

Learning from Gevgelija

αναπαραστάσεις
πέρασμα
δίπολα
κατώφλια
υποδομές
representations
passage
dipoles
thresholds
infrastructures

Το άρθρο παρουσιάζει μια έρευνα που έχει ως αφετηρία ένα ταξίδι μεταξύ της Ίδας, ενός μικρού αγροτικού χωριού της βόρειας Ελλάδας, και τη Λωρίδα της Γευγελής, μιας παραμεθόριας περιοχής στο νότιο τμήμα της Βόρειας Μακεδονίας, όπου παρατηρείται η ανάπτυξη διαφόρων εμπορικών εγκαταστάσεων.

Για την πραγματοποίηση αυτού του ταξιδιού είναι απαραίτητη η πρόσβαση στον αυτοκινητόδρομο E-75 (Ευρωπαϊκή οδός 75) που συνδέει τις δύο χώρες. Μέσα από αυτή τη διαδρομή, από την Ίδα στη Λωρίδα της Γευγελής, μια σειρά από δίπολα ξεδιπλώνεται: το πέρασμα από ένα αγροτικό χωριό σε μια περιοχή επηρεασμένη από την υπερνεωτερικότητα ή έναν μη-τόπο, καθώς και το πέρασμα από το πεδίο της παραγωγής και συγκέντρωσης ενός αποθέματος, σε ένα πεδίο όπου αυτό καταναλώνεται και κατασπαταλάται.

Ως ερευνητική στρατηγική χρησιμοποιήθηκε εκτενώς η παραγωγή αναπαραστάσεων (χαρτών, διαγραμμάτων, μακετών) σε διαφορετικές κλίμακες του χώρου, προκειμένου να αποκωδικοποιηθεί το κύκλωμα των χώρων, προγραμμάτων και υποδομών. Αυτή η μέθοδος χρησιμοποιείται επιπλέον για να προσδιορίσει τη σχέση μεταξύ των υποδομών παραγωγής στη μία πλευρά με τις υποδομές κατανάλωσης στην άλλη, αλλά επίσης και το ρόλο του εθνικού συνόρου στην ανάπτυξη αυτής της σχέσης. Η μελέτη δίνει ιδιαίτερη έμφαση στην περιοχή αυτής της ανάπτυξης και στον τρόπο που αυτή παίρνει μορφή λόγω της εγγύτητάς της στο κρίσιμο σημείο όπου δύο σημαντικοί -αλλά με αντίθετο ρόλο άξονες- (το σύνορο και ο αυτοκινητόδρομος) συναντιούνται και δημιουργούν ένα κατώφλι.

This paper presents research that originates from a journey between Ida, a small agricultural village in northern Greece and Gevgelija's Strip, a border/customs area in southern North Macedonia, permeated with various commercial facilities.

To make the trip it is necessary to access the E-75 (European route 75) which connects the two countries. By performing this itinerary, from Ida to Gevgelija's Strip, a series of dipoles unfold: the passage from a rural village to an area influenced by supermodernity, or a non-place, as well as a passage from the field of production and accumulation of surplus/capital to the field where it is being consumed and wasted.

Throughout this research, different kinds of representations such as maps, diagrams and models, were extensively used as a research strategy and method to de-code the circuit of spaces, programmes and infrastructure. Furthermore, they were used to define a relationship between the infrastructures of production on one side and the infrastructures of consumption on the other, but also the role of the national border in the development of this relationship. The study puts a special focus on the area of this development and the way it has taken form due to its proximity to the critical point where two important - but with opposite roles - axes (the border and the motorway) coincide and create a threshold.

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INTRODUCTION

The following article/paper questions the role of the border as a simple dividing, (or land arranging) line in the countryside and suggests exploring the multiple layers of its functions and meanings within the wider area. By examining the effects of the border in the countryside, we can understand its potential to create mobility and opportunities for co-existence under certain circumstances.

In recent architectural discourse, there has been a shift of interest from the urban condition to the countryside. Two major exhibitions have contributed to that shift: "Agriculture and Architecture: Taking the Country's side" curated by Sebastien Marot in 2019 for the Lisbon Triennale and "Countryside, the future" curated by AMO and Rem Koolhaas in 2020 for the Guggenheim Museum in New

York. The first offers a critical retrospective of "various urban and regional planning models on the basis of the rich history of environmentalist movements" (Marot, 2019, 4) and calls for action for the future of the planet. The latter presents certain case studies on what is happening currently in the countryside, an until now "ignored realm" as Koolhaas characterises it, and calls for its rediscovery as "a place to resettle, to stay alive; enthusiastic human presence must reanimate it with new imagination" (AMO, Koolhaas, 2020, 3). Borders can also be considered part of this "ignored realm" as they are lengthy lines that primarily traverse the countryside.

The research presents the ritual of an oscillation between an agricultural environment and a non-place, which is located also in the countryside but bears the characteristics of globalisation and

produces a quasi-urban space. A critical part of this oscillation is the crossing of a border. Through this ritual we observe, document and highlight spatial moments of density and activity in an environment usually characterised by the opposite (dispersion and low population).

The whole venture of this investigation begins from a rather personal relationship with the countryside as a place of origin¹ which brought the knowledge of this trip being performed by several people. This knowledge produced a curiosity, which could not be satisfied by just **hearing stories** from others about this phenomenon, but it had to be investigated.

Part of the methodology of this investigation became the exploration of the mentality of the subjects performing this trip through **in-situ** research

which allowed the experience, observation, documentation, and re-composition of this complex border-line situation through various **representational tools** (diagrams, maps, models) on **key-concepts** [the dipole, the Strip, the Box, and the dilated limit alias threshold], a process mutually fed by **theoretical investigation** based on socio-anthropological theories, architectural studies, and commentary on both realised and unrealised projects. These representations comprise mobility flows, interpretations of the landscape and the border, a diverse multiplicity of different scales i.e. time and temporal scales, activity intensity scales, spatial scales and scales of influence.

Most importantly, the research focuses on the border area and investigates its possible role and influence in the development of specific spatial formations when interacting with infrastructure like international highways. It delves into the significance of crossing a border, the role of the border threshold, and the influence of architecture in the context of boundaries. How does the border line transform into a place, or rather a non-place, with complex characteristics? How does it define itself and its users/subjects through synergies and contradictions?

1. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research begins in Ida, a small agricultural village in proximity to the border of northern Greece. Some years ago, a few local farmers, started visiting Gevgelija, a border town of North Macedonia, to take advantage of the substantially lower prices in newly built dental clinics and petrol stations but most significantly, to experience the luxury of the newly built hotel and casinos of the area. In Ida, stories were soon circulating about this place which attracted more and more people from the area.

Initially, this area of attraction seemed to us² like a "nowhere", since we knew nothing about it.

The area of Almopia, where Ida is located, is mostly flat, however, it is surrounded by mountains that become natural boundaries that sometimes are hard to cross - something that happens through a network of provincial roads that go uphill and downhill and are full of sharp turns- which added to the mystery of what could be hiding behind them (Fig.1).

Yet, this "nowhere" actually existed, and it hosted some quasi-hidden activity: gambling. At the outskirts of Gevgelija beginning from the border and along the E-75 highway that crosses it, an area of commercial activity -mostly hotel & casinos- was developed in the form of a strip similar to that studied by Venturi in *Learning from Las Vegas* (R. Venturi, et al, 1977). Gevgelija was already nicknamed as the "Las Vegas of the poor", due to the general state of poverty that prevails in the Balkans, something that also inspired the title of this project as a reference to the book.

Another interesting observation that acquired gradual importance in the context of this research was that people from Greece would not talk openly about visiting this place. Apart from the taboo-topic of gambling there was another taboo-issue: that of the 'contested' name of the republic of North Macedonia³. In the Greek region of Macedonia -where Ida is located-, people

strongly protested against the use of the name 'Macedonia' by the neighbouring country. Therefore, it seemed quite interesting, and somewhat contradictory, that many of them were also visiting this particular neighbouring country.

As a first way of an investigative approach, in-situ research was chosen. A typical trip from Ida to Gevgelija is examined.

In the framework of in situ research farmers from Ida were followed during harvesting season in their daily tasks, aiming to find out more about their lifestyle and the place they live and work in. That included visits to the orchards, the agricultural cooperative of the village and a privately-owned cold store located at its outskirts. The next step was to experience the passage from Ida to Gevgelija, along with some of the frequent travellers there. That allowed informal discussions during the trip, through which the mentality of the 'subjects' followed was approached, as well as their perspective towards the place we were visiting together. This mentality will be referred to, within this article, as the 'farmer-gambler'. The farmer-gambler is a person who makes a living by cultivating land that she or he usually owns and who then invests part of the profit made by this activity into gambling as a form of entertainment (Fig.2).

