Urban retrofitting of a large-scale industrial area. the new matrix of the built and natural environment in the framework of the process of metropolisation of the city of Baku (Azerbaijan) – the case of “black city”

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In the context of economic and demographic growth in Baku, one of the primary urban and environmental challenges is about the retrofitting strategy for the large-scale industrial area called “Black city”. This highly contaminated area exposes traces of heavy industrial pollution on a large scale and partly as a result of authority decisions made during Soviet era. Black City represents a legacy from the origins of oil exploration in the 19th century when Baku became the first center for oil exploitation (1847).

Today, the capital city of Baku houses 25 percent of all inhabitants nationwide (2.5 million people) and they aspire to better urban ecological conditions.

This thesis aims to address a particular and complex issue – the revival of a postindustrial urban area of more than 2000 ha. The particularity of this area is its low density and financial attractiveness for developers due to its proximity to the city center. The territory cuts the city in two; making this a huge slice of urban territory in the heart of the city. Within the last few years this area has become the scene of multiple urban revival projects with little or no comprehensive urban retrofit agenda or strategy.

The project’s objective is to suggest a sustainable alternative for a territorial revival project: incorporating existing retrofitting projects into a coherent program aimed to restore the natural values of the Absheron peninsula (Baku region). It will take into account multiple dynamics of change including environmental ones such as climate change. Through the thesis we are trying to answer these questions: how can we retrofit this territory and make a project in the context of heavy industry traces on a large-scale? What are the tools to produce a territorial project? Can “Penetrating the greenery”, that has been experimented in Geneva, be one of the solutions to meet presented challenges?