

what

where

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WHO

are we building for?

why

when





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Who are we building for?

short journal and journey through time and space in Kosovo

MASTER'S THESIS

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AFFIDAVIT

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Date

Signature



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I was born the year the Serbian Assembly revoked Kosovo's autonomy, at the time no one knew the consequences, but it was an event that would shape my world less than a decade later. The Berlin Wall had just fallen seven months before my birth, opening the Soviet Bloc countries to new opportunities and new horrors. I was born in the house my family built; the house I would grow up in. It was burned and rebuilt just like the fragile country that surrounded it. My father was a teacher, but he spent most of my early life scraping for work in a faraway land, my mother took care of her six children, including me, a task made more difficult by lack of running water and faulty electricity. Connectivity to the outside world was rare and fleeting. We grew up knowing every rabbit trail in the hills that surrounded the town but were never allowed to leave our country's borders. My oldest brother moved away while a young teen, to support the family from abroad. The other two brothers followed suit as soon as they were of age. My oldest sister married and moved abroad, leaving only my younger sister and me. By this time the war had come and gone, a horrific, but brief flash of human cruelty and suffering. I watched my family rebuild the remnants of the house with diminutive, and odd aid from foreign governments: A single door, or a window frame, maybe a few tiles, nothing substantive. But rebuild we did, just like my neighbors and the rest of the country. I saw firsthand the destruction of my tiny village as I rummaged through the torn-out guts of burnt, destroyed homes and shops. Searching for indoctrination booklets and other trinkets, toys, and artifacts, my little sister and I would bring them home, not knowing that my own family had just thrown out those same propaganda books the week before. But books were precious to me even when reading them the rhetoric made little sense to me. Soon enough they would be put aside and forgotten for more imminent needs of shelter food and water. We would eventually get running water and more reliable electricity, little by little the roads that I walked daily to the next town for school would be paved, and the mosque at the center of the village would be slowly rebuilt in time for me to move away, first to the city and then to Austria. Things in this account are true, they are accurate to the best of my ability to remember, but there is always an exception to the rule. When statements are made about how things are, I have always found someone to pop up and say, "What about...?" These exceptions only serve to prove the rules and show their exceptions. These exceptions stand out, rather than blending seamlessly with the background. The interviews I conducted occurred over time, the veracity of an old man's or woman's account about things that happened decades before can be corroborated, but not necessarily verified. They are like all good stories; truth is in them and sometimes the story's truth is more important than facts.



WHERE IT STANDS AS IT STANDS

I

"Dreq..." I grumbled as I kicked the degraded piece of concrete. Not even rebar was left, just some crumbled faded grey stones basking in the dying summer light. The only way I would have even noticed it was the gash of crystal quartz abruptly ending in a semi-circle of grey stone.

That was it, the last chance I had at making my proposed thesis a reality. Up in smoke, or better said, up in crumbled stones and thorny bushes clinging tenaciously to the face of the ancient coastal stones and the remnants of the not-so-ancient bunkers. I just spent the last two weeks hopping buses, dragging bags through streets of derelict buildings in danger of imminent collapse hanging over my head, and for what? Nothing, nada, zippo...

After working any shift I could get and saving every penny that came my way; I finally executed my long planned research trip to Albania. From Shkodër in the north to Ksamil on the southern border with Greece, my plan was to visit places I could only vaguely remember, places that I heard of, and places that had lived in legends.

I toured Albania with the hope of researching the vast network of bunkers that had spread through the country and covered the terrain like pox, but to my detriment, having realized their mistake, clearing up the huts, leaving only pock scars on the face of the countryside.

I remembered the bunkers from my time in Albania as a refugee; large and small, connected to tunnel networks or isolated and alone, but always present. My family and I escaped to Albania with just what we could carry in our hands and were ushered to the camps outside of Kukës, it was just one of the many places I would stay until I was able to return to my home. Our constant reminder that we were in a foreign country were these "concrete turtles."

There was not much to remember about the place, a small, industrialized city, with small neighborhoods. We were situated in a camp outside of city limits. But what I do remember were the bunkers, covering everywhere.

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From mountains to the lowlands these “pill boxes” of reinforced concrete were built under Enver Hoxha to protect the country from Western invaders who never came. The bunkers were unseemly and grotesque, abandoned and speckled the land like immobile tortoises. I remember them everywhere, yet on this trip there were none to be found.

Well, none is a bit of an exaggeration, I did run into a few, most of which had been converted into goat sheds, and were not of any particular use or interest. One in the capital was converted to a museum of sorts, but again these random, odd and occupied bunkers were not the bunkers that I remember, nor were they actually viable for the idea that was crawling around in my head.

“Oh well, let’s head back. And be careful where you step. These stones are sharp,” my colleague said after we realized there was not much more to do. And with the setting sun, my aspiration sank as well. But I needed to do something, for sure there was something I had missed, something that I could use, if I were just able to go back to the drawing board and rethink.

So back to the beginning, back to brainstorming.

Storm, storm, storm, storm.... And... I got nothing.

What little inspiration I had faded as we drove back north, we passed the fields that were once the camps at Tepelenë, a city established during the Ottoman Empire in the 15th Century and controlled by the Albanian historical figure Ali Pasha in the early 19th Century. It was a unique city, but one we just barreled through to stay on our tight schedule.

Tepelenë was old, but the camps were much more recent. Built during the communist period following the Second World War, they were of an equally dark origin to the camps which had preceded them during the war years. But just like the bunkers I had sought out, the camps were gone, buried, forgotten. Now a sports field, a few houses, and some barns cover any trace of the old internment camps.

Storm, storm, storm... and once again nothing.

Great ideas just popped up in my head but ended just as quickly as I shot them down with counterarguments.

where it stands as it stands-intro

I mean what is the point of all these empty things and places; so many abandoned things that were partially or completely deteriorated. It is as if no one ever thought of all the abandoned and forgotten places; places just like...

A lightbulb turns on, figuratively and literally, as our driver receives a "take a break" signal that the new VWs have once they notice your tiredness. The notifications got annoying enough that we decided to stop so it would reset. We had not been driving too long it seemed, but it was as good a time as any to stop for a quick coffee and a bite to eat.

A clear blue sky and an almost desert-like valley basin spread out before the small group of cars clustered on the side of the road. The small fruit market at the gas station was a godsend, fresh watermelon floating in chilled water, succulent cantaloupes and tasty-looking berries were on display, making it hard to choose what to snack on. Most of the products were grown locally in the Mediterranean climate fed by mountain water lazily flowing through the crystal rivers. The fruit was delicious, and the setup was very, very rural.

Ding, Ding, Ding, another light went off in my head. But still no coherent idea. There was something here, just what?

Passing out of the coastal countryside of Albania into the more mountainous region I noticed a change. A change that made me think of my childhood and the place where I grew up.

While visiting my homeland year after year, I had noticed that there was rapid growth, yet a stillness, an emptiness was forming. Rows of new houses appeared all over the countryside covering the land like a carpet, yet still and quiet as a gravestone. And for what? For whom? Who is building all these new homes? Who needs them? How are they being built? Why are they built the way they are? How does one decide where a new home is built? Are they needed? What will happen with the old, abandoned structures that remain? Did anyone really return so far? What are we heading towards? What does the future look like for my people? For my land?

As I write and look back, I realize what was happening. This trip is the basis for this coalesced work. Something I was trying to avoid, my homeland, my Kosovo but for some reason ended up being my muse. But not just the

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place, but rather my home, the countryside, the people, the rural area of Kosovo, and the events happening or not happening there.

Where do we belong?

My home, my house, is a small place for the size of the family who lives there. My father originally built the house and then rebuilt it after the war with the help of my eldest brother who as just a teenager had already migrated to Switzerland to work in construction to send money home.

It was two stories with an external staircase, but most of the living is done on the ground floor. The kitchen and the living room served as the center of life, with the family only retreating to our rooms to sleep...for those who are lucky enough to have rooms. The others must collapse on the couch, or pads on the ground, when the hour gets too late.

It was a great house where many kids grew up, becoming adults whose children then inhabited the house, and strangely, despite the cramped size, there was a peculiarity---an empty room.

This peculiarity, an anomaly of spatial constraints, seems to be a running theme in Kosovo. Kosovo is without a doubt a land of constrictions and odd surprises. Despite being landlocked its café culture and Mediterranean flair run rampant with some of the best coffee outside of Italy (that is not just my opinion). And despite being a majority Muslim country, it has a widespread tradition of alcohol production, distillation, and drinking. Kosovo despite being deep in Europe, celebrates the 4th of July and honors the heroes of the United States, by naming buildings, streets, and public spaces after American leaders. This oddity is a result of the constant waves of change raging over the region.

The speed of changes in Kosovo has been overwhelming, Kosovo had been in utter ruins, with every other house in my own village being burnt to the ground. Now it is one of the youngest, most vibrant countries in Europe. But this fledgling nation of rapid change and uncontrolled growth is facing new challenges.

Kosovo, dominated for centuries by outsiders, Romans, Slavic Serbs and Bulgarians, Ottomans, and Communist and Western regimes, resulting in a mix of cultures and influences, mingling the lives of its people, its

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traditions, and its socioeconomic situations. But now Kosovars are facing a new challenge, a challenge of freedom, a challenge of choosing their own direction and economic development.

These changes are making it so that most Kosovars can no longer meet their current or even future needs, especially rural dwellers. Food insecurity, unemployment, over-employment, spiraling debt, and much, much more are having drastic effects and changes on the social, cultural, and demographic makeup of the country. These changes, often due to powers outside of Kosovo's control or a continuance of poor past decisions embedded and ingrained into a system that the people did not choose are coming to a head.

The people of Kosovo, isolated and forgotten, now have a chance to decide their own country's future as international support and control fades. For example, the world banking crisis of 2008 was barely felt in Kosovo. Kosovo's recovery from the war and whose isolation from international banking, caused the wide-reaching economic shocks to be nothing but a tiny ripple. But will that hold true?

A part of that isolation is physical, climatic, and geographic separation. Kosovo covers an area of 10,908 square kilometers, or approximately two-thirds the size of Steiermark or one-fourth the size of Switzerland.¹ It is surrounded by a ring of mountains with a central plain divided by a small range into two valleys. The mountains are distinctly rugged with very few passes, which enforced the long isolation of the country and its critical position as a bottleneck in the battleground of the Balkan Peninsula.

Isolated yet right in the middle of everything?

Around 41% of the cultivable land in Kosovo is forest and 53% is arable which grows a small variety of crops with barley and wheat leading, and a variety of vegetables following in a distant third place.² The two main valleys are the Dukagjini Vally and the Kosovo Valley both having slightly different microclimates lending to slight variations in preferred crops in the two valleys. The forested foothills surrounding the valleys are often left for logging or cultivation of berries, grapes, and other fruits.

Kosovo is almost entirely self-sufficient in water, hydroelectricity being one of the country's hot topics currently. The main rivers in Kosovo are

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Drini i Bardhë, Sitnica, Lumbardhi i Pejës, Morava, Lepenci, Ibri, and Lumbardhi i Prizrenit which crisscross the country's various regions; none of which are navigable nor connect to a navigable body of water.³ This means all imports and exports have to come up over and through the mountain passes for trade, increasing the cost of doing business, isolating the country, and diverting development and infrastructure around Kosovo, despite it being a direct "as a bird flies" pathway from the east to the west.

A part of Kosovo's self-sustainment is resulting (unfortunately) in Kosovo dealing with environmental damage from mineral seepage, unauthorized mining and quarrying, illegal land clearing (resulting in deforestation), and dealing with human-produced trash and waste.

The only reliable source of electrical power in Kosovo is the dirtiest method of producing energy, a lignite coal plant. Lignite, mined in Kosovo as well, is incredibly inefficient to burn, stripping the top layer of earth, leaving massive scars, resulting in incredible amounts of run-off pollution and proximity contamination.⁴

Kosovo's continental climate, with hot summers and cold winters, is a driver for high energy demand, either cooling in the summer or heating in the winter. The transition months are rather brief and, while it receives adequate rain for hydroelectrical plants, land rights, ethnic disputes and future instability of the world's climate may prevent any movement on this front.

I experienced all this as I flourished in the forested hills and craggy mountains, running through the corn and wheat, picking grapes and berries in the foothills, and suffering from the cold winters as I walked to school in the snow or got drenched on the way home from a summer squall.

My life, the life of a typical rural Kosovar, was, is, and will be affected by the terrain, the climate, and mineral wealth, as much now as it was a hundred years ago.

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Historically Kosovo has had no sprawling metropolis. Even after medieval and early modern periods cities were small in comparison to neighboring countries and fiefdoms. When the few cities did develop their economies based mainly on trade of a local nature and still highly dependent on local rural agrarian activities. During the Ottoman period the towns designated as judicial and political centers developed, but most of Kosovo was ruled by local administrative bodies such as village elders. For hundreds of years, Kosovo's development and economics were stagnant, but this all began to change under the dogmatic yet progressive Yugoslavian establishment and the post-World Wars era.

Beginning in the '60s Yugoslavia opened its doors to emigration and Kosovo, as the most underdeveloped in Yugoslavia, suffered through or took advantage of this opportunity (depending on your point of view). Many emigrated to developed European countries such as Germany or Switzerland. This diaspora became a critical integral part of Kosovo's developing economy, many second and third-generation workers still economically invest in their "home" village despite growing up and living abroad.