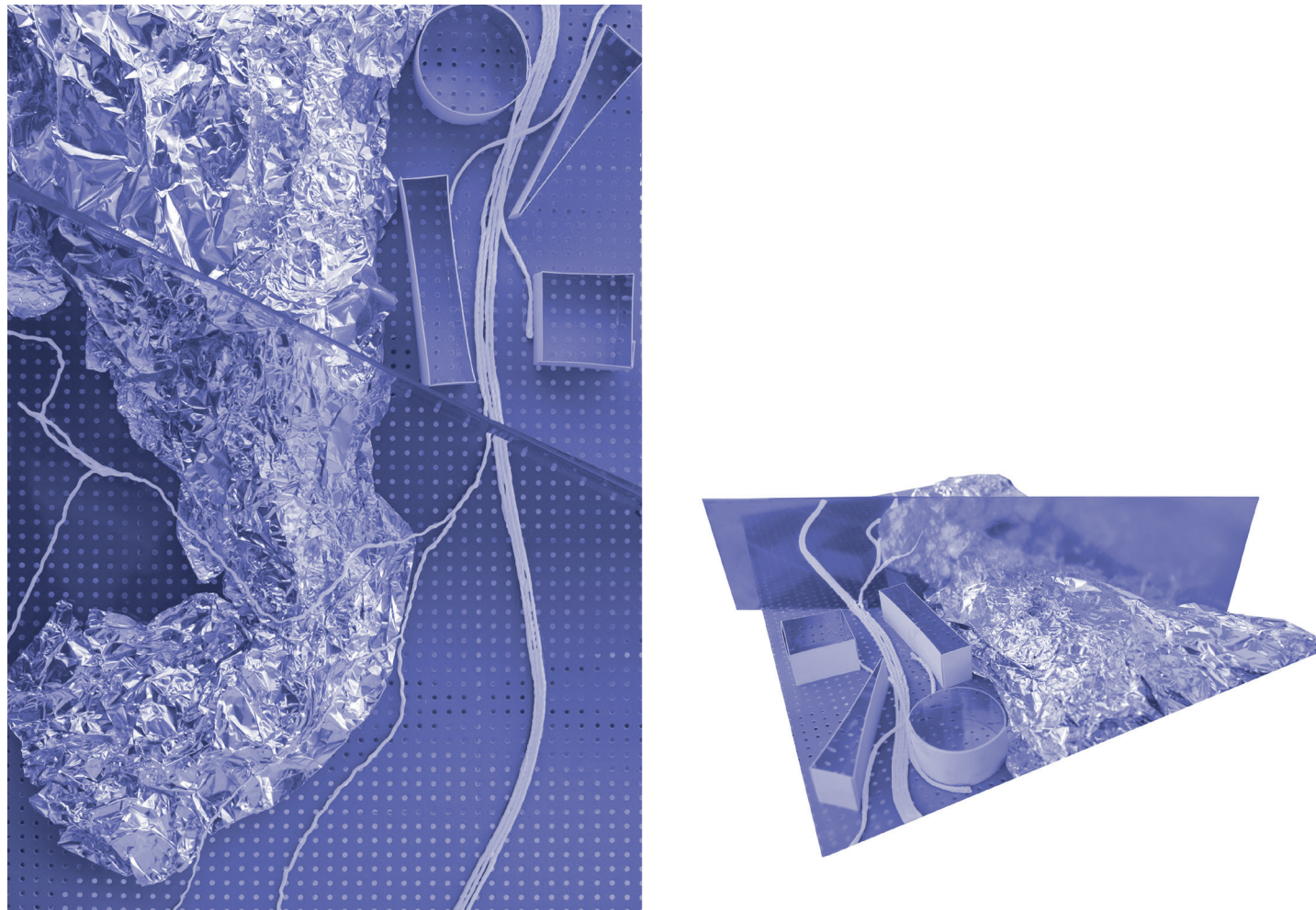


Fig.1 - From the plateau of Almopia and Ida to Gevgelija. Physical model including some of the geomorphology of the territory-Not in scale-. The border is built as a transparent wall. The road network is made with threads and the casinos take abstract out of scale forms and they are made with reflective material on the inside part to give an idea of the vast interiors because of repetitions. The border is made with red semi-transparent plastic sheet, like a wall. Figure by I. Orlis.

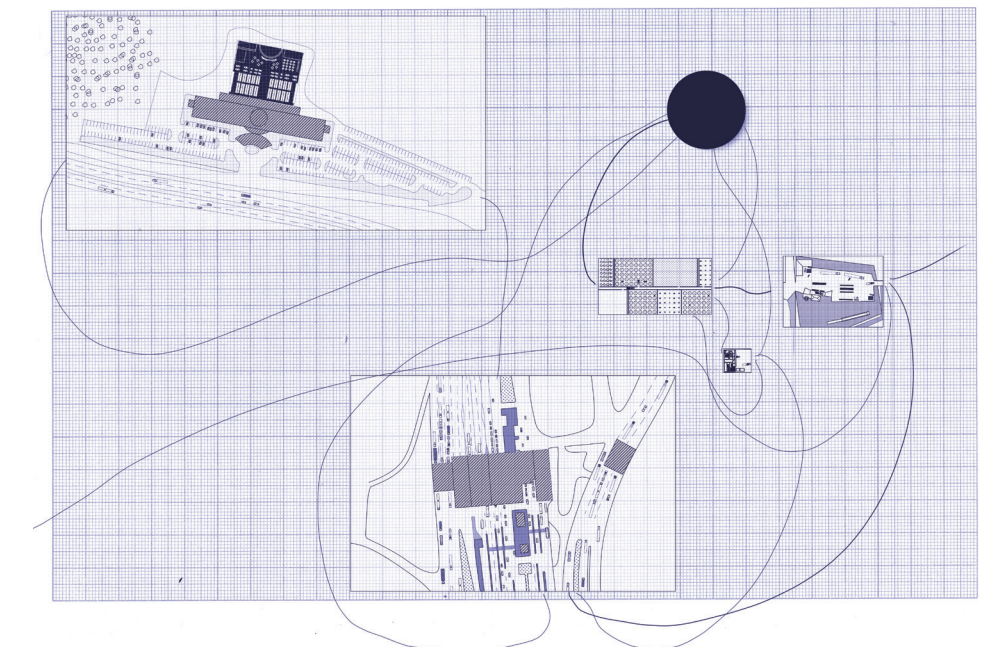


Fig.2 - Tracing the movements of a farmer from Ida between home (blue circle), orchard, agricultural cooperative, cold store, customs station, casino. Figure by I. Orlis.

With this road trip to Gevgelija, that had as a starting and returning point Ida, the aim was to go through as many stages of these subjects' experiences as possible. We⁴ went through the customs checks to cross the national border between Greece and North Macedonia and we also entered most of Gevgelija's casinos together.

During those stages of the research, photos and videos were taken from the majority of places we visited. The investigation comprises notes and, at some point, some sort of diary of the trip. A structured interview was also taken from one of the farmers-gamblers at a posterior stage of the in-situ research.

1.1 THE DIPOLE AND THE RELATION BETWEEN THE POLES

1.1.1. Ida and Gevgelija's Strip as opposite polarities

By experiencing the passage from the village of Ida to Gevgelija's Strip we were able to consider the structure of a *dipole* constituted by the two locations, alias the dipole <Ida-Gevgelija> (Fig.3).

Non-places an Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity by Marc Auge (Auge, 1995) also contributed to the conceptualization of this abstract dipole between the two areas as the hypothesis was born that we were also experiencing a passage from a place [Ida] to a non-place [Gevgelija's Strip]. This structure of the dipole allows us a better estimation of the dynamic between the two locations by highlighting differences beyond the pair 'place-non-place.'

Auge also uses the notion of the passage in his book to introduce us to non-places as the corresponding chapter bears the title: "From places to Non-Places".

Place and non-place are considered a pair of opposites and it is often through their comparison

that we better understand the two terms. "If a place can be defined as relational, historical and connected with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (Auge, 1995, 77-78).

In our case study on one hand, we have *Ida* which is an agrarian village with mainly native population.

People there mostly grow peach trees in their orchards to make a living. Cultivating this land is something that has been happening for many generations. The land is being passed on from one generation to the other

along with the responsibility for maintaining and cultivating it. The cultivated plain and the village are for the natives a living historical environment [heredity].

