

urban trails – Tirana

3-Lakes Project Summary

Project Principles

The project aims to build green paths and trails that link the Grand Park of Tirana with Farka Park and the Dry Lake neighborhood. These trails will not only provide avenues for **recreation and relaxation** but also contribute to the sustainable development of the region by promoting active mobility and preserving green spaces. To achieve this, the project adheres to strict guidelines ensuring the **safety and accessibility** of the trails.

The designed trails do not share the space with existing motorized traffic routes. They either follow newly established paths or reactivate previously abandoned routes. Streets with significant traffic loads will be safely crossed using overpasses, while at other intersections, maximum safety measures, such as traffic calming measures, will be implemented. Well-lit pathways, limited gradients suitable for cycling, and the creation of attractive passages with clear route guidance and visibility help to also increase **safety and security**. Additionally, **equal treatment** for cyclists and pedestrians (in terms of quality and quantity) is prioritized, with each trail segment designed to be a spacious 4 meters wide, fostering a harmonious coexistence and encouraging **diverse usage** patterns.

Furthermore, the project emphasizes the importance of **fostering synergies** and creating new business opportunities within the community. By connecting green areas through the most direct routes, including the (still restricted) area of the Palace of Brigades Park, the trails aim to enhance the overall **livability of the area**. Through intuitive design and careful planning, the urban trail project seeks to not only fulfill its functional objectives but also contribute to the cultural and economic vitality of the city and ultimately **becoming a cherished asset** for residents and visitors alike.

The existing trail network has not undergone thorough examination, and there may be areas requiring improvement to ensure consistent quality throughout.

Route Proposal

In the process of **route planning and design**, the following factors have been considered:

Connectivity: Establishing a network of trails to link the Grand Park Lake, Farka Lake and the Dry Lake as key destinations, including the surrounding parks, cultural sites and attractions, and the neighboring residential areas.

Accessibility: Ensuring the trails are accessible to pedestrians and cyclists of all ages and abilities, with provisions for ramps, crosswalks, recreational spots, and other amenities like shading and lighting.

Safety and security: Implementing measures to enhance safety, such as overpasses to crossroads with considerable traffic volume, respectively traffic calming techniques where crossing on street level is inevitable, signage, and lighting along the trail routes.

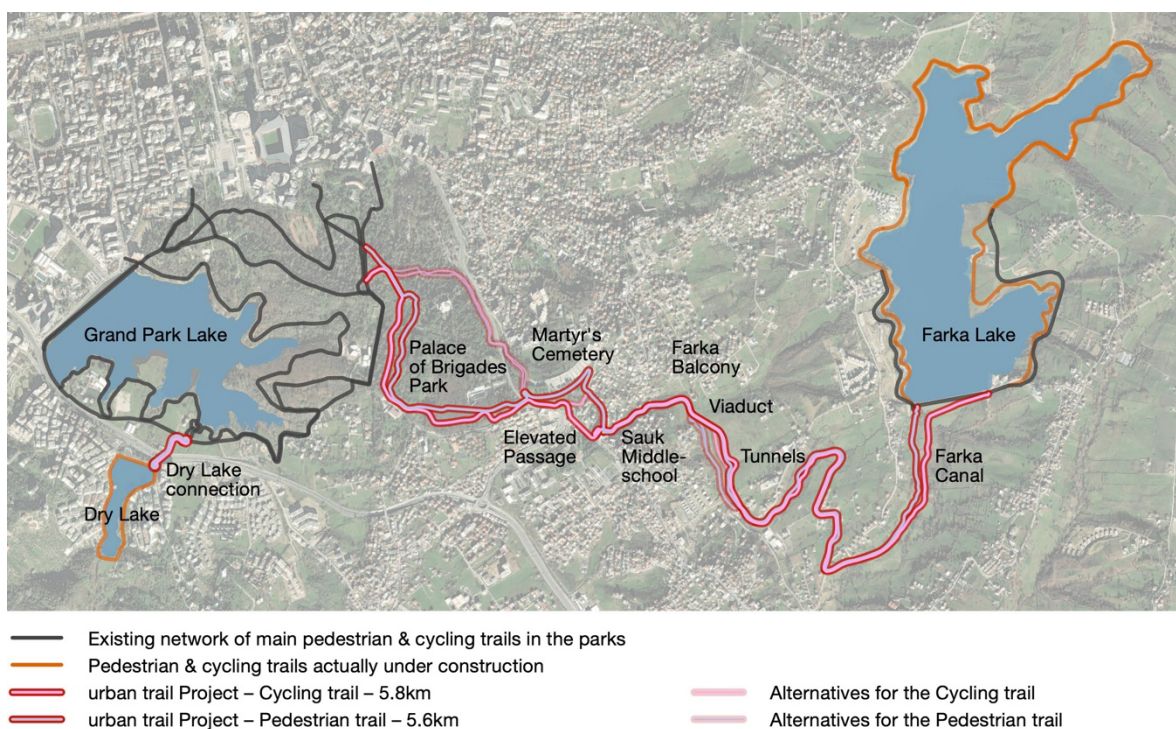
Integration: Integrating the urban trail network with existing sustainable mobility infrastructure, including pedestrian paths, bike lanes, and public transport systems.