What can I get for a Euro now?

In 1954 the per-capita income in Kosovo was 48% of the Yugoslav average, but after years of abusive policies benefiting other regions by 1980 it had fallen to 28% and the unemployment rate was more than double the Yugoslavian average.⁵ Kosovo's labor market was flooded with educated youths with no prospect of finding a job, which drove many to immigrate to other lands.

During the 1990s a parallel economy developed after Kosovo's autonomous region status was ripped away and its people cut off.

One of the most impacted areas was education. Serbia pushed a Serbian national education agenda and bared Albanians from education especially secondary and higher education. In an attempt to circumnavigate this and in a show of defiance, a parallel economy grew to pay the teachers who were instructing the Kosovar children after Serbia refused to pay Albanian teachers.

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As education was the heart of the Kosovar resistance movement it consumed most of the voluntary taxes raised by the parallel government. Two-thirds of the tax revenues were collected inside Kosovo with the remaining third from the Albanian diaspora. These funds kept over 330,000 students in school and financed almost 15,000 university students.⁶

During this time medical staff were also dismissed causing the parallel economy to fund medical clinics across Kosovo. This parallel economy led to a private economy making rapid advances and offering public services.

Small businesses and cafes sprang up on every street but without a production base, Kosovo was heavily dependent on imports and smuggling due to the shutdown of borders, which were a part of economic life. Hyperinflation burned through the early 90s and a complex barter system using the Deutsch mark was developed.

During this period the diaspora became critical to families in Kosovo. At that time around 217,000 Kosovars were estimated to be living abroad, the majority of which were in Germany and Switzerland. Not even a decade later did the number of Kosovars double abroad.⁷

By 1998, busloads of people were leaving Kosovo every day. Immigration was one of the only solutions for young men to avoid conscription into the Yugoslav army which was fighting genocidal wars in Croatia and Bosnia. For most families migration was the only way to survive.

Around DM200 million (€100 million)⁸ were sent to Kosovo every year through its migrant workers. These funds were of critical importance, but were still not enough to stem the economic decline. Without maintenance and investment, Kosovo's infrastructure was falling apart. The majority of rural houses had no access to telephone or sewage systems and to survive, families became subsistence farmers.

Years of salaries, and social pension contributions were lost. Cutting care and education of children was seen as "saving" by the Yugoslavian government. One of the most spectacular abuses was the government's seizure of private bank accounts. Companies were forced to merge with Serbian companies, and shady privatization, looting, and asset stripping were just a few more sources of income for the Serbian government. Destroying the Kosovar's economy, more than 350,000 individuals were dependent on humanitarian aid even before any fighting had begun.⁹

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Plenty of things happened before. why now?

October 1, 1997, a major protest organized in Pristina was crushed by Serbian Police.¹⁰ The next month the war began in earnest with Serbian police forces being ambushed by Kosovo liberation fighters. After nearly a decade of trying to find a diplomatic solution, Kosovars were forced to fight after years of being ignored by the European community. Serbia forced more than 800,000 Kosovars from their homes to Albania, Montenegro, and Western states.¹¹ Agriculture and livestock were completely destroyed, and the infrastructure was non-existent. Kosovo's economy no longer existed, with much of its population attempting just to survive in tents during harsh winters.

The international community created an impressive emergency and relief program estimated at five billion euros until 2005, but alas, much of this assistance (42%) never made it to the people and was spent on multi-national employee salaries.¹² It was the largest international peacekeeping mission ever undertaken, in terms of staffing, but relatively little or disjointed aid made it the people of Kosovo.

After hostilities had ceased Kosovars began to return slowly, as the UN transitioned over to a Kosovo-led provisional government that eventually became legitimate. By far the largest barrier for returning displaced persons was the destroyed economy: no trade, destroyed cropland, and just a handful of businesses survived to hire the returning refugees.

"I returned to nothing, but I was still not the worst off."

Mr. Krasniqi slyly stated, knowing very well I knew his story and what he really meant.

He was a long-time neighbor of my family, living just a minute down a dusty road. Not only that, but he knew, I knew, we had all lived through the same thing.

"My house was burnt out completely, just charred walls, but the barn at the other end of the field had been spared."

Either by laziness or expediency, I added in my head, as he spoke.

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"So we stayed there the first few months, was it, years?"

He chuckled continuing to speak,

"Luckily we had sold or slaughtered all the animals before leaving so they wouldn't have been left to fend for themselves or starved."

"But you eventually got aid, right?" I quizzed him.

"Yes, but no." He smiled back, he was the type that always seemed to be in a good mood, even when talking about morose things.

"We received some tents, that were not much good against the weather, and eventually some construction supplies, but most of the rebuilding was done by the family."

"The mud was so thick in the field we would just stay indoors, sometimes we would just sit at the stoop and watch down the road, still not believing we were back."

He continued

"But eventually I found work in the next town Rahovec."

I prodded him with a quick "Why there?"

"You know, it's larger, so a little more work."

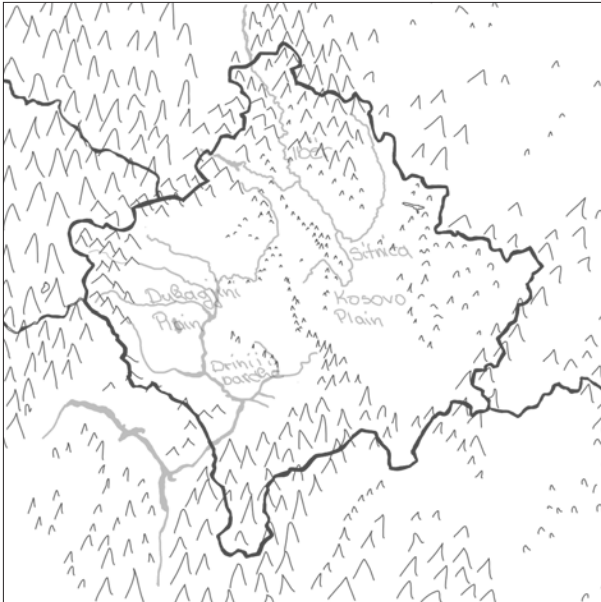
Yes, I did know, I would walk halfway there, to go to an overcrowded school. I imagine him continuing further down the road in the early dawn or staggering home in the evening after working a full day. Of course, he would be able to hitch a ride if he had some luck, but I'm betting that was rather rare.

Standing in the middle



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Kosovo: high to low



where it stands as it stands-intro





INCOMING!

II

I dove out the salon's door and scrambled down the narrow hallway and out the front door. She was after me. I couldn't let her catch me... my worst enemy, my mother, called my name, first with a calm even tone, but the second time was more of bleated beratement as she realized I had bolted again.

It was bath time and I, unlike my little sister, would not be subjugated to such an inhumane and dehumanizing act such as getting clean.

That was years ago, decades, my mother would walk down the road just to turn around, laden with liters of water back to the house. If she was lucky enough to get water that day, then she would heat it on a wood fire. The hotter the better. She believed that the water needed to burn the dirt away, along with your fingers, ears, and eyelids. What the water didn't burn, her tenacious scrubbing with sandpaper brushes would take care of the rest. Ok, ok, it was just a rag but please allow for some hyperbole.

Walking with my father into town down the same path my mother would travel to get water, it is all the same, but different. The small footpaths where I chased my friends through the overgrown shrubs, that are now trees have all gone.

We were leaving the new house, I wanted to walk into town to take some photos and my father decided to join me as we needed bread for the day.

A meal without bread is not a meal. That is how we are, and as we walked, I was already looking forward to soaking up the juice from the cooked chicken and potatoes that night with my bread.

We were much farther out from town than the old house, which we would pass on our way, along with the small two-room school I attended as a child and the graveyard where we would play, since it was the only open,

somewhat flat field in the small valley where my town nestled. However, although we lived farther than before, the store had moved as well, farther towards the opposite edge of town we were nearing.

This was my father's daily routine, even now in retirement, but it was a routine that most people in the village adhered to. In the morning the elderly approached. In the afternoon school children would hurry to the little store for essentials that were not produced at home. Coffee and tea were staples; bread was more and more common to purchase rather than baking at home. Other small goods, chocolates, sugar, were purchased in the store, but in the countryside, most families still produced their own foodstuffs.

Why does the food at home taste better?

When comparing household consumption to see where people and families spend their money, a divide between urban and rural development can be seen. An average rural family in Kosovo spends annually around 7200 euros, about 800 less than urban households. In rural areas, they are spending more on necessities such as food and transport, while in urban areas, money is spent on health, education, recreation, and communications.¹³

Furthermore, in 2013, around 75% of rural inhabitants had no hardline internet, more than half did not have access to computers, and 75% did not have a phone connection, landline or mobile phones.¹⁴ While this data has changed in the last decade, when compared to a developed country such as Austria, at the same time with 81% having access in 2013 and over 95% in 2020 one can see the disparity in infrastructure development.¹⁵

Urban residents receive their drinking water from public water services, and 50% of rural residents get drinking water from wells or other sources. This 90% of urban dwellings have public sewage and only 30% of rural households have connections. Only a very few systems have connections to sanitation plants.¹⁶ Lack of sanitation facilities puts rural dwellers even more risk of developing sicknesses, something that is already compounded by the lack of ready medical care.

The illiteracy rate is about twice as high in the rural areas as compared to the urban areas (8.8% to 4.3% in 1999 and 8.4% to 5.4% in 2009).¹⁷

The GDP per capita is estimated to be around €1.200 per year in 2010.¹⁸ This has grown substantially to around €5,300 per year in 2023.¹⁹ While remarkable growth in the last ten-plus years has occurred, the cost of living in Kosovo has also grown.

Traditionally Kosovo is an agricultural economy, most of which is subsistence farming. There are over 115,000 farms with an average size of .88 hectare and are considered operating at a loss, as more expenditure goes into the production of goods than is won from the sale.²⁰

Despite this handicap, agriculture is the largest revenue generator in Kosovo. Kosovo is reliant on imports as agriculture production is insufficient for its larger city centers, but as over 60% of the population lives in rural areas, most of the population is counted as self-sufficient.²¹

Most of Kosovo's industrialization is focused on natural and mineral resources. In the 1970s, Kosovo became a priority region for the Yugoslav Development Fund.²² Investments were however guided by political and ethnic motives, often one and the same. The various investments in different fields could not compete in a global market, due to an abundance of unproductive, poorly trained staff and corruption.

In the 1980s Serbian Assembly removed the worker's councils and placed their cronies in key positions. A new labor law allowed for large-scale dismissals of Albanians. Post-war, while under the direction of UNMIK, privatized businesses began to grow again, but despite best efforts, there were few international investors. However, remittances sent home from the Kosovar diaspora were around 505 million Euros a year.²³

Why do we need such a large tractor?

Due to its international isolation, the 2008 economic crisis had little effect on Kosovo, but stagnation occurred after years of international investor fears.²⁴ Kosovo's current industry is lacking and barely has any exports other than scrap metal, electricity, and galvanized steel. Despite being exported, regular and consistent electricity production is rare. The country runs a massive trade imbalance due to this disparity and close to 70% of Kosovo's budget is collected on import duties at the borders²⁵, which only passes the cost on to its people.

It is not all doom and gloom, reconstruction has been successful: modern legislation and new institutions have benefited many, there is a strong private banking and insurance sector, and infrastructure is improving.

This growth and improvement, while welcome, is still lacking. The country is slowly clawing along as the demands and needs of the people inside of Kosovo change and develop.

Architecture and construction are not to be isolated from political, economic, and societal influences. Growth does not happen in a vacuum. Once the political, economic, and historical growth of Kosovo is traced the influences on Kosovo's architectural space are obvious.

What is made in Kosovo stays in Kosovo?

"Xhufi, you've grown!"

I hadn't. I think I might be being made fun of.

"What are you looking for today? Kindereier?"

Now I know I was being teased.

"How's your father?"

She knew better than I, she sees him every day as he comes into the store, he was in the back right now, rifling through the bread box to find the freshest loaf.

But this was how she was, always ready to strike up a conversation. Luckily for me, dialog is exactly what I was here for today. And she dove right in.

"Back then we all ate from one bowl. Kids, old and young. I remember how funny it was, as the bowl emptied, the faster we reached with our spoons; it created kind of a melody when the spoon would hit the metal bowl. Ha ha ha!" she cackled as she rapped her knuckle on the small counter space that was overstocked with snacks and other goodies.

"We drank all from one glass also..." her voice drifted.

"When we split from our uncles, our family only had a cover to take with us and a room. We all slept up to 15 people in one room with the unmarried men sleeping with father in the guest room until getting married."

I continued to prod.

"Once you became a grandparent you no longer had a room or slept together. The grandma slept with the nieces or unmarried daughters and the grandpa with the nephews or unmarried sons."

We have a saying: The house belongs to God and the guest. She elaborated in her own way.

"The guests stayed for weeks. Each neighbor would invite the guest for dinner having a three-course meal. His place was at the head of the room. The door for the guest is always open no matter the time." She lingered.

"Men and women ate separately. Men ate at the guest room Oda, while the woman at the fireplace with the kids, where they cooked and worked. Not only that but each house had animals like horses and cows, inside the house if you could believe it..."

I could.

Dad finished up collecting the odds and ends he tasked himself with for the evening meal and we began to say our goodbyes and pleasantries, wrapping up business.