For the irrigation of the orchards underground water resources are exploited with the use of electric pumps, called *pomonas*, that drill the ground vertically and extract the water from below. On the surface, water channelling infrastructural networks running through the everyday life of the village, conduct water to the orchards.

Parallel to every road of the village or the agricultural plain runs an irrigation ditch that also functions as

a threshold for domestic courtyards, or the fields found behind them. It seems as they have always been there, connecting the village to the cultivated fields [metabolism].

The fruit that is being produced is collected and brought either to the agricultural cooperative of the village or to some private owned cold store. The facilities have grown *old* along with the houses of the village and they were built at scales that respect their context, so they have been incorporated into the environment.

In fact, though, this infrastructure has been built to service industrial agricultural production. This type of production is based on the intensive cultivation of the land using machines like tractors that run on fossil fuels and the addition of chemicals like soil improvers and pesticides that target bigger and bigger yields and a consistent quality of the product (Marot, 2019, 93).

Nevertheless, those practices are now connected with this place. Even the movements related to the logistics are consolidated for people and place. There is no need for intermediation of external symbols addressed to local people as instructions. If there is a sign, it is there to guide a stranger or a passer-by.

The infrastructure in Ida and the neighbouring villages of Almopia, has been built in order to serve mostly its native population: permanent residents who keep raising families there, growing their family trees, and secure a living by working their land; allowing for the place to stay alive as well, along with traditions and relationships between people and their environment.

This is how we conclude that we are dealing with an anthropological place as described by Auge. That is a place "of identity, of relations and of history" (Auge, 1995, 52).

On the other hand, we have the development of *Gevgelija's Strip*.

Gevgelija is a small city of North Macedonia, with a population

of approximately 16,000 people located on the south-eastern part of the country, close to the border with Greece.

The growth of the city is contained on the southern and eastern part by a series of axes. On the southern part, the city stops growing on the banks of the River Konska, a tributary of the River Vardar, and below that there is the border. Eastward to Gevgelija, there is Bogorodica, a small village also close to the border.

Between the city and the village lies a cultivated patch of land which could be considered as a connective tissue between them if not interrupted by the following axes.

On the eastern part of the city three important axes are developed, running in a north-south direction, subsequently intersecting with the line of the border which runs from east to west. Those three axes are: a) the railway between Thessaloniki and Skopje, b) the River Vardar and c) the E-75 motorway, which is the most important to this research (Fig.4).

The E-75 motorway is an international artery that works as an axis that connects the European North with the South. Beginning from the North, to end up to the South, the motorway passes through countries that are members of the EU and the Euro monetary union, or just the EU or neither of them.

A remarkably interesting dynamic appears to be developing, in the area we study. Gevgelija is the last city, as we descend through the motorway from the European North to the South, before we enter Greece, a member-state of the EU and the Euro currency. Therefore, this is a critical area, since the line of the border defines two different territories with different time zones, different laws, different language, different currency, different economies, and different geopolitical relations.

The different currencies of the two countries play an especially critical role in the creation of this border-

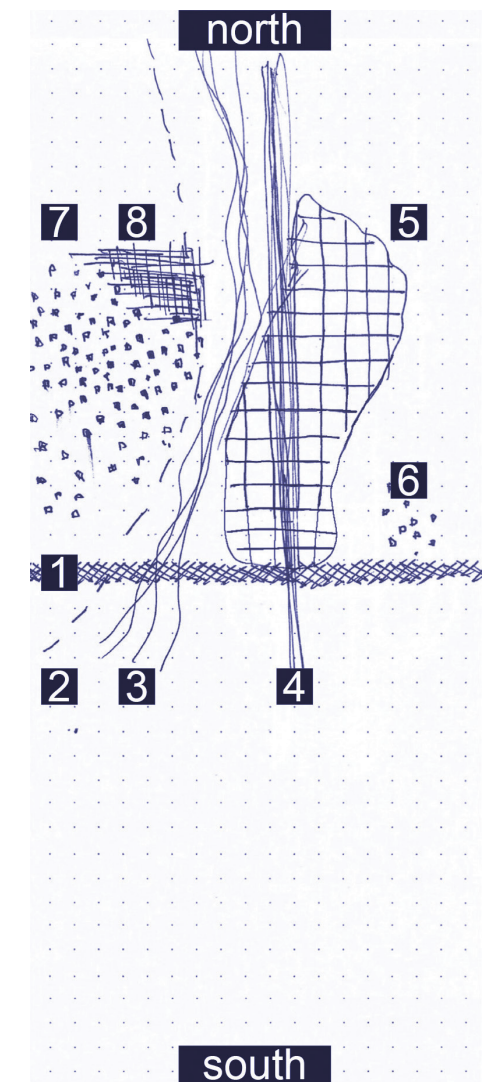


Fig.4 - The context of the area we examine: on the left side a city, on the right side a village. Between them a fabric of cultivated land interrupted by three important axes: the railroad, Vardar river and the E-75 motorway onto which this "other city" is developed. (1. The border, 2. railroad, 3. Vardar river, 4. E-75 motorway, 5. the "other" city, 6. Bogorodica village, 7. city of Gevgelija, 8. Industrial part). Figure by I. Orlis.

line condition being examined. As we approach the border, between the Greek village of Evzones and the North Macedonian city of Gevgelija, we notice that a weaker currency, actually fills up the space, whereas the stronger one leaves it empty.

That exchange rate between the two currencies has as a result much cheaper prices in services and products in North Macedonia compared to Greece. This way the market of North Macedonia becomes attractive for people living

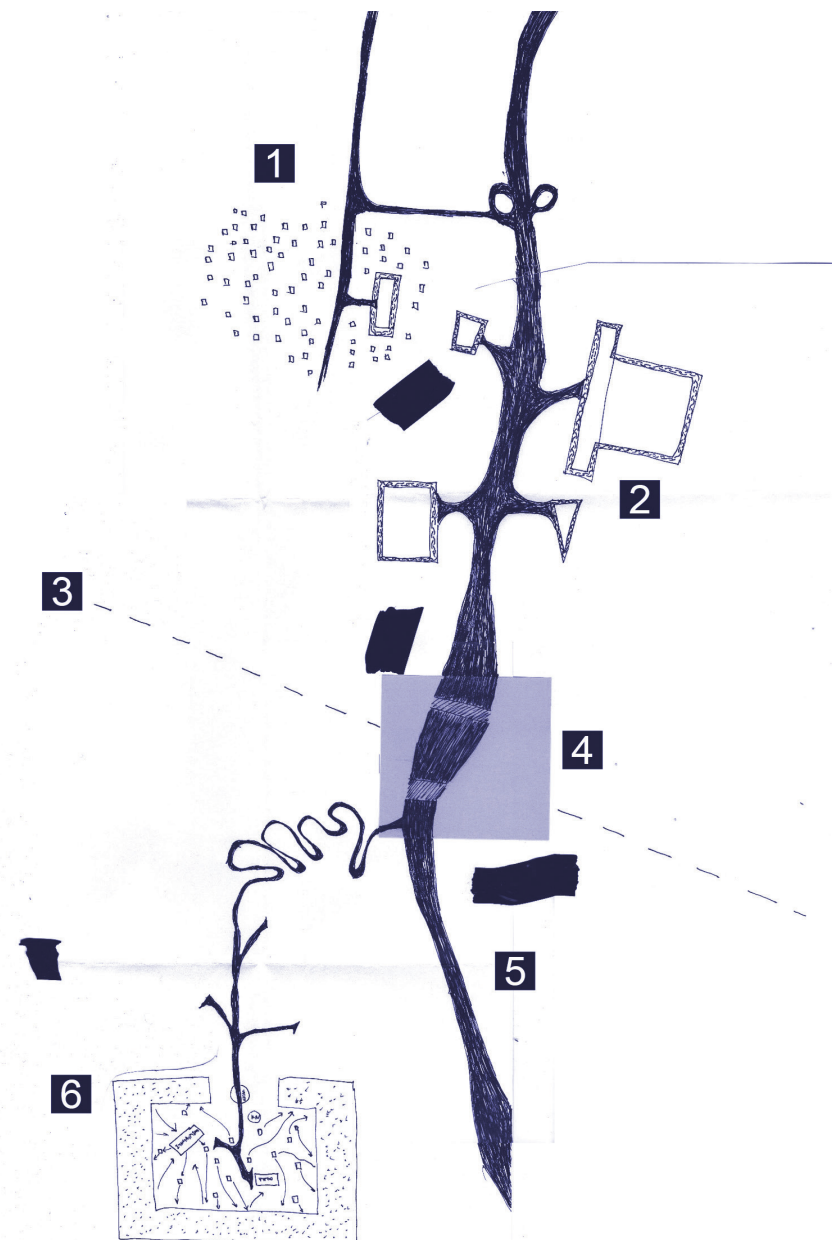


Fig.3 - From the productive field of the agricultural plain of Ida, to the E-75 highway and the insulated boxes of the casinos of Gevgelija connected to it. (1. City of Gevgelija, 2. Area of development, 3. Line of the Border, 4. Customs area, 5. E-75 motorway, 6. Ida village surrounded by the field of production) Figure by I. Orlis.