The highlights

The new pedestrian and cycling trails connect at the highest point of the Grand Park (Exercise Park) with the existing path network. From there the trails enter the (so far restricted) area of the **Palace of Brigades Park** through the north gate (in case the Palace of Brigades Park cannot be accessed [yet], an alternative bypass-route has been studied to be drawn along the Elbasan Road). There, in most parts, the existing and historic paths can be reused – winding through the forest, passing the biotope and climbing up to the easternmost corner of the park, from where an **Elbasan Road overpass** will provide easy pedestrian access to the **Martyr's Cemetery**. The **elevated passage** continues high above the noisy traffic arteria, circling the **Sauk Roundabout** in a spectacular way. The total 500m long elevated passage descends then safely at the location of the planned **Sauk middle school**, enabling synergies and an attractive access for scholars and residents. Just behind

the school, the trails reach a green and park-like area again, meandering between the Sauk neighborhoods towards the **Farka Balcony**, from where the whole valley can be overseen from the newly created, relaxing lookout point. Pedestrians and cyclists are led from there over a **wooden viaduct** with a slight descent towards the land on the other side of the valley, continuing southwards to turn and pass in front of total 26 former military **tank tunnels**, which – at least some of them – can be reused in any creative and synergetic way. Passing along vineyards and orchards the trails reach the still noticeable canal platform, which is evidence of the earlier **canal system**, that once worked between the artificial lakes. Tracing the canals as they wind their way northward, the trails lead to the lake dam, seamlessly merging with the trail network encircling the Farka Lake.

On the Dry Lake side there's a relatively short link needed to connect the **Dry Lake** pedestrian 'roundabout' from the dam towards the existing Grand Park Lake trails. The connection consists of a Bridge over the highway (southern ring) and – due to the topographical conditions – a ramp descending towards the Municipality's **Bicycle Academy**, which serves as a hub for cyclists and pedestrians.



Mobility modes

Pedestrians

It is essential for humans to feel safe and secure to decide 'to walk'. The project addresses this need in several aspects like the spacious and clear route. Lighting, accessibility, safety at junctions, the use of overpasses (instead of underpasses), the dedicated pedestrian area, recreational spots and shadow-casting trees along the path contribute to a pedestrian-friendly environment and help promoting walkability. In this regard, the expansion of public transport offers is equally essential!

Stairs are planned only where a barrier-free alternative is available in the immediate vicinity, so that people with wheelchairs or (grand-)parents with strollers do not have to make unreasonable detours.

Cyclists

Specific attention is given to the needs of cyclists. The design of cycling trails with a maximum gradient of 6% wherever possible, ensure accessibility and safety. The route is direct and intuitive, without interruptions like crossing levels. Providing a 4-meter-wide trail for cyclists enables efficient and safe travel, allowing also overtaking of slower travelers.

One of the project's key goals is the promotion and practical demonstration of cycling as a sustainable, attractive, and safe mode of transportation and recreational activity.

Public Transport

It is strongly recommended to expand the public transport network and establish regular service to the neighborhoods surrounding Farka Lake through the introduction of new bus lines and bus stations. This would provide greater flexibility, particularly for pedestrians, and yield mutual benefits for both public transport and urban trail users.

Motorized Traffic

Pedestrians and cyclists are always given priority over motorized traffic. This is particularly important at crossing levels, where the motorized traffic is slowed down on walking velocity, to sensitize the drivers sufficiently for the slow and vulnerable participants.

Key subjects

Environment

The project incorporates environmental considerations to minimize its **ecological footprint** and enhance sustainability. The performed Environmental Report identifies potential impacts on biodiversity, habitats, and natural resources. An important focus of the project is the maintenance of the green infrastructure balance. Trees, shrubs, and groups of them (tiny forests) will be planted along the trails, to enhance **ecological resilience** and provide ecosystem services.

Land use

The urban trail requires the use of cultivated and forest land, as well as **land acquisition** (expropriations) along the trail's route. Temporary land use is necessary for construction activities, with recultivation planned to mitigate **impacts on cultivated areas**. Minimal tree cutting is required in forests, with efforts to preserve healthy trees. Land acquisition aims to minimize disruption to parcel boundaries, with restoration planned after construction. Historic substance, notably in the Palace of Brigades area, will be preserved through adherence to respective management plans.

Branding and Communication plan

Linking **three artificial lakes** and their surrounding parks in the southeastern periphery of Tirana offers an excellent opportunity for an imaginative Branding and Communication. The comprehensive marketing guideline outlines strategies to promote the urban trail, aiming to raise awareness, engage stakeholders, and ensure **successful implementation** through targeted branding and effective communication.