But first, "About that Kinderei..."



LOST IN THE SAUCE

III

"It was the late 80s when Hilmi decided to build a new house, but to be able to build a new house, he had to sell quite a valuable piece of land, and that took some time."

My sister, Fjolla, and I chatted while she bounced her new baby.

"But for the new type of house and its size, for that time" she noted, "would be all worth it."

She continued.

"The old two-story stone house with two bedrooms, a fireplace, and a guest room will be left to his two married older sons. The new one is already meant to belong to his youngest son because the parents are planning to spend their old days with him."

Strangely the local gossip was aligning with architecture and my interests.

"The new house was built but it remained unfinished for years. The parents were still living at the old house. It mattered that their son was still young and had just moved to Austria, he had time until marriage to earn better and to slowly build up the inside. Slowly they moved into the new house by having the cellar and the first floor ready."

"The cellar was turned into a fire room, cooking, storage place as well as the living room. On the first floor, they had the guest room now called a "salon" and one bedroom for the parents and a bath. It took over 20 years, including the war, until they managed to build the entire house with the façade included. Now the second floor with three bedrooms and a bath

belonged to his three sons, at least until the other two managed to build each their own house."

She chattered on, normally I would have lost patience, had she capitalized on this conversation by continuing with something else, but I slowly broke out my little notebook to start scribbling notes.

"All his three sons moved abroad, and with time the two other sons each built a house just down the street for themselves, each having three bedrooms: one for the parents and two for their sons. The parents kept living in the cellar until they died. Other than the bedroom on the first floor, the salon was used casually when guests would come. But the rest of the house remained empty and unused. After his father's death the son, seeing his two other brothers with new houses said, "I'm going to flatten this and build a new one for myself."

Ahh, that is how we got on that topic, I absentmindedly asked about the new clearing and work trucks down the road. Forgetting what such an innocent question would have led to. I guess I had been in Austria too long with the monosyllabic answers I get there.

Fjolla's husband strode into the room from the entry. I had not seen him in a while, but Fjolla had just shared the family picture album, including a few of him as a chubby kid. I decided to capitalize on his childhood tubbiness with a little light teasing.

"Hey! It's not my fault. That was the first year I moved to Switzerland as a kid. For the first time, I was exposed to so many varieties of chocolates and candies. Also, my dad, was feeling guilty about his absence while I was growing up, made sure to fulfill my wishes and I could buy whatever and as much as I wanted."

Destroy the old. build the new?

The old words are passed on, generation to generation, so that they are not forgotten. The dances practiced, the songs sung, and the music played, father to son and mother to daughter, all so that they are not forgotten. But the spaces that are built are burned and torn down, erased from memory. Kosovo's people pass on their traditions and values over and over, preserving the uniqueness of the culture, in all except architecture, it seems.

lost in the sauce-development

Either through invaders or the people of the land themselves. a tradition of construction, destruction, and construction again. in a never-ending cycle. An "ouroboros" of architecture that has its roots deep in Kosovo's past.

Romans overtook the Illyrians/Dardanians, which then fell to the invading tribes from the east, only to be subjugated by the early Ottoman empire. This process didn't end there, modernism, brutalism, deconstructivism, so forth, and so on... once something is out of "style", a tongue-in-cheek meaning of the term, it is removed and replaced. Architecture is as much en vogue in Kosovo, as whatever labels are parading down a catwalk.

Why did so many Roman Emperors come from Illyria?

Many architects and authors say you can read the story of a country through its architecture. You can see layers of history in architecture, plastered and glued and hammered together over the centuries, but not so much in Kosovo.

Being at the center of two conflicting worlds, the East and West, has created a no-man's land of architecture, almost as barren as the No-man's land of the First World War. To the north, south, east, and west of Kosovo, history still survives better. The Czech Republic, for example, has century-old gothic churches and contemporary architecture (Dancing House). But rarely does a historic building last in Kosovo.

The infamous motto "Destroy the old, build the new" from the 1950s arose in Kosovo as a part of Yugoslavia after World War II.²⁶ The fledgling reconstructing nation faced a new era, but the ideologues in charge, to promote their dogmatic doctrine approached architecture with eagerness of destruction, declaring the old, a vulgarism to the new modern state.

Many places have become unrecognizable through time, none more so than Prishtina. Destruction of the old Ottoman-era buildings including public places and buildings such as bazars, churches, mosques, and hammas took place following the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) policy that closely followed the earlier urbanist experiments of the

lost in the sauce-development

Soviet Union. Connections to nature such as having rivers running through the city or a house with a garden were replaced with concrete and high-rise buildings.

Promoting new, wide open, and clean living the Yugoslav propaganda found enthusiasm among people such as a group of volunteers who demolished the original city center of Prishtina, and as they did, they danced on the ashes of the buildings almost in celebration.

This trend is not solely limited to Prishtina, but is rather a fault of almost all urbanization with the entombment of natural waterways in concrete and steel. Once a site for bathing, strolls, and socializing, the rivers of Prishtina were turned into sewage and runoff conduits. Just like all totalitarian states, the ones in charge had a plan and they knew best, taking no contextual site evaluations.

Do things really change?

Strangely enough despite trying to modernize and promote the equality of women, the changes inflicted upon Kosovo only trapped them even more. While often Ottoman architecture considered the restrictions placed upon women under its empire by constructing quasi-public areas for women to mingle, the new socialist society blustered forward with no regard for the difficulty of changing the old ways. Facilities and areas designed for women to experience the outside world, women's gardens, and bathhouses, were common in the previous era, soon disappeared.

The new socialist/communist era, in the name of equality and equity, created small apartments, and isolated compounds, effectively cutting women off from the world.

Women's access to outside architecture, once again, was discarded. In

lost in the sauce-development

the decade-long decline of the SFRY, the structures that held the country together fell apart, and so did the chains on architecture. Just as Fitim consumed all the chocolate he could get his hands on, so did Kosovo devour the world of architecture as it opened to Kosovo.

A dome from Istanbul, the White House columns, a Frankfurter kitchen, it is a place of split personality disorders, a place trying to find its identity.

So yes, when Kosovo is criticized for not having an identity, yes, that is true only because finally it is allowed to have one, to create its own future and not one of an imposed structure from far away.

I would, however, argue that Kosovo has an identity of war, invaders, construction, and deconstruction. A personality of drastic changes of government and of failing regimes, and most importantly a glorious new state is born, a new experiment, a new way of trying to do things, that may include a misunderstanding of freedom and that with freedom comes responsibility. That is Kosovo's story, its identity but one which is still metamorphosing.

lost in the sauce-development



THE ORDER OF THINGS

IV

"Aihhhh! You know that is not how it works here. What do you think would happen if we tried it that way." My older sister chided me as she smiled and knocked the ash off her cigarette.

"You've been out of the country too long."

Maybe I had been, we were talking about something pretty trivial that later rolled into politics and of course, taxes. I had mentioned property taxes to curb expansion and sprawl, and to fund schools and other public goods. Perfectly logical, except, no list of any one person or governing agency knows who owns what and therefore no one knows whom to tax. This divide is something that can be seen between rural and urban settings in Kosovo. And while unregistered buildings are quite common in the city, the proximity of the government ensures any new construction is quite visible, making it difficult for high-profile public buildings to skirt the law. But the history of bucking authority can be found throughout Kosovo's past.

The rule of law?

The history of the Albanian people can be traced to the time of the second century B.C. and are considered one of the oldest inhabiting people in the Balkan Peninsula. Despite this fact, little written history or the remains of this ancient culture can be found. Facing floods of invaders over the centuries from all directions the Albanian people weathered the storms of time, but this created a constant state of transition.

History, poetry, and law among many others have been passed orally from one generation to another, the same with the rule of law. The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini is the oldest existing unwritten constructed law that has been used from the XV-XX century and still finds practice among people today. Albanian-spoken law was used for Centuries by many generations until it was finally documented and summarized by Shtjefën Gjeçovi in 1913 and then fully published in 1933.²⁷

the order of things-law

The word "kanun" comes from old Greek which describes a "straight rod, bar, esp. to keep a thing straight".²⁸ It is called "The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini" because it originated in the area where Lekë Dukagjini and his family ruled, but the laws were created and passed for many centuries before Lekë Dukagjini was born.²⁹

The Albanian Kanun is a set of unwritten laws shaping and governing social behavior and everyday life of Albanians (a summary of social and legal issues). The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini is divided into twelve chapters, among them the chapter on "Family," "Housing, Livestock and Property" and "Property Transfer" plays a very important role.³⁰

The highest, most sacred value of Kosovar society to this very day is the family. Traditional Albanian families would live in extended families of up to 50-60 people per household spanning many different generations, a tradition still to be found today, albeit in a reduced form.

The shared blood connections living under the same roof were the bond that constructed the family and organized in a hierarchy of having the eldest man as the head of the family. This blood-bond built brotherhoods and clans that shared the same values, language, and tradition. Each member of the family according to age or gender had a specific role and responsibility.³¹

Respect and care for the elderly family members is a must for the young members, as well as the elderly taking part in raising children. Care and contribution within the family goes from one generation to another. The family is a cluster of economic and residential entities that have equal obligations and rights to their clan and village. This value can be seen in the topological practice of having a shared common area found in the vernacular of Ottoman-influenced typology (more on that later).

Alongside rules that govern and organize the family, the oral law regulates housing, property, and livestock. Just like the family, property is sacred. By oral law "Every building that has a chimney where the smoke is to

the order of things-law

be seen is considered a household."³² A house includes a garden, land, vineyard, forested area and so on, divided from other lots by a boundary. This boundary creates a division between the village and the household. To mark this boundary, half-buried stones, or an old existing tree, would be set or chosen to mark a straight line that divides one property from another³³, to avoid future misunderstanding and conflict.

*These boundaries were sacred, placed by the elderly, and witnessed by the youngest to be retained in generational memory. In the view of Kanun, the bones of the dead and the stone boundaries are equal. To move a boundary is like moving the bones of the dead.*³⁴

According to tradition the change of the boundary cannot be done without great effort and consternation. The one that set the stone carries its weight in this life and the next while under the oath that he will be fair and represent the best interest of the parties involved and the village. These were serious matters, as a property dispute could soon boil over into bloodshed that engulfed the whole village.³⁵

This property, marked by the elders, can only be passed on to the proper heirs, sons of the owner of the land. If the owner doesn't have a son, it belongs to the extended family, but under no circumstances to females or their sons.

How did such things come to rise?

Just like inheritance, selling property also has strict rules to follow according to the Kanun.³⁶ If someone wants to sell his property, first he must ask his brothers and relatives, the clan, or the villagers. Someone else outside the village very rarely would receive the entire village's approval and could buy the property.

In rare cases if the approval happens the new owners are required to respect and obey the rules and customs of the village. The process of negotiation, as well as buying property is done in the presence of

witnesses. Young and old would be present to make sure the generational continuity of what occurred would be remembered.

Property is classified into private and common, movable, and immovable, per the Kanun, and regulates the usage of the common property equality for each household as well as the infrastructure including roads, sewage, and so on.³⁷ Kanun, depending on the region, contains much more than what has been written; each aspect of life goes into more detail.

One time I asked my father how the distance of the house from the boundary of the neighbor's was set, and he answered, "A meter away from the other neighbor's house shadow." Knowledge of this agreement has been passed down through the family and is known throughout the village elders, establishing a common ground and setting rules that are to be followed by the next generations.

Among the many rules, the Kanun has a unique regulation when it comes to the guest and hospitality. "The house of an Albanian belongs to God and the guest. If a guest enters the house, even though he may be in blood with you (in conflict), you must say to him, Welcome."³⁸ "The guest must be honored with bread and salt and the heart."³⁹

So many rules, so few freedoms, but who enforces?

Once a guest enters the house of a family everything revolves around them. Offering them comfort such as shelter, food, and most importantly protection; it's a tradition that has been practiced for centuries. It is not surprising that over two thousand Jews fleeing for their lives were sheltered and saved during World War II because of this tradition.⁴⁰

Architecturally this guest tradition can be seen in the inclusion of guest rooms in vernacular and post-vernacular houses in Kosovo (But again, more on that later).

the order of things-law

The Kanun today can be shocking to modern values, especially when it comes to women's rights. It strongly limits and controls actions women are allowed to do, and inheritance stands out.

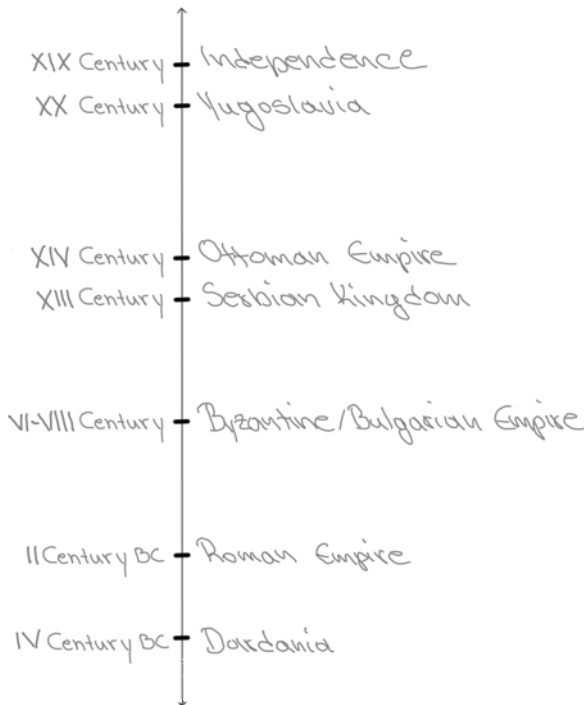
There is a subtlety to the rules, however, women are not allowed ownership, but despite this, they and their children are also guaranteed under the law always to have a place to stay in their family home and as long as needed. Often this would be a second home. Typologically this resulted in many extra rooms or whole floors being kept empty to accommodate the influx of visitors.