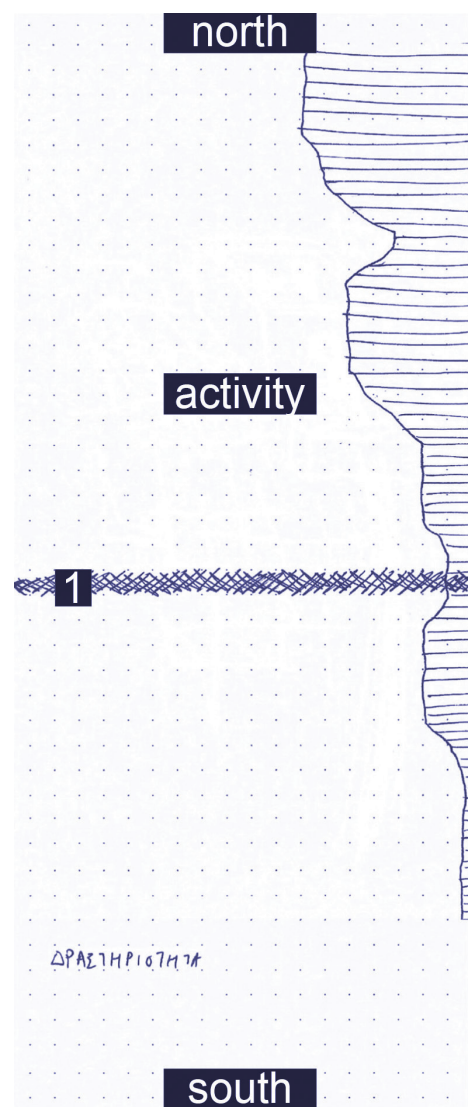


Fig.5 - Diagram of activity intensity along the axis of the motorway. As we approach the border on the Greek side there is almost nothing. After we cross the border, on the North Macedonian side an activity boom. (1. The Border). Figure by I. Orlis.

on the other side of the border [in Greece] and that fact produces spatial effects: On the Greek/ EU side of the borderland, almost nothing happens; there is very low commercial activity and human presence is scarce. When we pass to the North Macedonian side there is an activity boom (Fig.5).

Big autoroutes & motorways are infrastructural networks that take form as physical objects in our world and divide the land they traverse; they act as boundaries. We can only go with their flow or cross them by building bridges on top of them. The infrastructure of a motorway often takes advantage of the division it creates to produce its own enclaves around it, only accessible through the motorway

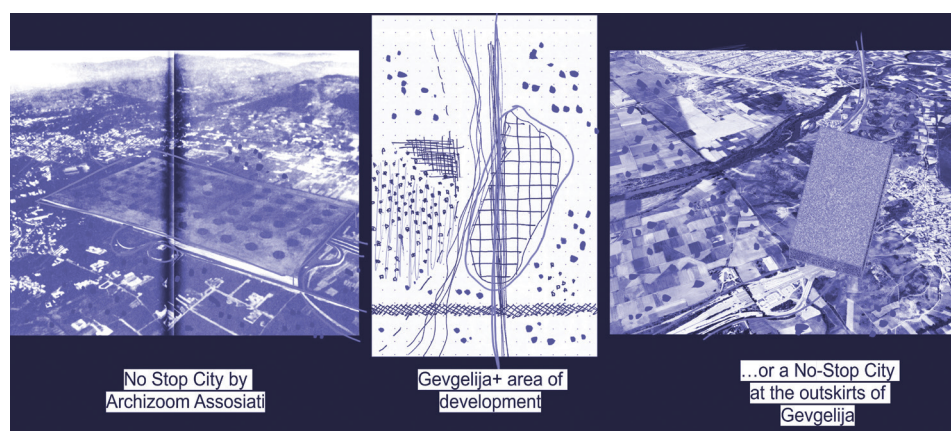


Fig.6 - Comparing the development of a No Stop City with the area of development at the outskirts of Gevgelija. (On the left part of the figure, an edited by author1 image is being used from BRANZI, Andrea. No-Stop City: Archizoom Associati. Orléans: HYX. 2006, p.68-69) Figure by I. Orlis.

itself.

The space of the motorway which, albeit an object placed in the countryside, does not form bonds with it, instead it lets it be a "backdrop". As highlighted by Marot even projects which try to suggest an incorporation and blending of urban features in/with the territory and practices of the countryside, like Branzi's Agronica (and other similar projects) cannot be easily succeed in achieving that goal.⁵

This is what we come across at the outskirts of Gevgelija: the development of Gevgelija's Strip.

The Strip develops in an area defined by the local authorities through an urban development master plan. The master plan is aiming at the commercial exploitation of plots of land found on the two sides of the motorway, beginning from the customs post of North Macedonia, towards the north.

The Strip comprises commercial facilities with programmes that were "copied" from the city, because they were proven to be successful in attracting visitors -mostly from Greece. The programme of the hotel-casino was the most popular.

The motorway in this area functions as vital infrastructure⁶ for 'boxes' to which the various programmes get attached to. The term "box" is used here to refer to standardised buildings constructed in a way that the appearance of the building from outside is not necessarily indicative of the type of

programme the building can host. The building, or part of it, becomes an insulated container since the activity it hosts does not require (or it is even incompatible with) an immediate contact with the outside environment, through windows for example. Like the unrealised, critical design project 'No-Stop City', architecture is stripped of its ability to intermediate between the inside and the outside of the building (Branzi, 2006, 152). This characterization is often given to generic, big buildings (logistics/fulfilment/retail centres, hotels-casinos, storage) that appear in the countryside and are being serviced by other infrastructure like road networks.

Without the motorway none of the activities mentioned could be possible or at least survive. The 'box' is dependent to the motorway since the only way for someone to reach it is by driving there, along the motorway.

Located in the countryside, these big-sized facilities host a population that can only come from somewhere else. Since the countryside is an environment characterised by low density habitation and dispersion the motorway assumes the role of an inserter of the public into them.

We can even trace this dependent relationship of box-shaped architecture with the infrastructure of a motorway in the unrealised-critical project of Archizoom Associati, No Stop City. We notice similarities with the area we study to

one of the group's representations: they have placed the box that contains the No-Stop city at the periphery of some city. The grey inexpressive box is surrounded by cultivated land and sparsely located smaller buildings. However, there is also a motorway which penetrates the box from various sides.

If in our case we collect all the programmes scattered along the motorway, and place them in a single box instead of many, we would have a No-Stop City in Gevgelija (Fig.6).

On one hand, this development is neither dense nor big enough, nor has the structure to be named a city. On the other hand, the lifestyle of this area has if not metropolitan, for sure globalised characteristics, therefore we cannot name it a village either. But the main point is that this area has no permanent residents. Nobody belongs here.

The Strip is an elongated centre for the passers-by⁷. For some people it is a part of their trip while for others it is their getaway-destination, or the place they work. All the subjects that this area addresses to, have mutual characteristics with the subject M. Foucault names "guest in transit" (Foucault Michel, 1986, 26), M. Auge

"passing stranger" (Auge Marc, 1995, 106) and Archizoom Associati "metropolitan nomad" (Branzi Andrea, 2006, 150).

The way that the relationships between people, architecture and environment are articulated in this space allows us to confirm that at a first estimation this area can be identified as a non-place as described by Auge who writes: "As anthropological places create the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality. [...] The link between individuals and their surroundings in the space of non-place is established through the mediation of words, or even texts" For the writer that way of mediation is a type of "instructions for use" that "absolves" the user of the non-place "of the need to stop or even look" (Auge, 1995, 94-97). Spaces that have the characteristics of a non-place according to the writer are motorways, supermarkets, big hotel chains where relationships between people and space are mediated through certain protocols, and symbols like traffic or commercial signs, labels or logos and not necessarily human communication.

