig.17 &18), indicated as the 4 urban Furniture and 7 Cast Shadows’, is aligned in a narrow strip of land, squeezed between the density of gastronomic facilities and the sea. This ‘atmosphere’ of the projects transmits a three - dimensional resonance with the water surface. The main formal elements in this project are the four urban furniture – an urban bench or sofas, and seven ‘shelter’ element that cast shadow; it is a design with considerable formal variety held together by a coherent overall form, which as already emphasized is in full reverberation with the water, the waves. A poetically description of the feature of this project, would be provided quoting Prominski and Koutroufinis ‘... a folded or undulated plane: an imminent decision follows for a while the crest of the wave and the unforeseeably and suddenly falls to one of the sides’.<sup>50</sup>

The focus on geometric composition that unfolds as three dimensional and structural rather than as a pattern, perceived as flat, is very significant. Within this context, the flat ground, different from the folded urban furniture, is designed to be clad in black color stones, laid in a very neutral pattern. Furthermore, the urban benches are extremely functional. Designed and clad in wood - a very warm and welcoming natural material,

<sup>50</sup> Prominski, M. and Koutroufinis, S.: 2009, *Folded Landscapes - Deleuze’s Concept of the Fold and Its Potential for Contemporary Landscape Architecture in Landscape Journal*, Vol. 28 Issue 2, p. 157

with an appropriate and slope - very comfortable for people to sit and lay on, that incorporates drainage system, offering also shelter from the sun, ensures that form and function could melt in one. In addition, the 'folded' structure demonstrates high consideration for the human body, privacy and appeal for other senses, not vision alone.



Figure 17: People using/appropriating the public space. Picture of the Seaside promenade – Shetitore pas Pistes, after implementation, March 2011 (personal archive)

Figure 18: Picture of the Urban Benches and Shadow Casters, March 2011 (personal archive)

#### 4 CONCLUDING NOTES

In this research paper, the Seaside or Seafront Promenade was extensively analysed, since it constitutes a very important physical component of the Waterfront, hence the city structure of Durrës, the coastal - port city in the Mediterranean basin. The promenade, one section of the linear elements constitution the entire urban frontier of Durrës city, was analysed both from its structural and programmatic attributes. The research, developed as a descriptive and comparative analysis of public space production and transformation during different political and economical systems, focusing mainly on the socialist and post-socialist era, assists in deriving some fundamental conclusions on the continuous tension between the public and private space, and the actors influencing this phenomenon. The investigation was developed based essentially on visual material such as maps, images, and pictures and written material (reports).

A special concern of the work was the examination of the impact of political, economic and social factors, in other words: the role of state, planning theory and practice, law, property relations, as well as the influential or determinant morphological and geographic conditions in setting, producing and transforming the urban space, especially the seafront promenade, as the most frequently used public space. In this framework, while in the socialist system of centralised governance the notion of private property was inexistent, and the urban-public space was mainly used for expressing the state's power and ideology; in the post-socialist free-market economy, the state and collective property was 'invaded' and appropriated for individual purposes.

Extensive focus was dedicated to the exploration of how the urban public space is used, (re)produced and transformed in a post-socialist political system. In this regime, not only the ownership and property relations are highly influential to the public / private use of space, but actors such as local or central government, the developers and property owners, and professionals (architects, urban/landscape designers, planners, engineers) play an important role as well. In addition, the phenomenon of "space appropriation" occurring on the public space – mainly on the seaside promenade, was elaborated from a social, economical, political and spatial perspective. This phenomenon was illustrated through the act of informal commercial constructions emergence on the public space (mid 1990s – 2000); to be followed by the action of the local government – the municipality in early 2000s: the demolition of the illegal constructions; to proceed with the process of re-structuring, re-constructing, re-developing, re-vitalizing the waterfront –thus the seafront promenade. Due to the physical, social, cultural, commercial, spiritual and material features inherent in it, the waterfront and specifically the seafront promenade in Durrës, generates extensive flow of investments and spontaneous revenues. This process converts the place, thus the waterfront; into a commodity, which needs to be developed, used and ultimately exploited.