Despite centuries of invasion and occupation by the Romans, Slavs, Ottoman, and Serbs, Albanian culture and tradition survives today, because of the Kanun. This created and maintained until this day a parallel system that, despite overpowering occupiers, the culture of the native inhabitants survives and thrives. The insistence of the laws ebbed and flowed with time, falling in and out of the controlling system. But it was always there, in the background, to give structure to a rather wild and isolated region in southeastern Europe.

The Kanun is most probably what kept the Albanians from assimilating.⁴¹ But above all having a strong tradition made it easier for Albanians to organize their life and manage living in harmony with each other throughout the centuries of change.

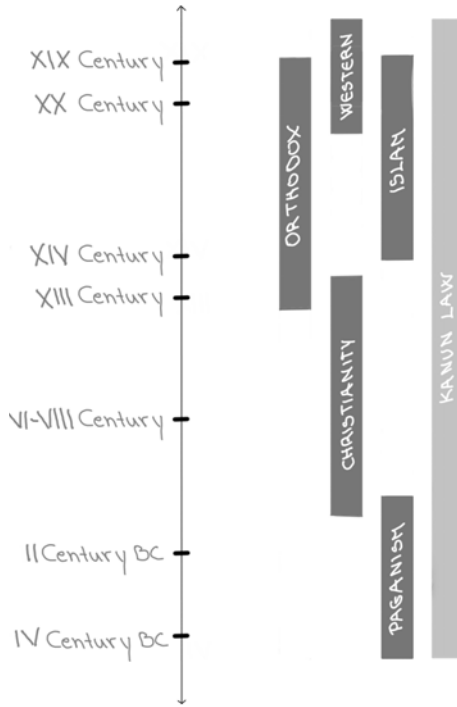
Even today, parallel to the internationally recognized democratic laws that cover all spheres of life, the Kanun laws are practiced among the people of Kosovo, especially in rural areas. Kosovar society holds tight to these oral laws, and it is unimaginable to be Albanian and not pay credence to them. Being Albanian and following the Kanun are embodied together, so strong is this connection.

Just the high points



the order of things-law

Running along



the order of things-law



THE LEFTOVERS

V

As a child, my father was rarely home. Even when he was not in "Ausland", he worked constantly. He was a teacher, a farmer, and a father of six children. He would walk to the school where he taught in the early morning, then would walk to another village where he taught in the afternoon till early evening. Only then he would make his way to fields, orchards, or barns depending on the season to finish up the workday before daylight ran out. He tried to persevere and continue to teach when the government cut all Albanians from state jobs, but was forced to look to foreign lands in order to feed his family.

He was gone most of my childhood, but when he was home, he made sure to spend what little free time he had with us. We would all gather in the living room with him talking, playing, and enjoying being a family. It was a meager existence, but I remember every crack and divot in that living room, that is where we ate, where we slept, where we talked, dreamed, joked, and cried. That room was the heart of the house.

Architecture does more than create a place for things to happen, it creates a social, psychological, and emotional place. A place that could become a home but is not necessarily pre-determined by design, but rather dependent on the functions that one finds there because of the people that inhabit the space.

But what happens when the people who should be living there are not?

Diaspora?

It is hard to understate the importance of the diaspora's effect on the economy, culture, and architecture of Kosovo. They play a critical role in bringing in funds, new ideas, and styles but also compounds problems that already exist, leading to an acceleration of the Leerstand or Emptiness in the country. It is hard to find a person in Kosovo who cannot say that they don't have a close family member working abroad. It is currently estimated about a third of the population born in Kosovo currently live outside its borders.⁴²

Why so many in such a small location?

But first, we need to understand the difference between emigration and diaspora.

Diaspora is more specifically seen as a people who move to a different part of the world, but maintain a connection with their homeland, most often physically or financially, but whose presence can also be through storytelling and mythology. In contrast, migration refers to people who move to a different area to settle, with little or no regard for the homeland.⁴³

There are four main periods or waves of diaspora. In contrast to these periods, many emigrants left for Turkey. Pre-WWI in 1910 over 120,000 Kosovars were deported to what would be present-day Turkey. During the Interwar period about 400,000 Albanians emigrated to Turkey and post WW2 another 400,000 were removed from their lands to Turkey. Many of the emigrants moved or were driven to Turkey with no intention or way to return and/or no family members left behind to financially support.⁴⁴

In contrast to the expulsions and immigrations, the four main waves of diaspora begin with the seasonal workers that started migrating in the '60s to Switzerland and Germany, the second wave took place during the downfall of the former Yugoslavia⁴⁵, the third during the Kosovo War (1998-1999)⁴⁶ and since 2014 as the newest wave.⁴⁷

Estimated at around 800,000 Kosovars living abroad, despite Kosovar's inability to travel unless they attain special documents or visas⁴⁸ many resort to illegal immigration filing for asylum once they cross into a country's borders to attain work as manual laborers in developed lands closed off to them.

The full extent of Kosovo's diaspora is unknown, making reliable statistics hard to determine.

In 2011 the Ministry of Diaspora (MoD) was established to represent the interests of the diaspora and allow them to participate in the governmental

process.⁴⁹ It was established to set guidelines and implement projects that would be helpful for those living abroad. Showing the rising power and political importance of the diaspora as a demographic/socio-political section of the people.

The MoD has set investment in Kosovo by the diaspora as a top priority and with the diaspora bringing in over 30% of foreign direct investment in Kosovo. The most recent study shows either by function or fault the MoD reached its goal. "In 2021, the sum of the remittances, tourism, and real estate investments realized by the diaspora amounted to a staggering 39 percent of the total GDP."⁵⁰

As well as the MoD, the Kosovo Diaspora Agency was established, to draft, implement and oversee policies promoting the values of the diaspora and prepare a diaspora strategy plan. This functions as an agency in the Prime Minister branch, but if this agency and the MoD was created to do something or just to create more administrative jobs is to be seen.

Does that amount really make a difference?

Socially, according to the Kosovo Diaspora Agency (KDA), Kosovar diaspora is a form of the country's diplomacy and is a critical provider for Kosovo's funding and world appreciation. This diplomacy can swing in either direction, positive or negative. This year's World Cup in Qatar (2022) featured all the drama of the Kosovo-Serbia conflict when Switzerland, with many team members of Kosovar origins, faced Serbia in the quarterfinals. This faceoff in Qatar brought the continuing dispute into public view on a global scale, if only a glimpse of it.

Diaspora do not only leave, but bring things back- money, ideas, and new appetites. The face of Kosovo's architecture has been influenced greatly by this: Cut and paste homes, new construction materials and methods, new designs and concepts from foreign universities. But above all, houses with empty rooms, abandoned apartments, and derelict villages still are remnants of its architecture.

His brother abandoned his house to build anew?

"You must see it! It's big and has everything! Everything that one would think of." Hysen fervently explained to me.

"I built another house for my second son also. Depending on how much pension I get in Switzerland, I will also build another one for my third son. They have the house structure built by me, the rest they should take care of on their own. I'm not sure of building the third house, though I must admit, my son Adnan has only three daughters, not sure if I should wait if he gets a son."

Hysen was my father's long-term neighbor, we rarely spoke but once he heard I was studying architecture he jumped on his chance to show off his new house. His pride and the financial risks he took to build his house reminded me of my parents building their house in the late 80s.

"It was a brave act to tell my father that I was going to have my own place." The fourth son in the family, my father, had announced all those years ago that he would move out and build a house for himself, his wife and four children (at the time). "As much as I felt brave and free, it had a high cost on the other hand."

My mom told me as a child. "We already knew what we wanted for a house. My husband's friend, who is also a teacher, just built a beautiful two-story house with red bricks and a terracotta roof. It even has a concrete floor, it looked stable and long-lasting."

"We sold one of the land pieces that we inherited to buy the material for the house. We built the house on the other lot that we inherited also. The house was a copy of my friend's, but what made it better is that we were facing the fields where we planted a lot of trees and created a garden. No neighbors around. I told my wife that we will even have privacy, she can wear her bikini and get tanned." My father grinned ear to ear.

Socially important functions but not architecturally integrated?

A two-story house with a kitchen, guest room on the first floor half underground, it connected the floors with an externally covered staircase and a larger balcony connecting the rooms on the second floor. There would be a bedroom for the parents and a bedroom for each of their three sons. Much later my parents had me and my younger sister and it

always felt strange to hear that every room had an owner, excluding my sisters and me.

The second floor was never finished or furnished. We spent all our life growing up in two rooms downstairs. Financially unable to finish the upper floors, and too poor to heat any other room than the kitchen and the living room, our life was constrained to these meager rooms. However, an unforeseen and fortuitous outcome of this was that it saved the house from getting entirely burned during the war.

I remember during the last war my mother would ask anyone who had visited in the village if they had seen if the house still stood, while we were sequestered in the refugee camps in Albania. Once the war was over and we returned home, she was full of joy, and was able to forgive my father for not being able to build the second floor, once she saw that the house was still standing. "Thank God we didn't build the second floor, it saved possibly the entire house and the roof!" she exclaimed.

After returning to the village, we moved from living in a two-room household into just a single room. We all slept, cooked, and lived there for a while. I still remember the smell of the scorched ash sodden walls and the peeling cracked façade pieces falling on us.

With my brother's help who had left to go to work in Switzerland, we started to build the upper floor because it was cheaper than fixing the burned downstairs. One room upstairs for the guest and one downstairs for our living. Years went by until the entire house was finished, unluckily my mother was never able to see that.

After almost forty years of slowly investing and building the house, when it was finished it was abandoned.

Now my two brothers have built a new modern house, "all shiny" as I like to patronize them. The family plans for the old house remain unclear. It's a

pity to demolish it, but it no longer meets the needs of the family, and we also can't sell it. What a conundrum.

Summer in this old house is one of my finest memories, a house nestled into the back of a small rise in the ground, stayed cool into the hot Kosovar summers and with time the trees grew providing shade for the entire day and fruit to pick. We woke up with the morning sun coming through the windows that we only dressed in a thin lace to keep the mosquitoes out and we played in the yard during the day where shadows kept us from burning in the sun.

What will become of this old house, what will become of the people who return to Kosovo summer after summer? Will one day they stop, and Kosovo, like my old house, slowly break down to return to the earth?

Where is everybody?



the leftovers-diaspora



FACE OF THE FUTURE

VI

"She is too young to go abroad!" Blerina's brother said sternly while emphatically placing his tea down and sitting upright ramrod straight. Then he cracked a smile.

I know he was being serious but trying to play it off as wit. I also knew he was proud of her accomplishments and was just very worried about losing his favorite niece. And by losing, I mean, her moving abroad and never coming back or his never being able to leave Kosovo to visit. This was something we were all worried about.

We were all gathered in the living room, I had come for a visit since I had not seen my friend in ages. I had arrived the day before, and immediately hit the ground visiting and hadn't really stopped running around until now. I was exhausted, but felt compelled to defend the honor of Blerina's beloved niece. But her mom spoke up and then her father, and my other sister, and my father and... Caught a lucky break, I was the silent one that night, maybe just taking things in more since I came with a documentation mission. It kind of puts things at a distance, makes you a little slower to react, more willing to sit and observe.

The discussion continued into the late night, the children slowly drifted off to sleep and were carried away one by one to be put to bed, but the adult always stayed within ear distance of the conversation so that they didn't miss a beat.

It was already past midnight and things still had just begun.

Demo means blowing things up?

The face of Kosovo is changing, something that can be said throughout its torrid history. To begin to get an understanding of Kosovo's demographics one must understand the highly politicized and ethnicized history of the country. Even back to the earliest census, the highly controversial and combative region consistently underreported or slavicized ethnic Albanians living in the area.^{51, 52}

Following this period, the demographic statistical gathering of the Ottoman Empire used for taxation, ignored language and ethnicity to focus on religion, and only certain social classes resulting in extremely undercounted Albanian and other minorities in their census reports. For example, a Croatian-dominated village in Western Kosovo was reported to have only one Croat household.⁵³ In the subsequent centuries these low population counts were highly contested by other invading armies⁵⁴ and visiting dignitaries.⁵⁵

Gustav Weigand in 1912 found much of the population in Kosovo was ethnic Albanians, which varied from region to region, some were exclusively Albanian and only one small region held a Serbian majority.⁵⁶

During WWI and the Balkan Wars in the period Serbia and Montenegro attempted colonization once again, offering "newly liberated areas" that offered 9 hectares of land to families.⁵⁷

Serbia reestablished dominion over Kosovo post WWI and a strategy to change the ethnic and religious demographics of Kosovo through colonization⁵⁸ was set in place, through land reform, a colonization policy issued in 1919 and later in the 1920s.⁵⁹

Why so much concentrated power?