The road signs on the motorway inform us about the exits we must take in order to get ourselves to the

parking lot of a hotel-casino, to a motorway service area (MSA), to a dental clinic or some other facility linked to it. The fact that traffic signs are used on/by the motorway to guide drivers to the casinos further highlights that motorway and casinos work as a system.

The buildings, in order to communicate what happens inside them⁸, use illuminated name signs, billboards, and big LED screens that advertise their offers by displaying their messages in Greek [Greek is not an official language of North Macedonia]. Some of those visual signals are visible from a very long distance.

Summing up, by travelling from the village of Ida to Gevgelija's Strip the unfolding of the following dipoles is witnessed: place-non-place, place of surplus stock production and capital accumulation - [non] place of consumption/wasting money, place where infrastructures are incorporated into the landscape- [non] place where infrastructures dominate and divide the landscape, buildings built in a scale that respects their context [the village] - buildings built in scales that are compatible with the motorway to which they form a system (Fig.7).

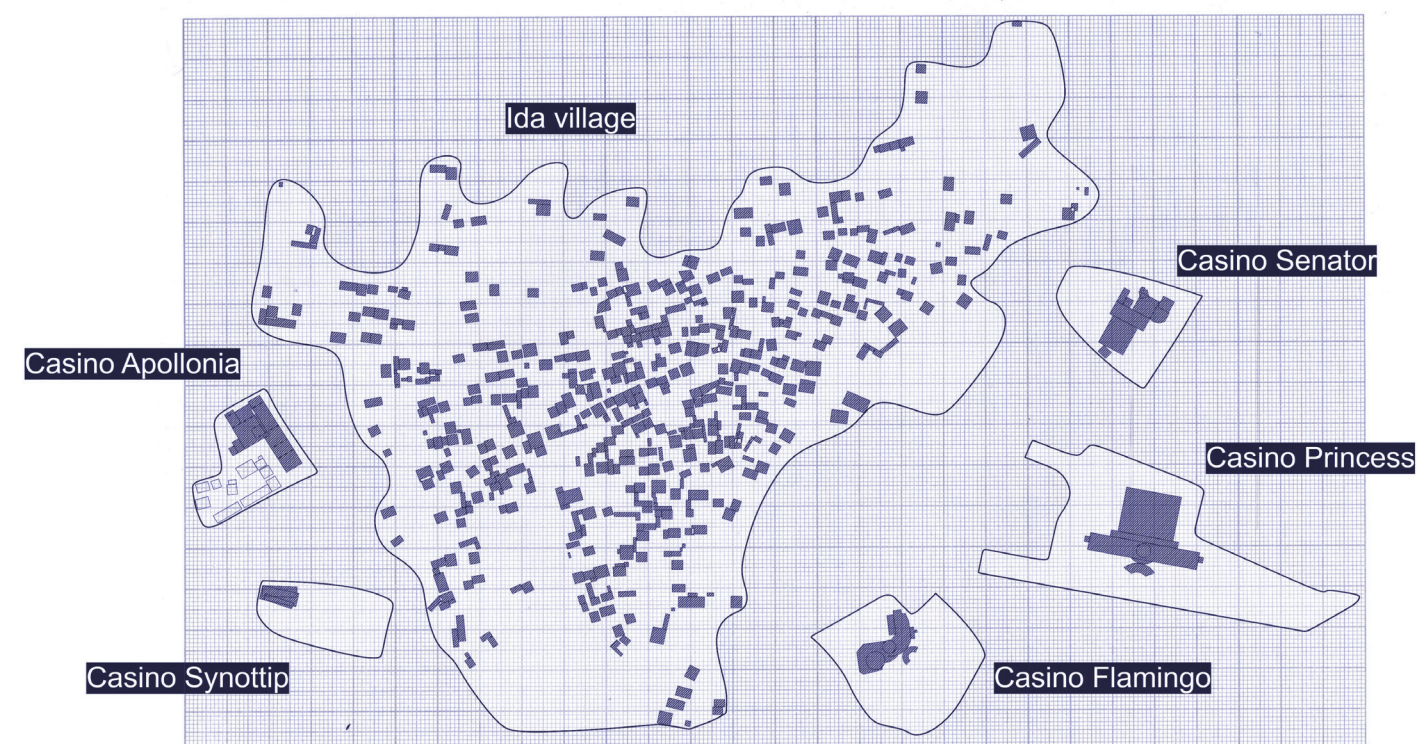


Fig.7 - Comparing scales between the village of Ida and the casinos of Gevgelija. The casinos altogether take almost as much space as the whole village of Ida. Figure by I. Orlis.

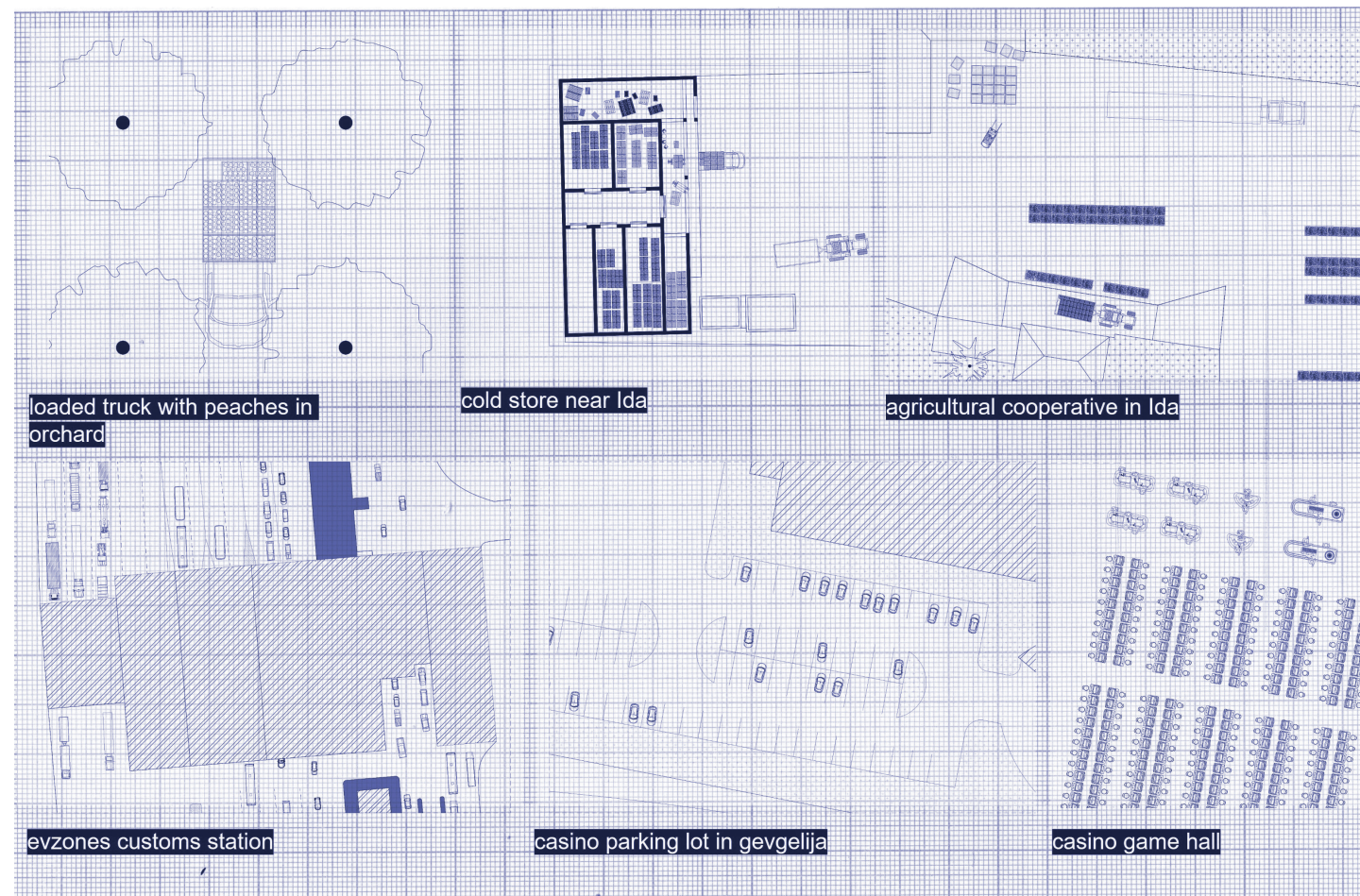


Fig.8 - From fruit trees to fruit [slot] machines: Details of the spaces structured around humans and objects according to the rules of logistics. Figure by I. Orlis.