Finally, by affirming the seafront promenade as a place that continuously calls for users, and is under pressure of development, the last section of the paper was a description of the most recent urban interventions and revitalization and developments on the waterfront initiated both by the Municipality of Durrës and private developers, in 2011, aiming the enhancement of the public character of the seaside promenade, and its identity as a public place.

The investigation of spatial transformation of Durrës waterfront during and after socialism paying particular attention to the social, political and economic factors, is quite crucial in understanding the forces that drive the transformations in these sites and contexts. This analysis establishes an essential background for grasping the approach of the latest revitalization project of Durrës waterfront. The emphasis on spatial and environmental transformation is one of the most interesting elements of this landscape-urban design proposal. Landscape (architecture – urban) planning and analysis ‘requires a heavy dependence on scientific expertise, it also involves negotiation with private interest’ as well as the public<sup>51</sup>. The site context was definitely crucial factor in this project: the location in reference to water and land, the interface condition; the site footprint – the length and width of the site; the geological and hydrological conditions; the neighbour physical and functional facilities such as commercial spaces: cafés, restaurants, shops and housing etc.

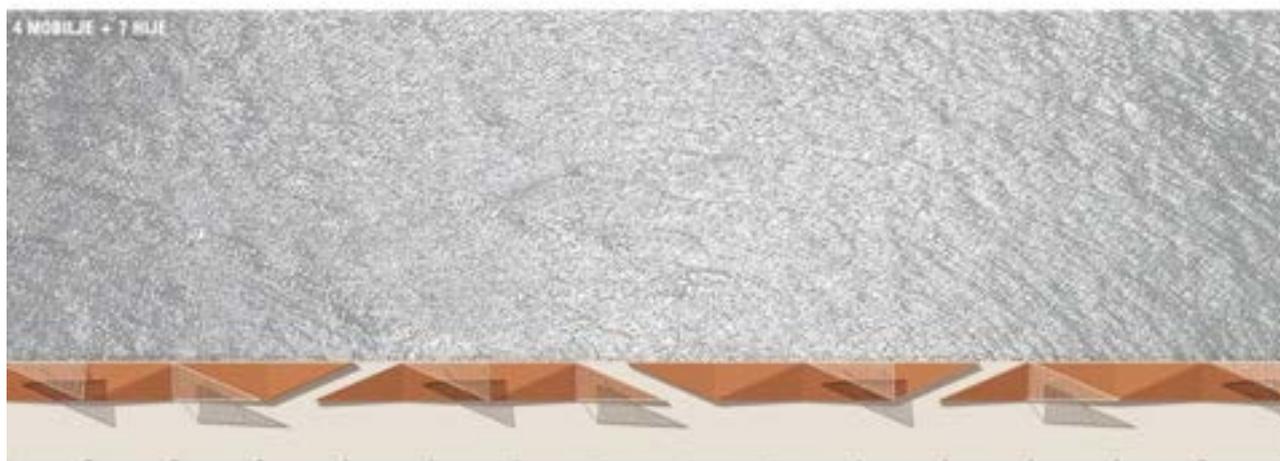


Figure 19: Render-images of Durrës Waterfront Revitalization Project ‘4 Urban Sofas + 7 Cast Shadows’. Image courtesy: APRICOT (D.Tytymce, F.Kapllani)

To conclude, it is important to emphasise that the public space, and most importantly – the waterfront in the coastal city of Durrës - deserves continuous attention (not only from a professional perspective). Regardless of the economical, political and social constraints, the aim should be: to answer some environmental issues facing the contemporary city of Durrës; to emphasise the ground level surface as a stage for future “appropriations” in order to allow for a general design to evolve over time, thus envision ‘indeterminate’, open-ended strategies; last but not least: ‘addressing urbanity in a significant way’<sup>52</sup> connecting the city with the water acting as an inter-mediator in a very context where water-land coexistence seems very natural.

<sup>51</sup> Crewe, Katherine and Forsyth, Ann. 2003. LandSCAPES: A Typology of Approaches to Landscape Architecture in *Landscape Journal*, Vol. 22 Issue1, p.46

<sup>52</sup> Livesey, Graham. 2009. A Look at Landscape Urbanism in *Canadian Architect*. Vol.54 Issue 11, 46

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