Despite the policies of the Yugoslavian government to colonize the area, either through migration or forced immigration. The percentage of the Albanian population failed to change drastically⁶⁰ which led to further radicalization of Yugoslavian policies against the Albanian population.

WWII led to a free-for-all fight in the region, with ethnic groups and Axis powers pitted against each other. Despite this, Kosovo was considered a relatively low-intensity area, but did lead to a quasi-resettlement of Kosovar families that were pushed into Albania previously.⁶¹

Post WWII, in an attempt to avoid sectarian violence, Tito discontinued Yugoslavia's colonization efforts, and later opened the border to Albania to allow for families to join their families in Kosovo the Italian occupiers or Albania re-settled into Kosovo.^{62, 63, 64} From the 1948 to 1981 census the ethnic Albanian population percentage grew steadily from 68.46% to 77.42%.⁶⁵

In 1989, Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic removed Kosovo's autonomy⁶⁶ resulting in a large majority of Albanians and other ethnic minorities to boycott the 1991 census.⁶⁷

The Yugoslav Federal Statistical Institute estimated there were 1.97 million people in Kosovo, of whom 82.2% were Albanians.⁶⁸This is also the first census that estimated and included the number of the diaspora living and working abroad.⁶⁹

In 1992 the Serbian-led Yugoslavian government instituted once again a colonization policy of Kosovo in an attempt to push out ethnic Albanians and other minorities.⁷⁰These policies escalated during the Kosovo Liberation War to expelling Albanians while destroying and confiscating their documents⁷¹ to prevent return, as well as an outright attempted genocide.^{72, 73}

The first post Liberation War census conducted by Eurostat, the EU's statistical agency reported in "2010 Kosovo's resident population was 2.2 million, but in 2011 it was 1.79 million."⁷⁴This was once again due to an estimation of the population due to a boycott by the Serbian population and attempted compensation for the previous inaccuracies of the preceding census in Kosovo.⁷⁵

How can these things ever begin to be accurate?

Despite this long-disputed history of demographics in Kosovo, there has always been one major trend, an upward tick in population, until the Kosovo War of Liberation in 1998-1999. The war shattered the country, either through the creation of a large refugee population which created a quasi-opening of Kosovo to the world where a large percentage of the people now live as Gastarbeiter and diaspora. With the peak estimated population of 2.07 million in early 1999 to the current 1.79 million residing in Kosovo, the population of Kosovo has been shrinking.⁷⁶

In 2015 the country sat at a negative net migration rate of minus 3.91% due to the large percentage of the population looking to and moving abroad for better economic opportunities due to the ongoing economic and political crisis. The rate of loss has reduced but has not stopped since then. Kosovo's fertility rate currently sits at 1.51 which is lower than the 2.2 rate estimated to sustain a population and is on par with the EU average of 1.50.⁷⁷

One can see the difference between the EU and Kosovo quite dramatically (See Illustration: Population Pyramid Comparison). The left side of the pyramid represents the male population in different age groups and the right female. Where there is a surplus of one gender one can see an additional line denoting the difference. In both pyramids, one can see a surplus of young males up to 40 years of age normally and then a surplus of older females.

The Christmas tree-like shape of Kosovo is generally considered healthy, with younger population groups supporting fewer elderly except for the extreme tightening of the trunk of its tree, which could result quickly in depopulation and a collapsing support system. This constriction at the base of the tree shape leads to an interesting point, even though it is considered Europe's youngest country by age.

Kosovo is starting to suffer from the same ailment that has stricken the rest of Europe. Massive population decline has already begun to affect the rest of Europe and the aging of the European workforce will lead to massive changes in society, some even predict the collapse of what we know as western Europe. There are simply not enough workers, not enough children to take their place and too few caretakers for this aging society.

The only answer seems to be migration from other parts of the world. Even if all the able-bodied adults in Europe started to have children, the 20-year time gap to become a somewhat functional member of society is too far of a leap in time, hence migration to shore up these numbers. Kosovo is no different from other nations. While a large percentage of Kosovars live abroad as diaspora, most will never return, and if they do it will be in retirement at an older age.

Not only this expectation, but the increasing life expectancy of those that live in Kosovo will only further the need for a support and care system for the elderly. An estimated decrease of -11.2% in population by 2050, one of Europe's better numbers, but nonetheless, a stress on the social and economic systems of Europe's second poorest country, will lead to needless complications which can be avoided if things are addressed now.⁷⁸

Living longer but living less?

face of the future-demographics

One of the hardest hit areas in Kosovo is now and will be the rural population, with an estimate of 62% of Kosovo living in rural areas. Services, amenities, infrastructure, and support will be difficult for most of the population to acquire. While this number is decreasing, 84.4% in 1953 and approximately 62% now,⁷⁹ it only illustrates the challenges facing Kosovo's population. Villages in the mountains and valleys of Kosovo no longer meet the needs of the people who live there. Forcing them to move to urbanized areas and even abroad looking for work and support.

On my most recent excursion to Kosovo, in the town of Dujakë I spoke with a woman tending to her garden. She told me the village is empty and just this year over 200 young people moved away.

She then pointed out a large house across the way with stairs going everywhere, stating that only an elderly couple lives there and inhabits only the first floor as stairs are too difficult for them already.

These undue stresses on the rural population drive the need for a better solution in these regions, including architecture. Dealing with an aging population, a decrease in able-bodied workers as they move abroad, and migration of immigrants with different cultural backgrounds and predilections results in out-of-the-box problem solving and solution-finding.

Socioeconomically, one of the hardest hit demographics in Kosovo currently is the elderly. Despite Kosovo having the youngest average population in Europe right now, the increasing life expectancy, coupled with emigration to other states is leaving the elderly behind, literally.

With the decreasing availability of resources, this trend denotes potential social changes, and an escalation of healthcare demands that will be difficult to accommodate.⁸⁰The elderly are at risk for living in impoverished conditions, with acute and chronic illness resulting from a lack of healthcare support and being financially and physically dependent on others, compounding the problems.⁸¹

Where did they all go?

Rural areas are rapidly losing population due to the larger economic prospects found in cities. For example, between 2006 and 2016 Marec village lost around 20 percent of its population.⁸² Prishtina's metropolis has seen a tenfold growth in population over the previous six decades, whereas the neighboring villages have remained static or experienced a minor increase. However, it wasn't until Yugoslavia's dissolution that rural migration to urban areas or other countries drove several villages to the verge of extinction. Prapashtica is a great example, as a mountain village it recorded 121 families in 1991, but just 32 in 2008.⁸³

Both the size and the gender makeup of Kosovo's population have been impacted by migration: while more women live in urban regions than men do, the reverse is true in rural areas. The fact that having a boy is considerably preferable to having a girl, speaks much about the hard physical labor required in the rural areas as much about the social structure and views of the Kosovo villagers, where patriarchal attitudes are still deeply ingrained in the community's culture.

Deeply ingrained in the culture of Kosovo are the various ethnic minorities as well. The Serbian minority set themselves aside among the other ethnic groups in Kosovo by primarily being rural inhabitants. Approximately 90% of Kosovo's Serbs live in groups in villages based in the central, eastern, and northern parts of the country according to the 2011 census.⁸⁴ Apart from the Turkish community, which has 2/3 of its members living in urban areas, and the Roma community, which has 63% of its members living in urban areas, other ethnic groups in Kosovo reside in communities primarily located in rural regions clustered together in enclaves.⁸⁵

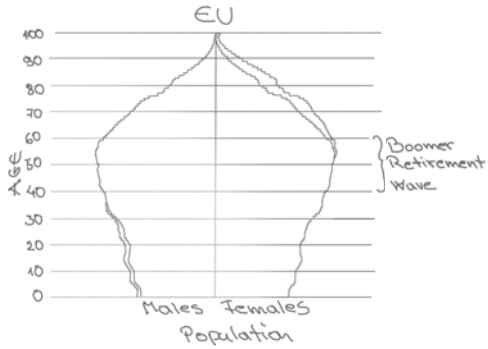
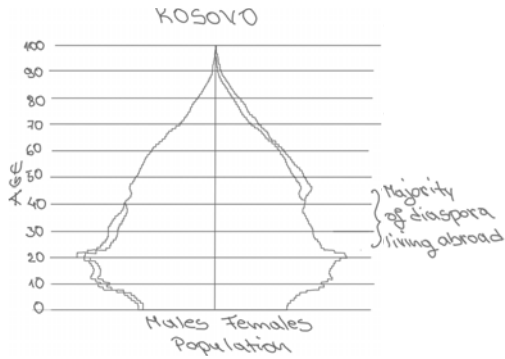
How to remove a deep rooted splinter?

Grouping around the short, stout wood table we ended the night agreeing to disagree, or better said, we were all too stubborn to give any ground, so we let the subject of Blerina's niece going overseas drop, at least until another day.

I looked around at the sleeping children who had not been dragged away by their mothers and wondered the adventures life had in store for them.

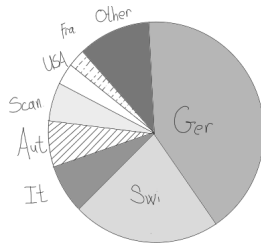
In Kosovo's uncertain and changing future, they would be the most influenced by the decisions adults make now. How long would Kosovo's youth stay in the country? How long would it stay young? What would happen to all the homes that would be abandoned and left empty as they moved abroad, and unlike with the tradition of the diaspora, they would never come back?

Population pyramid comparison



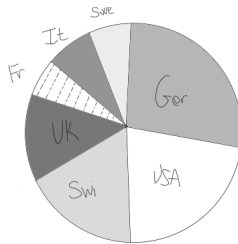
face of the future-demographics

Everybody is here ... almost



Germany	34,4 %
Switzerland	23,2 %
Italy	7 %
Austria	6,7 %
Scandinavia	5,8 %
USA	3,5 %
France	2,1 %

Where Diaspora migrants are



Germany	25%
USA	17%
Switzerland	17%
UK	14%
France	9%
Italy	8%
Sweden	7%

Where they want to go

face of the future-demographics



TYOLOGY NOT TOPOLOGY...

VII

A few grumbled and mumbled as they collected their things and exited the bus, the rest were jovial, chatting and finishing off the last of their drinks before exiting the bus at the border. We were all going home, I had just finished the summer semester and first was going to stay with my sister in town, in order to get a few documents sorted, and then would head to my home, my father's house, in the village.

Luckily it was not too cold, or too wet and we had some cover as we huddled in a large group with a few stragglers off to each side. At this point even the most gregarious of characters were ready to leave. We had been standing for well over two hours waiting for the border authorities to let us on our way.

Me, I just knew I would be exhausted the next day as midnight passed by long ago and we still had not left the open steel structure with its large columns jutting out the top, cables extending in all directions like a spider holding up the metal framed and clad superstructure that constituted cover for the transients who passed beneath.

Underneath were small boxes that cars approached with hesitancy, like ants dropping off their daily labors to the colony, the passengers handed over their identification to disinterested guards. Who then, after noting names, and checking faces, sent them on their way, except us, we still stood there waiting.

Waiting and waiting more, stuck in between the expansive parking lots on both sides filled with truck after truck. None of the trucks were moving, all asleep like lumbering land whales.

Were they not allowed to pass? I wondered.

Were they stuck there like us? Was it because it was night, and they were not allowed on the roads at night? Or... My thoughts trailed off as we got the go-ahead, and the bus pulled forward to the small side structure which house a few human conveniences that we were encouraged to take advantage of as we still had a long way to go.

They really did hold us up this time as I saw the faint glow of the sun creep over the distant hills and mountains to the east or was that just the reflected lights of a far-off city that I could not see? This was going to be a long day regardless.

It was dead out, other than a few cars trickling by most probably heading to the border then on north to Germany. The small-town centers that we lumbered through were all quiet. A mass of raw bricks, sparse lighting and bird's nest of cables and poles floated by.

The window was never empty, even in the middle of nowhere there were always houses or other structures, small lights on doorways or through windows giving away the position of small far-off homes, or large blasting lights illuminated the empty, but grandiose restaurants outside of the towns and cities which serve as event halls; with each hall trying to be bigger and grander than the next.

This representative architecture can be seen all over Kosovo. most particularly with the houses of the diaspora which are popping up out of the ground like spring flowers that a ton of fertilizer fell on. An empty field one day and then they are everywhere.

This is nothing new, this "Showing off" in architecture. I bet even back in the Neolithic era Neanderthals and proto-humans decorated their caves, by putting their stone tools and giant sloth skins by the entrance, so that the neighbors Ugh, Karen and their little brood of Neander-humans can see as they go out to hunt and gather.

I laugh at that image in my tired mind.

But I think I am getting ahead of myself at this point, because these typologies did not and do not occur in a vacuum, they are a direct result of the demands, and conditions set upon the architectural space that is Kosovo, and arose from imported influences, home grown dreams, and historical ties.

One needs to be very careful when evaluating Kosovo's typology. Large

typology not topology...-analysis

general statements will (as I say in a large general statement) be misleading, other times they will be spot on. Kosovo's ethnic, cultural, and historical past influences are a large part of the country's present typology. We can draw general lines of influence and direction, but there are always outliers, as with most other countries around the world. But the outliers only prove the rule, because they are so rare.

When discussing Kosovo's rural housing typology, I've broken it down into vernacular, diaspora and contemporary. These can be further broken down into subdivisions, but there are always going to be a unique cases which requires its own division, and we could infinitesimally splice the divisions into smaller and smaller components, but would lose sight of the overall picture.