1.1.2. The box: common denominator between the poles

On both poles we can also locate a common architectural typology: the box. In order to be functional, both the cold store building for fruit near Ida and a casino in Gevgelija's Strip need to become environments where the relationship with space and time outside of them is abolished or controlled very strictly [insulation].

Their main function is the management of an interior space, analogous to No-Stop City [Archizoom Associati, 1972], where repetition, standardisation and indoor conditions controlled by technical means dominate.

They are buildings that belong to the realm of logistics, therefore are characterised by "an atemporal and aspatial dimension of quantities and

measurements that is nevertheless concretely embedded within the cycle of production, distribution, and consumption." (Marullo, 2015, 112) (Fig.8).

The cold store examined, found near Ida, has those characteristics so its chambers have a steadily low temperature -achieved through mechanical/technical means- and therefore the products inside can be kept with their qualitative characteristics almost unchanged or otherwise put, as fresh as possible. The main space of a casino in Gevgelija's Strip on the other hand, a room without windows, artificially lit and air conditioned, can feel comfortable in terms of weather and privacy protection, but also makes its visitors/users lose sense of time while being there acting as consumers.

Finally, both buildings appear attached to a road network. As we have already explained the way this happens for the casinos of Gevgelija's Strip, we will briefly

refer here to the cold store which appears in a position near the field of production and also with immediate access to the road, to serve its purpose as part of a distribution network.

1.2. THE DILATED LIMIT [as threshold]

A threshold can be described as an area placed between two different situations. The line of the border is an invisible boundary between two geographic regions that also constitute different political entities- sovereignties. Crossing that border-limit is usually something that happens through a standard procedure. Whereas the border is just a line on the map - in reality an invisible line-, at the areas defined as official crossing paths a dilation or expansion of the border occurs, and the area functions as threshold.

This phenomenon of dilation could also be described as an

incision in the middle of the width of the border line, creating an eye-shaped opening (Fig.9). This opening is an in-between space, a grey zone. On its upper and below sides there are the "lids" of the eye i.e., the customs stations, that control the flows of movement from the one side to the other along the motorway.

Practically, this dilated limit is placed on the E-75 motorway since it is a very important axis that connects the two countries. On the other hand, the line of the border is also an important axis that has the exactly opposite role of dividing them. Since the two axes cross each other, the area where they

intersect, becomes the position for the dilated limit or threshold. So, in this particular area from the one side there is the Evzones customs station, whereas from the other the Bogorodica customs station, and between the two the established threshold.

The space on the motorway between the two customs stations, that has been defined here as dilated limit, or threshold, or grey zone, is limited; the development of new commercial facilities inside that zone could be complicated. The only commercial facilities operating now within the area of the dilated limit is a Greek duty-free shop -like those we find at the airports- and two

small casinos.

Generally, the area around the border is a hub for people and products in transit, therefore it accumulates the indispensable infrastructure and services required to facilitate those activities. This consequently creates the opportunity for the installation and development of architectural programmes that could make this area not just a place you pass by to go from point A to point B, but also a destination (Fig.10). In this case, as mentioned in the previous subchapter, economic factors are also critical for the creation of such opportunities.

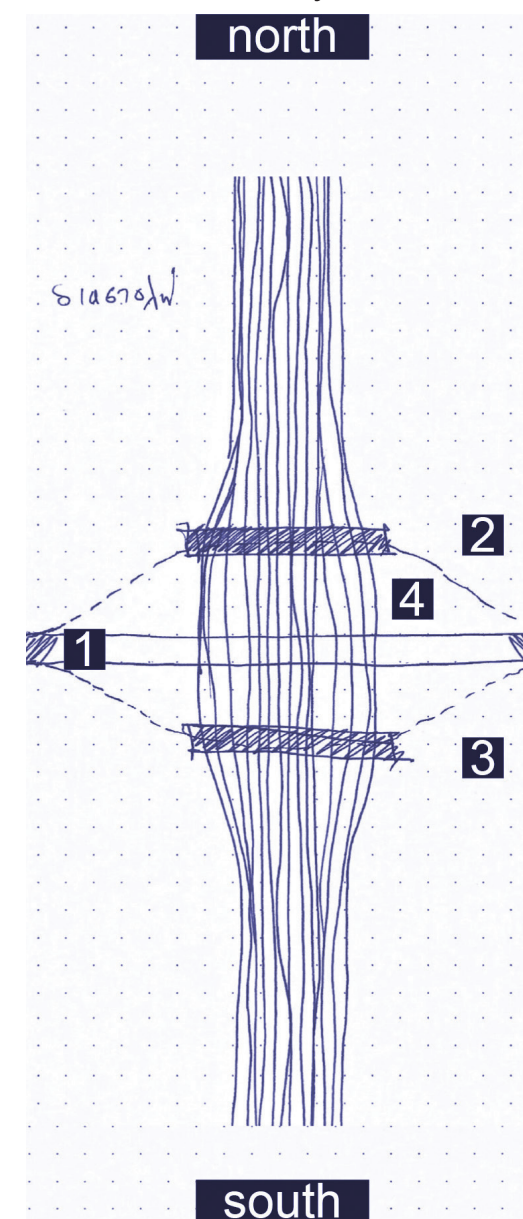


Fig.9 - The dilation of the limit. Where the motorway that connects the two countries meets the border that separates them, a dilation of the limit happens. (1. The border, 2. North Macedonia customs, 3. Greek customs, 4. The dilated limit or threshold) Figure by I. Orlis.

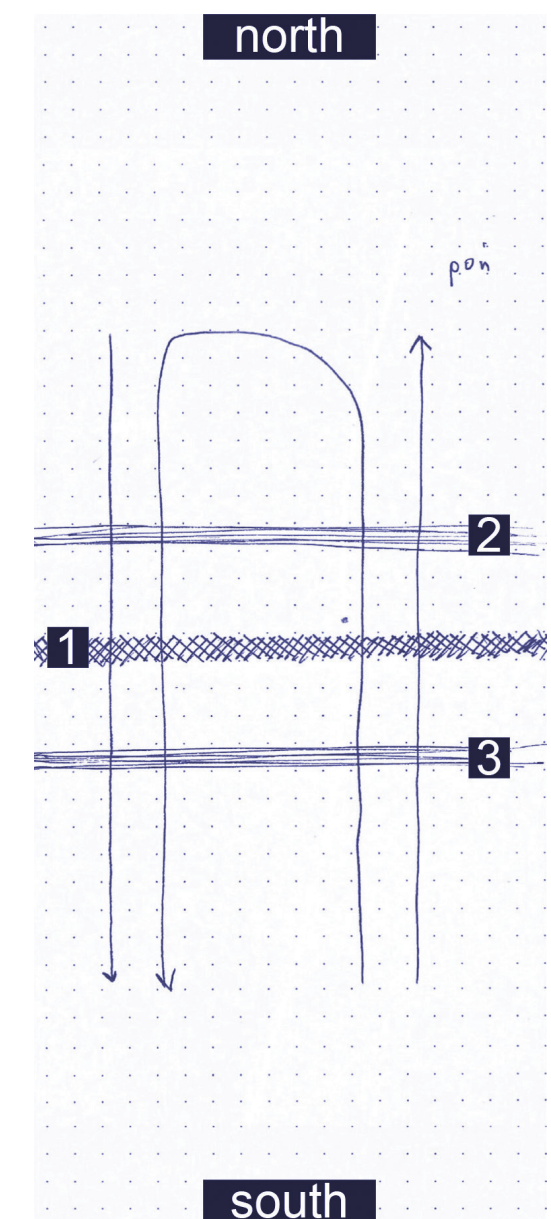


Fig.10 - Flows of movement at the customs area. For some the area is a place they pass by to go from point A to point B, whereas for others it is their destination. A U-TURN scheme appears as a generic itinerary track in this diagram, which could become a cluster of circuits if we place its beginning in Ida or other Greek villages or cities (1. The Border, 2. North Macedonia customs, 3. Greek customs) Figure by I. Orlis.

2. RESULTS

2.1. THE METASTATIC & DILATED THRESHOLD

In this section we investigate a 'metastasis' or in other words a transposition-and-expansion of the characteristics of the threshold in an area where they can develop further. The Metastatic & Dilated Threshold (Fig.11) is a mechanism that serves two purposes: a) making visitors feel at home when they are visiting Gevgelija's Strip, in particular visitors of Greek origin, b) increasing the Gevgelija's Strip influence beyond the border, specifically towards Greece. This mechanism functions by the time we exit the dilated limit or threshold.

The Metastatic and Dilated Threshold basically resides at the area of development of the Strip serving there the primary purpose (a) mentioned above. The Strip is a seemingly inclusive, or rather a pseudo-inclusive environment, because of its apparent neutrality and lack of historical references. References to history are carefully avoided, since the countries at the two sides of the border-Greece and North Macedonia- held different positions on the topic, especially before the *Prespa Agreement* was signed by the two states, an agreement which among other issues regulates the issue of historic claims by the two sides.⁹

This a-historical allure has been a way to conceal fanaticism and avoid misunderstandings that could obstruct the smooth operation of the 'consumption system' along the Strip. A typical example took place before the Agreement was signed between both parties: within the borders of North Macedonia: the name of the main motorway [E-75], was changed to "Motorway of Friendship"; whilst previously named as "Alexander the Great Motorway"; the previous choice of name was avoided since it could have been perceived as off-putting for some of the Greek travellers and potential consumers, or as a

"gesture of cultural appropriation". In the area of the Metastatic and Dilated threshold, extra measures are taken to make Greeks feel more welcome. Even though it is on North Macedonian territory, elements familiar to Greeks are incorporated:

the advertising billboards and the LED screens of the Hotel-Casinos and dental clinics are projecting messages written in Greek. The official currency of North Macedonia is the denar (MDK) but in this area you can do almost everything

using the Euro. Last but not least, at the facilities that operate there, employees know how to speak Greek, and use the Greek language when addressing visitors of Greek-origin and potential consumers.

In this transit centre, or centre for the passers-by, which is in the realm of the Metastatic and Dilated Threshold, a stranger can also feel at home because of the non-place character of this area. Auge's words are proven right: "in the world of Supermodernity people are always, and never, at home: the frontier zones or 'marchlands' he [Descombes] mentions no longer open to totally foreign worlds" (Auge, 1995, 109).

The proximity of the Strip to the border made its facilities noticeably irresistible. So close to Greece, but at the same time away from the Greek players' homes; at arm's length, protected by the national border and the casinos' policies on customers' privacy, which function as filters that protect anonymity. The direct connection to the motorway makes the Strip easily accessible and open to the big flows of movement.

In order to influence even more people from Greece to visit their facilities, some of Gevgelija's casinos extend the mechanism of the Metastatic and Dilated Threshold in action also to Greek territory. They manage to deterritorialize themselves and become present in Greek territory by using a variety of networks (Deleuze, Guattari, 2005).

Information networks (some of which are also deterritorialised themselves): some hotel-casino businesses of Gevgelija, buy airtime at Greek radio stations in order to advertise their facilities and amenities as well as their proximity to the border. They also send text messages to Greek players to invite them to lotteries or tournaments they organise, and they have a presence on popular social media.

Transportation networks: casinos offer their customers the option of free transportation to their premises beginning from big Greek cities and bringing them

back. There is a fleet of shuttle buses performing that itinerary between Greek cities and casinos of Gevgelija.

Interpersonal Networks: people who visit the casinos spread the word about the experience to their social circle. Casinos help the process by gifting people souvenirs (pens, lighters, key chains) with their brand printed on them to excite people's curiosity.

This way, these businesses manage to reach people from Greece, without leaving their territory but by using objects, networks and means that are or can be deterritorialised, creating signals and symbols which refer to the casinos.

The venture has succeeded. Thousands of people flock to Gevgelija's Strip to be temporarily freed from the burden of their identity and they adopt other roles: that of the passer-by, the passenger, the traveller, the customer, the lover, the gambler. All of that inside an environment which might not be their home, yet everybody speaks their language and therefore, understands their 'wishes'. Most of these 'wishes', constructed and fed by the mechanisms of the Metastatic and Dilated Threshold, are fulfilled, at least apparently/ seemingly, within the transit and consumption 'ritual'.

3. CONCLUSIONS: NODAL GENERATORS AND HETEROTOPIAS

In these final paragraphs a re-evaluation of the dipole Ida-Gevgelija is combined with a focus on the findings regarding the Metastatic and Dilated Threshold, as part of an effort to reach more general but not forced results, and potentially results which could apply beyond the case study area.

The dipole Ida-Gevgelija as well as its pairs of opposites (place-non place, field of production- field of waste), also brought to the surface similarities as well. In both locations we can observe ways of habitation

along and with infrastructures found in the countryside.

On the one side, at Ida, we see that the village is not only a place of history and identity, but also a concentration of infrastructures that serve the production and commercialisation of the peach. Part of that infrastructure is embedded as shown with the example of the irrigation ditches that run through the village and become part of the homes there.

What is observed on the 'other side', at Gevgelija's Strip, is the way that the infrastructure of the motorway is 'inhabited' by the various programmes that plug into it: the customs station, hotel and casino facilities, motorway service areas, dental clinics. Whereas the basic function of the motorway is high speed movement, along the Strip it stops; exits and interchanges are added to service the facilities previously mentioned. This way the motorway becomes frequently used and a quasi- familiar infrastructure for the people visiting the Strip.

The motorway is a spine for the Strip, which becomes a nodal generator of quasi-urbanity; quasi urbanity stands for the fact that the Strip's scattered buildings, functioning as isolating introvert boxes, do not consist of an urban whole, lacking public spaces, continuous public networks, and public buildings which refer to the social sphere and the local context of the city of Gevgelija.

Through the Strip, acting as an acquaintance and bonding generator at the periphery of Gevgelija, new social relationships and social identities are formed. Our study offers as an example the formation of this transitional, transnational and hybrid persona, that is the farmer-gambler. This transitional persona might have as a home-base the village of Ida and as a basic occupation farming, but they also spend parts of their life at the 'other side' of the border. There they might foster a different lifestyle with urban characteristics and enjoy new experiences of luxury and pleasure within a homogeneous, world market globalisation ambience.

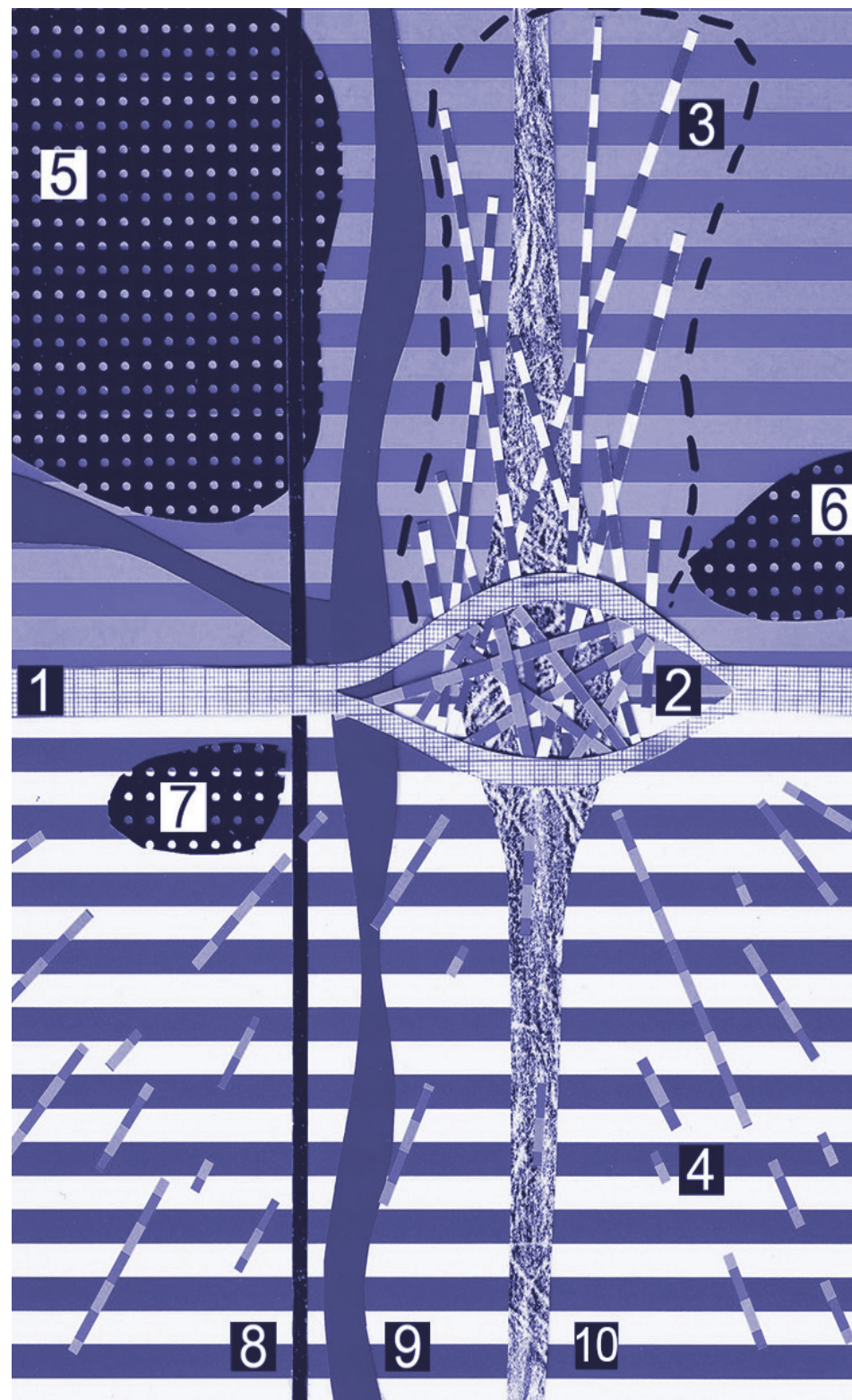


Fig.11. - The Metastatic and Dilated Threshold beginning right after the customs station of North Macedonia but also extending its influence in Greek territory.