But more importantly, the way the families live in the houses, their lifestyles, and how the space in the house is being used, or not used is important.

Before nature was natural – vernacular

Starting somewhat chronologically, we'll jump back about a hundred years from the present, and investigate two common types of rural housing architecture. There were many forms of housing at the time ranging from little more than stone huts to palatial villas.

Two types that I will focus on are the "Kulla" typology because of its cultural importance and resurgence due to heritage resurgence architecture and the "Ottoman-era" typology due to high usage and commonality in rural areas. I grew up in an "Ottoman typology" home and it still stands today, to a degree, but we will get into that later.

From the mountains with love

Following the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans during the Middle Ages, a distinct type of defensive and residential tower developed. These fortified dwellings can be found throughout the region including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Greece, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia and Romania.⁸⁶

The tradition flourished until the early twentieth century, and all but disappeared with the fall of Ottoman Empire. These highly functional

spaces were made of stone to serve as defensive positions. Some scholars debate the precise reason why these types were developed; either through blood feuds or just the insecure socio-political situations in the lands.⁸⁷

Usually and initially three to four stories and a simplistic quadrilateral design Kullas served as defensive positions and residential housing. Later they became symbols of wealth being constructed by wealth families to project their perceived respect and honor.⁸⁸ Kullas were also built by and for middle class communities who divided up the construction costs.⁸⁹

Kullas generally constructed of regionally sourced stone, with local wood for exterior details mainly on upper floors.⁹⁰ Generally, the Kullas were only inhabited by men, with women and children living in separate annexes.⁹¹

The outer walls are "about a meter thick at ground level" and "decrease [in thickness] upwards."⁹² Small apertures that serve as windows are known as frngji, and their size is attributable to the Kulla's defensive function.⁹³

Muslim culture has a great influence on aspects of Kulla life, particularly the separation of men and women in communal places and entrances. While on occasion there would be internal staircases between the floors where inhabitants lived, the ground floor was always isolated due to its functions and design intent.⁹⁴ Each floor of the Kulla typically had its own staircase, separating private residential living from other areas.⁹⁵

Kullas are also well-suited to the Kosovar environment due to their thermal mass, which allows them to stay cool in the summer and warm in the winter.⁹⁶

While not as common as other basic vernacular homes, Kullas are iconic, and making a resurgence as symbols of the fledgling nation. Many of the surviving towers are being renovated, modified, and improved to meet the new demands of modern life. A visualization of the old Dukagjini fighters sitting in the Oda surfing their smartphones pops into my head.

In Kosovo, these tower types were often located more in the mountain

regions and serve as a good comparison and contrast to the other forms following this section.

But who lives there? And how did they live there? It can be summed up in one word. Men. A bit of an oversimplification, but not much.

Three generations would live in the compound with the Kulla as the stone heart of the activities. The patriarch and matriarch of the family sat at the head of the figurative family tree with two generations below, co-inhabiting the structure. Their eldest son lives with his wife and multiple children, seven children as well, with nieces and nephews, of differing ages and perhaps even married, in the compound as well. Sometimes these compounds would host up to 80 family members of many generations and lineage.

The ground floor was most often a barn, and storage for equipment. It was isolated from the other floors by exterior covered stairwells. Small unspecified tasks and care of animals would take place here.

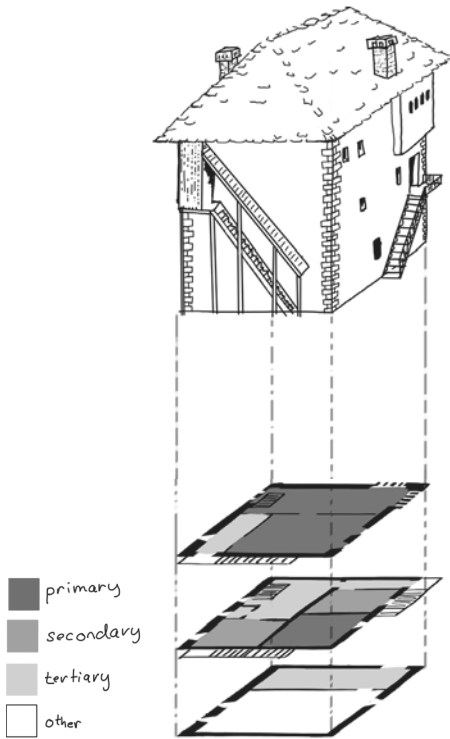
The first floor above ground usually had the fire room (akin to a kitchen, but had multiple other functions) along with two rooms for sleeping.

On this floor is where much of the family live and share time together. The second generation and married son would be on this level, and the fire room would be inhabited by the matriarch (grandmother) and unmarried granddaughters.

The top floor was the floor of the Oda. A room for guests (men) and men of the family to gather. Females were not allowed in this room and serving duties would be taken on by the grandsons of the patriarch. This floor was also the bastion of defense for the compound with design considerations for good oversight of the land around. The grandfather (patriarch) and his grandsons would stay on this level and often the toilet would be found on the street side of the tower, emptying its contents directly into the streets as was common in medieval style constructions.

Side Note: While normally the patriarch (grandfather) would eventually pass the functioning mantle and title to his eldest son, who would take over the decision and executive process while the grandfather stepped back, serving as an advisory role and caretaker of the compound. Again, my disclaimer, this was often true, but not always. Quite frequently the

Typology: kulla 18th-19th cent.



typology not topology...-analysis

grandfather and sometimes great-grandfather (if particularly long lived) would retain the position as head of the family.

It is important to note that the Kulla was constructed as a part of the compound's external walls and often, but not always situated directly next to the compound's main gate.

In the figure (See Illustration Typology: Kulla 18th-19th Cent.) one can see the usage broken down into primary, secondary, and tertiary usage. This denotes the criticality and how much time is spent in that area. Tertiary rooms often just function as transition or storage areas. This critical distinction does not discount the importance of every square meter, as no matter the time of the year, every nook and cranny in the building was put to good use, either drying peppers hanging from the rafters or housing an overflow of guests while napping in the hallway.

Is that what you call urban? - vernacular

According to Riza due to the negative perception of traditional values and culture, and to the general lack of Albanian heritage studies, very little was accomplished during the past century in vernacular architecture. The sporadic and fitful research that was accomplished was limited and singular in focus. Besides the Kulla type is the Banesa type. First coined by Bogdani the term Banesa comes from the term "te bana" which means "a building in which a family lives."⁹⁷ (I know many words in a small package.)

Banesa developed and evolved parallel with society and when society changed so did the Banesa. The earliest forms appeared in the 15th-century to 19th-century feudal economies that were driven by the guild system. These "dwellings", defined traditionally at the time to include the buildings and spaces within the surrounding walls: (annex buildings, foyers, gardens, yards, orchards, etc.) were mainly designed and built by craftsmen and sometimes the owner, but followed the now formalized mantra, "form follows function."

This previous statement must be equivocated with a disclaimer; little research has been done in this area and maybe a trend always has exceptions to the rules. This only drives home my point that more in-depth research needs to be accomplished.

Stone, wood, earth. The three main construction materials for this dwelling are built with hands and animal power. These materials are usually locally sourced and produced. The function of the main structure changed over time when changes in economic conditions occurred. As the wealth of the inhabiting family soared or waned, so did the functions of the spaces within. Where a family might have started with a single living structure in a compound, as they grew and changed, often the buildings would change in parallel.

The single living structure would initially house food storage, processing of agricultural and livestock products, woodworking, along with normal living functions, cooking, sleeping, leisure space, etc. As the capital wealth of the family improved, the additional functions, besides living, sleeping eating, were reduced, and moved to outside facilities.

Deeply ingrained and honored is the Albanian tradition of receiving and housing guests. This creates a hierarchy of spaces in the household with the priority spot belonging to the visitors.

Joy, sorrow, peace, and war, are celebrated and mourned in these spaces that are observed with the large extended families and friends who accompany such events. Due to the many guests, the reception environment and the structure's external as well as internal appearance in the reception area was of particularly high priority when designing scope and function. Especially when expressing the economic power of its owner.

The primary resource for categorizing vernacular Typology is Riza. He breaks them down into six types:

1. House of Fire
2. Dwelling with a Vestibule
3. Dwelling with a Porch
4. Kulla Tower

typology not topology...-analysis

5. Dwelling with a Nook

6. Special Solutions

House of fire

One of the earliest forms in Banesa typologies, developed under feudalism and having a weak connection to civic centers, the Fire House played an important historical role in Kosovo's agriculture and herding economy.

As handicrafts and mercantilism began to rise, the Fire House's unsuitability for the subdivision of large families became its downfall. The complex would be constructed on a sizable plot of land featuring a yard, a garden and even rows of trees to bear fruit. The domicile usually does not face the street, but some exceptions can be found. As the house would be combined into the exterior compound walls (deaf walls), walls with no openings, windows, or doors, would arise, which was a rare occurrence. Orienting itself in relationship to the street, the house would take up the center of the land and align itself in relation to the main gate.

Open terraces oriented toward the sun were common. The main volume becomes a nucleus for which the surrounding environment develops. The main space in the structure was used for cooking, eating and less for napping or spending time. As the economic power and size of the family increases, often the structure's size would as well. The centralized and main area is built around the fireplace without a chimney, with rather small windows allowing smoke to escape through the roof; this feature would give the name to the typology.

Dwelling with a vestibule

Characterized by its horizontal layout with an immanent connection between the yard and outdoors by a hall (vestibule - large open living area that hosts many and varied life functions) especially during the summer months is the centerpiece of this type of house. The vestibule is where all the rooms are conjoined. It acts as a natural connector to the various closed rooms, as well as the yard and outside. The vestibule is a multi-use, multifunction space. Its size and composition are determined by the economic well-being of the inhabitants, especially the size of the plot.

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Surrounded by massive walls, this type would be integrated with the rooms on one or two sides, especially in an urban setting. This is one of the most basic forms and is seen as uncomplicated.

Dwelling with porch

Occurring mainly in urban areas, but also found in rural spaces, the Çardak or dwelling with a porch comes in two main variants, with or without a hall. Its design is driven by its functional role and is one of the most classic types of houses. The Çardak clearly illustrates the urban/rural connection and is mainly inhabited by the middle and larger feudal lords. In later years, spreading to the professional and administrative class (middle) would almost always include a large plot of land where the dwellings are surrounded by large courtyards and large walls.

Like the previous example, the Çardak has a strong connection to the outside, where the porch functions as multi-purpose area including sleeping in summertime, housework, and receiving guests. In most cases the house is unified with one of the street walls with the uninhabited first floor completely closed to the public. This is the most common and widely spread typology of the types.

Dwelling with a nook

A later development is typified by an open or closed area in the form of a console, which if on the second floor, is supported by columns. This form is closely tied with the beginning of a free market in the area, first in the cities and then in the rural areas. This began to replace the Vestibular and the Çardak typology. The nook was a separate part outside of the dwelling, directly connected to nature. This type could have one or two floors with a basement. Usually constructed on a limited land plot it had a limited garden or courtyard, where many and varied activities took place, fulfilling the multi-function usage role. Due to the limited plot size, this led to the development of the nook on the second floor. Like all the others it is also walled.

Special solutions

This is truly the catch-all for the plethora of variations found throughout

Kosovo. They were mainly influenced by two important factors, land availability and economic conditions.

Often shoehorned into a small oddly shaped lot, these types are the most unique and inventive. On the other hand, these types came from the wealthiest of the wealthy and were architectural master classes of the period.

But what type?

The Banesa type used in this work to explore the typology was chosen to show symmetry and simplicity. With its large prominent hallway and two stories it is a good generalization of the multiple typologies. The floorplan composition shows hallways as multiple use spaces and not just a transition area. This is also a format that is most common in this typology due to its flexibility and simplicity.

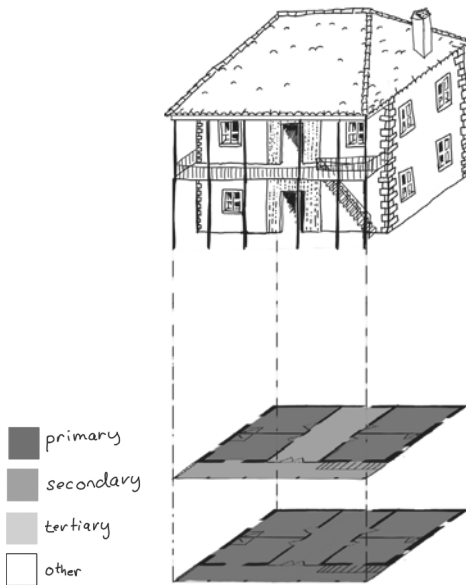
Due to the domicile's flexibility a large and diverse family grouping would live here. Three, possibly four generations would live in this house, from grandparents to multiple children and grandchildren.

On the ground floor the fire room, a guest room and two bedrooms would be situated. A whole sub-family group (father, mother, children) would stay in each room at night and would spill out into the rest of the building during the day.

Since receiving a guest is considered incredibly important in Albanian culture, the guest room on the ground floor was placed there to be ready for guests, young and old, while being positioned close to the fire room, so that serving duties and food accessibility were convenient.

Above the ground floor, one finds four equally sized and spaced bedrooms where the family subgroups would break down and inhabit. The shared hallway space was used for storage, and activities and also served as a living room of sorts when put in a modern perspective. Despite being exposed to the outside temperature changes, it was used throughout the year.

Typology: banesa 15th-19th cent.



typology not topology...-analysis

In our example, the family consists of grandparents with two married sons inhabiting the house. The eldest of the two sons has one daughter and one son.

All married sons sleep upstairs, the one that is abroad still has a room on the second floor. At times it gets converted to be used as an additional guest room since they are abroad.

On the first floor sleep the grandparents. The grandparents are in the guestroom while the married sons each have a bedroom. One of the rooms belonged to the parents, but while the family expanded, one of their sons changed rooms. Very often the grandmother slept with her nieces, but in this case the grandparents both slept at the fireroom on their own.

Non natural?

Growing pains – transition – diaspora

Post WWII Yugoslavia was a different beast compared to the hobbled together nation that entered the war. Now bolstered with Soviet support and revitalized ideas, the country set forth to define itself anew. That was at least true for urban centers, the rural enclaves, especially of ethnic Albanian origins were left to deal with the financial burdens of a second world country.

Many men were forced to work multiple jobs in country and work as seasonal guest workers in Germany, Switzerland, and other central European countries. This constant inbound and outbound motion of people brought ideas, materials, and methods into Kosovo, which were readily adopted and adapted to the country. Most often seen as the unfinished Hochlochziegl brick house. The generalized example created for this work is an epitome of the typology throughout Kosovo, as well as most of the Balkans. This form is non-specific as well but is still archetypal in its ability to illustrate the typology.

Generally, construction of these homes began in the early 70s and began to lessen in the late 2010s as newer forms came in (See later Section: Diaspora-Contemporary). Our example house hosts just two generations,

typology not topology...-analysis

with the grandparents inhabiting their own domicile, usually an older structure. Parents with six children, three sons and one unmarried daughter inhabit the house while two other daughters are married and live with their husbands and their family.

The most critical room in the house is the cellar. This is where life for the family takes place. It functions as a living room, a kitchen and even a bedroom (especially for children) as well as storage for foodstuffs.

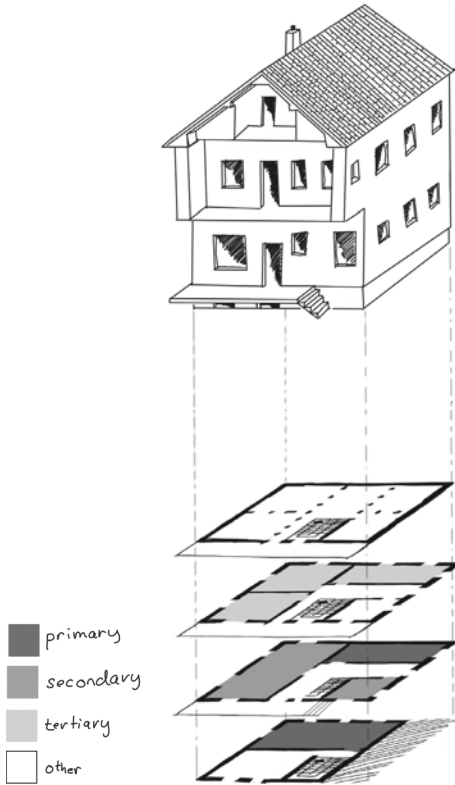
The Albanian guest culture reached an extreme in this period when whole families would entomb themselves in the basement, to preserve the first floor for guests. While the families were generally smaller than the previous generations, the density in the room was just as high.

On the ground floor are the living room (salon) bathroom and parents' bedroom. The salon is only used for receiving guests and is otherwise kept clean and empty. It is a rather critical space due to the "Albanian guest receiving tradition" despite low usage rates.

On the second floor you would typically find a bathroom and bedrooms. This floor was often left unfinished, or it took so long to finish that the planned inhabitants would move abroad or construct their own house (cloning the same form and usage). The attic was for storage, and in rare cases was used as extra sleeping space, but would normally be left unfinished and empty.

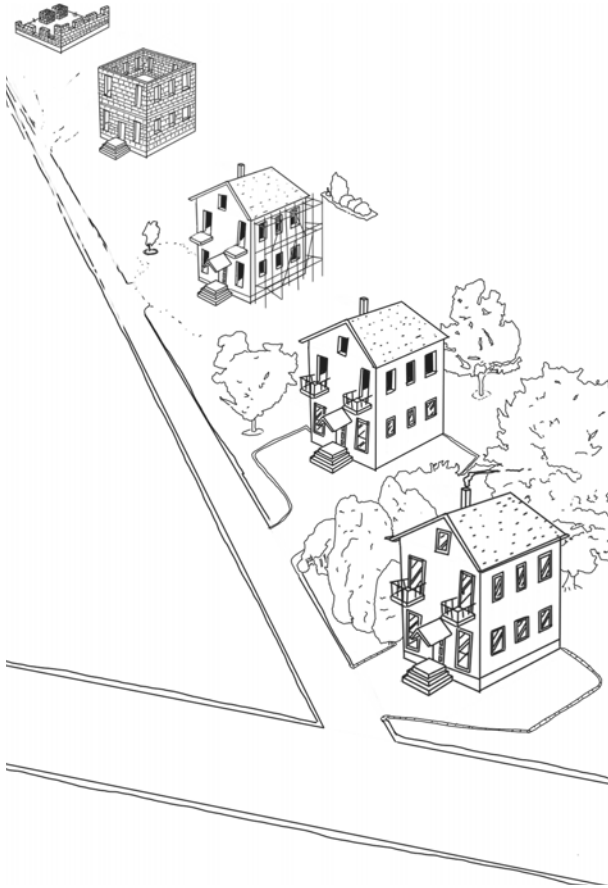
A phenomenon that appeared during this transition period is the almost production line-esque row of brotherhood housing (See Illustration: Brother"hoods"). As the financial stability and wealth of the early diaspora as well as a developing inland economy, families would convert a strip of agricultural land into a tract of housing. Often using the same plan for all brothers of a family, but beginning at different stages as funding became available. One finished, one with only the first floor done, the others in various stages of construction and possibly disrepair if the timeline was too long (See Illustration: Old Fashioned). This occurrence was not about a lack of imagination, but rather a result of the appearance of equality. Each brother would receive the same amount in the spirit of the Yugoslavian slogan of "Brotherhood and Unity."⁹⁸

Typology: gastarbeiter 1970-current



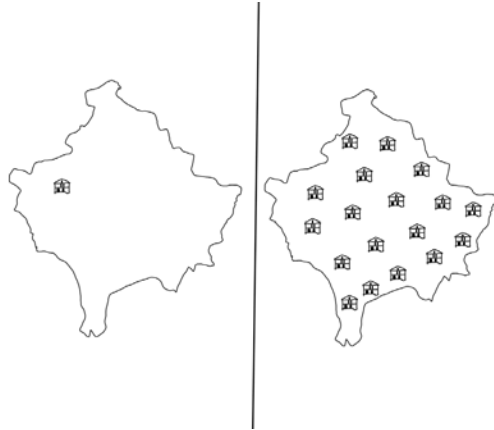
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Brotherhoods



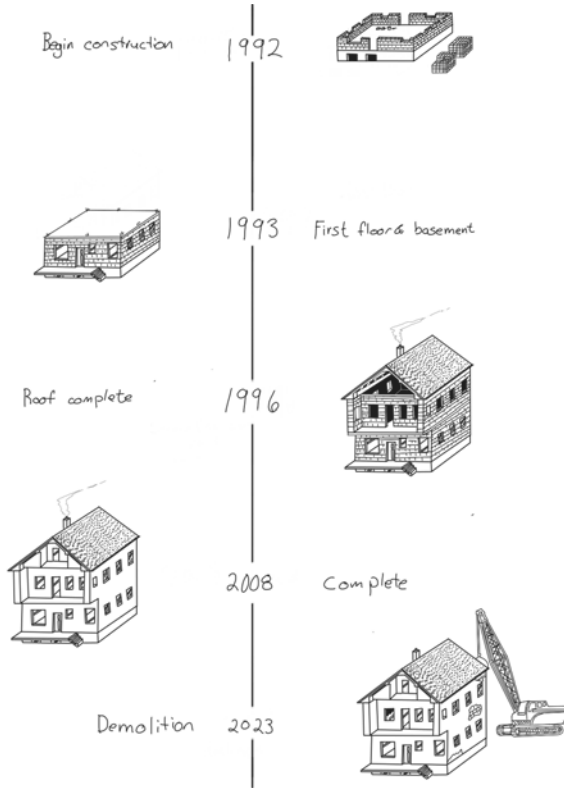
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Here ... and now there.



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Old fashioned?



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This occurrence was not a one-off but rather a standard operating procedure for the countryside. Often taking decades to complete, a finished house would soon be destroyed, as it was considered inadequate for the family's current situation or even tastes.

Often these buildings are just abandoned, denying access to the valuable land below. Occupying the limited and crowded town center, often new construction is forced out into "no man's land" between villages, causing a rural sprawl.

Another phenomenon that arose was the spread of a single format throughout Kosovo. Almost as if by magic the same house would spring from the ground in every region. As if the house itself was an invading army of UFOs landing throughout the country (See Illustration: Here... and now there). Through targeted searches or just traveling to a different town, Kosovars would snap pictures of houses they liked, bringing the pictures to builders to replicate for them, leading to this effect. Because they focused on appearance and outside representation rather than concerning themselves with usage which would later result in unforeseen consequences in the actual inhabitation of the structure.

These two phenomena continue into our next typological occurrence, but with a caveat explained in the following section.

Far and away but always there - diaspora - contemporary

The current iteration of the transition house is almost an exaggeration typifying the transitional typology. Using modern construction materials and techniques brought from the diaspora, who in likely cases work as construction workers throughout central Europe, these houses have a pan-European influence, just as the previous generation of structures. Tied heavily with increasing economic success and improvement in the country and abroad, the houses typifies representative architecture.

typology not topology...-analysis

After years of deprivation, war, and just getting by, families in Kosovo, supported by those working and living abroad, had a bit of an ungainly growth spurt and less of a renaissance. They now had time and financial ability to focus on themselves, rather than ensuring the survival of their family.

Living abroad in overcrowded apartments eating bare pasta and day-old bread, the Kosovo diaspora toiled diligently to collect money to send home to invest in their houses in Kosovo. Yearly new houses would push up from the ground, each one bigger and a bit more glamorous than the next.

New materials, new forms, and new ornamentation worked its way into Kosovo's countryside. While not an unknown phenomenon in other parts of the world, the need to crystallize and display wealth and prosperity in Kosovo happens at a frantic pace. Almost as if one's value in society should be visible in a new car, an expensive lifestyle, and especially the new house.

The Contemporary form is an evolution of housing. Outcompeting for survival to propagate its own progeny, just as the finches in the "Origin of Species". A larger beak (porch), smaller wings (more roofs), or brighter colors (well, bright colors) parallels can be drawn between the evolution of Darwin's finches and these forms. (See Illustration: Competition of Representation)

Multiple small roofs, more windows, nooks, patios, and stairs spring forth in the new species. Even decorative detailing of flags, statues, and ornamentation is beginning to enter the bloodline. This is above all a continuing evolution and its final form is still in development all over the countryside.

Unlike previous examples, two distinct use cases are developing in this typology. The first we will call "Diaspora-Pur" and the second "All at Home." Constructively they are the same, but the inhabitants' living patterns and situations are different enough to deserve a distinction.

Diaspora-pur

Most of this family lives abroad and/or with another household in Kosovo. The grandparents usually live in their own house or are abroad, having worked in Switzerland (or in other developed countries) most of their lives to build a house in Kosovo. The main inhabitants of the house are parents, the second generation in the family tree, but they are already older with three adult children who live abroad.

The parents spent most of their time growing up in another house that was abandoned as soon as this one was completed. Their siblings also inhabit their own house. A strange side trend is that the family, mother and kids on one side, and father on the other, will split visiting their respective family homes, not even visiting the house they built.

The usage pattern for the Diaspora-Pur hails from the previous generation. The family lives in the basement of the house. A large, dedicated living room, kitchen, washroom, and a storage room that makes up the basement. For two weeks a year the basement would be a flurry of activity when the inhabitants return.

The ground floor has a new addition, a garage. The importance of the car has entered the construction culture in Kosovo and while, designed for a vehicle, like everywhere else in the world, more than likely it will act as storage for junk collecting over the years.

This level also includes a kitchen and living room, used for receiving guests, a bathroom, and a small bedroom, again for the guests. This whole floor is set aside for when the guests arrive; instead of just a salon, it is now a whole floor with many functions included.

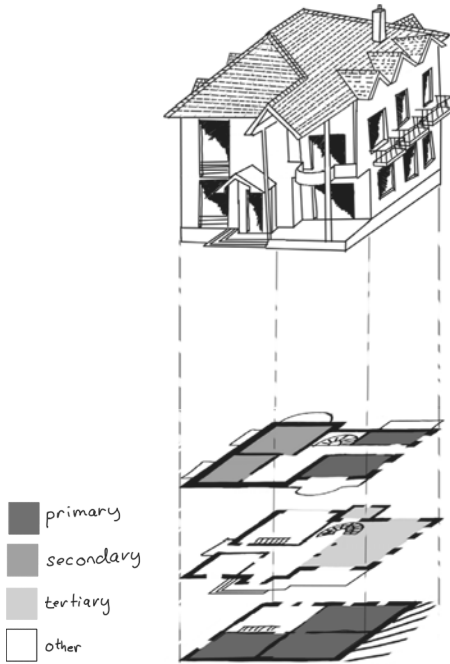
The second floor has three bedrooms and a shared bathroom; the main bedroom that is used by the parents and the two other bedrooms by their married sons.