1. The Border, 2. Dilated Limit, 3. The Metastatic and Dilated Threshold, 4. The Metastatic and Dilated Threshold as influence on the Greek territory, 5. Gevgelija, 6. Bogorodica, 7. Eidomeni, 8. Railway, 9. River Vardar, 10. E-75 motorway.
Figure by I. Orlis.

The experience of this subject makes us understand that these visits to an environment that has the characteristics of a non-place, for some people become part of their identity.

Crossing the border and gambling in one of the casinos of Gevgelija is considered by those who perform these activities a social-celebratory event. The people examined here form groups and have Ida as a starting point to live that experience. Through the repetition of this trip the members of the group develop bonds between them and with the area and spaces they are travelling to; but they also become familiar with the people who work as staff in these non-places. The environment of the non-place becomes for them more and more familiar and homely. Of course, the full appropriation of this space is not possible or either desired since that would have as a result new responsibilities, deeper bonds and maybe a different temporality and duration of the experience.

Gevgelija's strip is not a utopia where one enters once and never exits because it is perfect, but rather a multi-layered heterotopia that one can enter and exit. The desire for this [non] place could be related to the fact that the stay there is short and there is always the promise for a return as well as a sense of unfulfillment. Time can be perceived as travelling time or as waiting time in the Threshold, as a temporality of Identity, as loss of place and time inside the casino, as speed or slowness, as a state of limbo and a promise of return before someone crosses the border again [collective time-space].

The goal of this transit, this passage to the 'other side', is the avoidance of responsibilities and the pleasure of being in another place, where one can leave behind the identity and role they have at home and temporarily assume a new one that gives them access to a different context where they can feel free to enjoy a life of lavishness. A repetitive circuit is thus formed, as the surplus that is being produced

from the cultivation of the land around Ida is being invested into the growth of Gevgelija's Strip.

The part of the Metastatic and Dilated Threshold that is spatially expressed [in this case Gevgelija's Strip] could be analogous to 'extrastatecraft' as described by Keller Easterling: "a site of multiple, overlapping, or nested forms of sovereignty, where domestic and transnational jurisdictions collide, infrastructure space becomes a medium of what might be called extrastatecraft- a portmanteau describing the often undisclosed activities outside of, in addition to, and sometimes even in partnership with statecraft" (Easterling, 2016, 15).

In accordance with Easterling, indeed infrastructures define the framework into which we co-exist and shape our living environment. This becomes clear through a transition we could name *from fruit trees to fruit* [slot]-machines space, infrastructures sometimes are integrated and assimilated into an existing condition, like the irrigation ditches rooted in Ida, while other times they work autonomously and create their own framework, like the Metastatic and Dilated Threshold of Gevgelija's Strip, where a new type of [non]-city is created next to the already existing one.

Yet, we find that this new formation of the "other [non]-city" is for some people addictively useful, if not indispensable. The position of this assemblage, but also the programmes developed there, make the area a heterotopia of hedonism, a hedonism that comes from activities related to extravagance and luxury. The "other [non]- city" becomes a field for display of phenomena that could not be openly taking place in the local countryside society. As Foucault has described the condition which generates a heterotopia is related to a mental displacement: "it is through the mirror that I discover my absence from the place I occupy, since I see myself from the other side. Starting from that gaze that somehow stares at me, from the depths of

this virtual space, which is from the other side of the glass, I return to myself and begin to return my eyes towards me and begin to reconstitute my presence there where I am." (Foucault, 1986, 4).

A collateral conclusion could be that critical areas like borderlands, when traversed by important connecting infrastructures, have the potential of being designed as generators of opportunities for coexistence. Albeit this coexistence appears as a collateral phenomenon, within the Strip since it consists of 'a detached world' dominated by standardisation in the service of the market economy, we still can trace down connections between places, people, and lifestyles we priorly considered as different or incompatible.

The powerful combination of the border and the motorway forms a threshold, here referred to as Dilated Threshold, and moreover the Metastatic and Dilated Limit which become critical spaces and/or mechanisms allowing for this coexistence to be possible and desirable.

However, from an architectural or planning point of view we are currently unable to detect a relationship of coexistence between Gevgelija's Strip and its context i.e. the countryside. Can this type of quasi-urbanity, Gevgelija's Strip suggests, be the only answer on how can we live out of the city, in the countryside, along with infrastructure and even borders, or is it in fact the result of an architectural uneasiness/anxiety when trying to make suggestions in this context? Could things be different if we tried to think that 'non' of the non-place, or the absence of density, architecture or programme in this or similar areas, not as a lack of something but rather as a creative field for thinking that the countryside confronts us with, contrary to the highly developed reflexes/reflections the city has created for us?

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NOTES

1. Author¹, I. Orlis originates from and grew up in the Village of Ida.

2. The in situ research was conducted by Author¹.

3. For background information about the Macedonia naming dispute See: NIMETZ, Matthew, 2020, The Macedonian "Name" Dispute: The Macedonian Question—Resolved? *Nationalities Papers*. 2020. Vol. 48, no. 2p.205–214. DOI 10.1017/nps.2020.10.

4. Ibid note 2.

5. S. Marot on Agronica (Branzi), New Babylon (Constant), Agricultural City (Kurokawa): "Although one notices an increasing role given to agriculture and agricultural practices in shaping a hybrid rural and urban environment, each one of those systematised visions still considers the farmed, rural world as basically a backdrop or carpet onto which the urban components -be they solid or transient- act as three dimensional protagonists." See: MAROT, Sebastien. *Taking the country's side: agriculture and architecture*. Lisbon Architecture Triennale, Polígrafa. 2019, pp.71-72.

6. K. Easterling refers to the role that infrastructures play today in shaping the environment we live. According to her: "Infrastructure space has become a medium of information. The information resides in invisible, powerful activities that determine how objects and content are organized and circulated. Infrastructure space with the power and currency of software, is an operating system for shaping the city." See: EASTERLING, Keller. *Extrastatecraft: The Power of infrastructure space*. London, New York: Verso. 2016, pp.13.

7. Author¹ I. Orlis first developed an interest in the concept of the center for the *passers-by* by working on his student project *Κέντρο διερχομένων* [center for the passers-by/ transit center] at the Department of Architecture, University of Thessaly [presented in June 2018] with supervisor visiting Professor Leonidas Papalampropoulos. At some point of the research for the topic presented in the current article the term was also found in the research thesis of Antonios Tsiligiannis for the Dept. of Architecture, National Technical University of Athens titled *Οι Σιδηροδρομικοί Σταθμοί ως Πυκνωτές του Αστικού Ιστού*. [Rail stations as condensers of the urban fabric] with Supervisor Dimitris N. Karidis, presented at winter Semester of academic year 2011-2012. See TSILIGIANNIS, Antonios, *Οι Σιδηροδρομικοί Σταθμοί ως Πυκνωτές του Αστικού Ιστού*. [Rail stations as condensers of the urban fabric] [online] Available at: <https://www.academia>. pp.55 [Accessed on 14th of April 2022].

8. See: VENTURI, Robert. and others. *Learning from Las Vegas: The forgotten symbolism of architectural form*. Cambridge: The MIT Press. 1977, pp.9-18.

9. Since signing the Agreement Greece and North Macedonia "acknowledge that their respective understanding of the terms 'Macedonia' and 'Macedonian' refers to a different historical context and cultural heritage." See: Prespa Agreement [online], available on: <https://www.mfa.gr/images/docs/eidikathemata/agreement.pdf>