All at Home

Our second example is that all three generations live in the home having

typology not topology ...-analysis

Typology: diaspora pur 2000-current



typology not topology...-analysis

abandoned their previous house or having an empty house under construction next to it. While usually a little younger overall, the family that inhabits the exact same layout uses the house with a slight difference.

The basement is again the primary kitchen and living room, but instead of a dedicated storage room an extra multi-use room used as flex space bedroom or living room is constructed.

On the ground floor the grandparents will take the bedroom. The kitchen and living room remain ready for guests. On the top floor the three bedrooms host the parents (two brothers) and their children. Once the children become older one of the children will either move out, or move to the salon (living room), almost as if they are guests in their own house.

Side Note: These last three typologies "Gastarbeiter," "Diaspora-Pur" and "All at Home" all arose around the turn of the century but as there has been no real studies accomplished the timeline and exactness of these types are only corroborated through interviews.

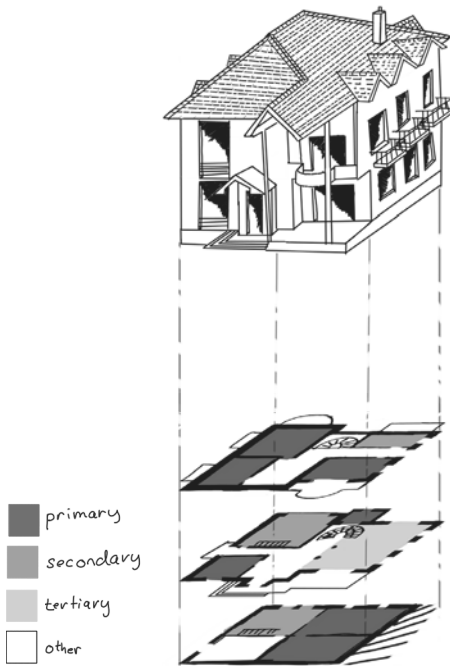
Keeping up?

The three phenomena introduced in the previous section: tract building, reuse of the same design, and the long construction timelines continue in the Diaspora era housing.

On top of these, a new phenomenon begins to dominate, with a competition of wealth representation in architecture. Even among brothers, small tweaks to the same design would be made to represent the wealth of the family who owns it. (See Illustration: Competition of Representation) This change can be as simple as using more expensive materials to an extravagance such as adding pools, pillars, and towers to a design.

But one thing is always certain, the house is never finished. Even with the most extravagant designs, one will see new things popping up, a shelter for the doorway, a back porch, another garage... always growing

Typology: diaspora all at home 2000-current



typology not topology...-analysis

and just like the previous generation of housing they lose touch, and are abandoned.

"I'm going back to the house this summer. Got to build a fireplace." Mr. Bytyçi grandly and with a hint of irritation noted.

"What do you mean?" I quizzed him.

"Well when I built the house, fireplaces were not a thing, but nowww (he drew it out) they are." Mr. Bytyçi, very aware of the brinkmanship in housing design and keeping the wife happy.

What's the difference you say?

Taking an analytical approach to usage. The four representative houses can have their usage broken down into primary, secondary, and tertiary usage. With "primary usage" representing the most time spent, as well as the criticality of a space. For example, a kitchen may not be where the most time is spent when compared to a bedroom, as one spends several hours sleeping, but the function of a bedroom can be covered by a living room or another space. The functionally critical and specialty of the kitchen cannot be replaced. Where a secondary important designation is more along the line of abundance in time spent, but less critically. The tertiary is the least used and least critical space. In the floor plan drawings these three can be seen as different shades of grey.

The total floor space is broken up into percentages of usage and then compared to each other as well (See Illustration: Usage Percentage). We can clearly see the percentage of usage difference between the two vernacular examples. Both are rather evenly distributed between rooms. The Banesa-Vernacular house example with a very even distribution, due to the equality of the rooms and high density of inhabitants.

The rooms were often distributed to brothers; a fact that now instead of rooms, houses are distributed between the brothers. This might be one of the reasons that the Banesa-Vernacular style houses are becoming less and less common. (Another potential research opportunity to add to the list.)

Competition of representation

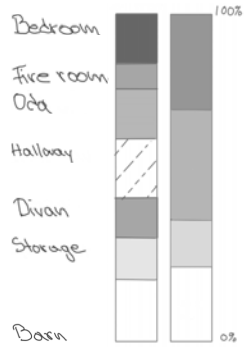
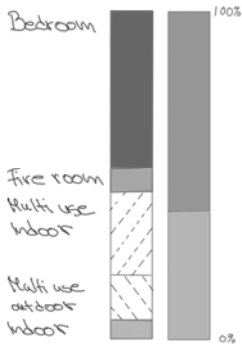


typology not topology...-analysis

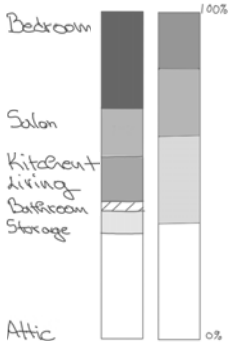


typology not topology ...-analysis

Typology usage comparison



typology not topology...-analysis



typology not topology ...-analysis

Despite the different family occupations of the two contemporary domiciles, they are very similar in critical usage. Something to remember in the Diaspora-Pur example is that it is also very time limited when compared to the other typologies. With less than a month of usage per year, while for example the Vernacular houses (Banesa and Kulla) had extremely heavy usage throughout its floor plan, only changing due to climatic conditions. (Inside vs. Outside)

Anything else?

A general occurrence noted is the ever-increasing house size, yet the decreasing number of actual inhabitants. (See Illustration: The Bigger the Emptier)

A contrast and the inspiration of the title of this section. Almost like UFOs landing and taking no heed to the architectural space around it. Contemporary houses are cutting and forming the land and space around them to conform to a standard set plan. (See Illustration: No Relation)

Modern builders will cut the side of a mountain out, level it and build massive retaining walls to maintain a strict site plan perhaps bought off the internet for a house designed for a flat area. Instead of nestling the house into the hill using the thermal mass to the advantage of the owner or using natural vegetation for privacy and cooling, modern builders are hacking and cutting the landscape. This is not a particularly new occurrence worldwide, but could indicate an increase of additional financial capabilities and a different direction of development in Kosovo that was not there before.

A more general observation one can make, no matter the typology of domicile, is how the house is reconciled with the accessing street (See Illustration: In Relation to the Street). We see four types of relation to the accessing channel. One: detached from a wall that borders the street. Two: attached to the wall that is on the street. Three: detached with no border wall or structure. Four: is detached from a bordering fence that allows for visual contact with the street and vice versa from the house. There is no set pattern, and multiple examples of each can be found in each typology. Some typologies do lean in one direction over another, i.e. diaspora housing and fences.

Land/Size Collection

The bigger the emptier

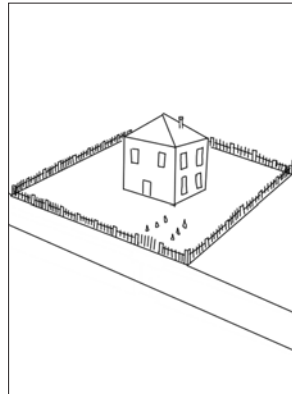
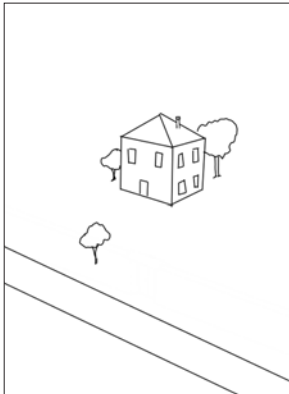
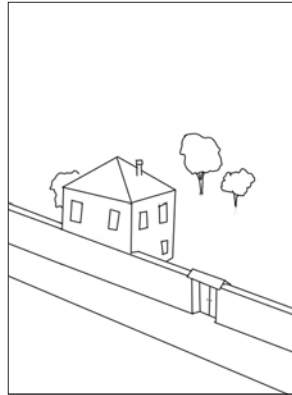
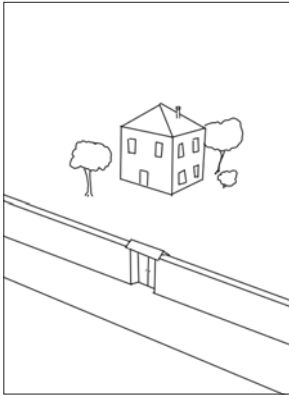


typology not topology...-analysis



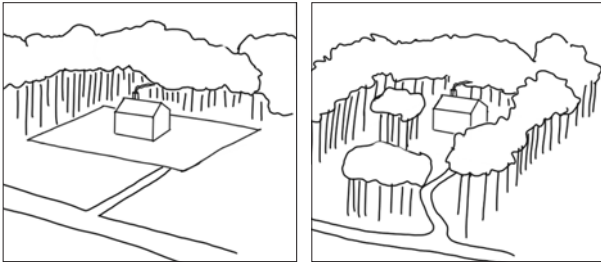
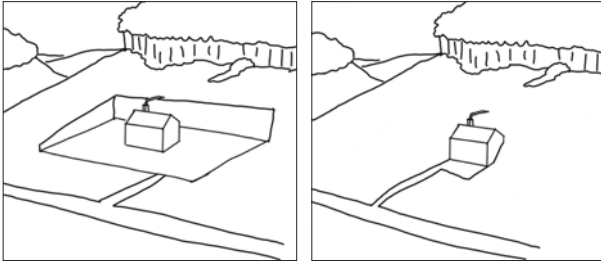
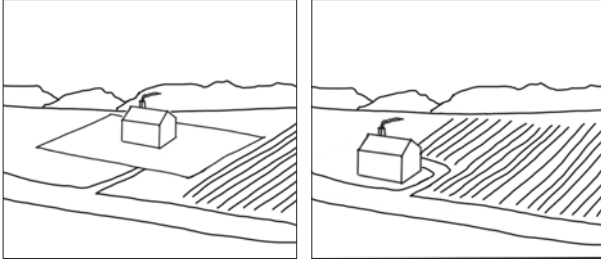
typology not topology ...-analysis

In relation to the street



typology not topology...-analysis

No relation



typology not topology ...-analysis

More?

The last three figures show from above, a typical relation of the four typologies to their surroundings. The Diaspora-Contemporary marked by large swaths of land cut them. The Transition-Diaspora house, is almost like a factory production spitting it out on a production line.

The two vernacular types, are situated in a twisting conglomerate of houses, barns, and other structures with little distinction between the two in their relationship to the outside world. One is more welcoming and the other one standing guard.

"When I was little, I would stay at my grandparents' house. It was a mill, with a creek that ran through the courtyard and the living quarters split up among the various structures. Where we stayed was little more than a barn, but even to this day I can hear the babbling creek and the turning machines." Fatime, the shopkeeper, spoke with a calm voice; she was somewhere else.

She continued.

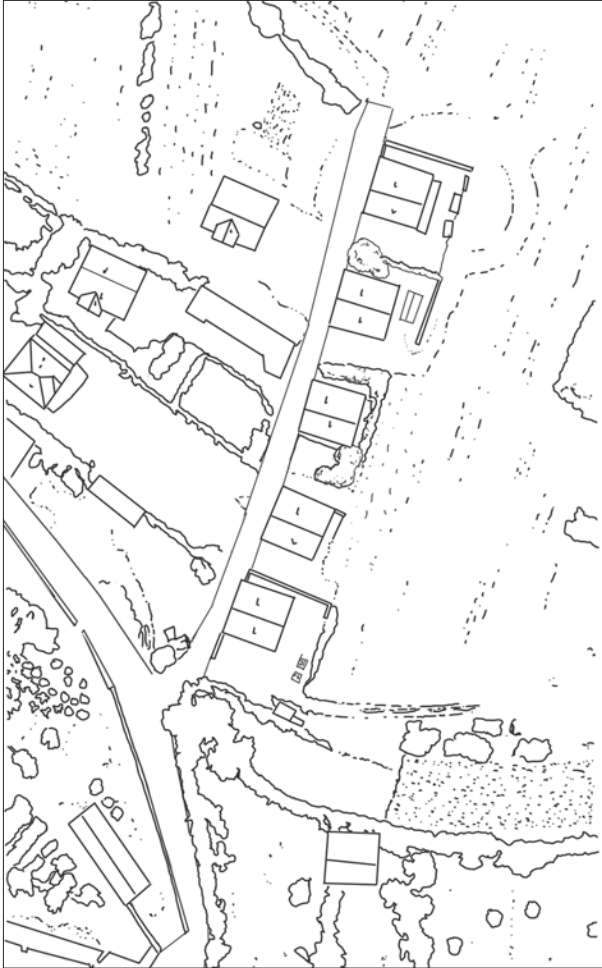
"That old house did not have all the luxuries of a modern house, AC, refrigerator, lights. But the new house does not have my heart. Maybe it is different for my grandchildren who live here, but for me I still dream of that creek."

Typology: kulla, defense, banesa, compounds



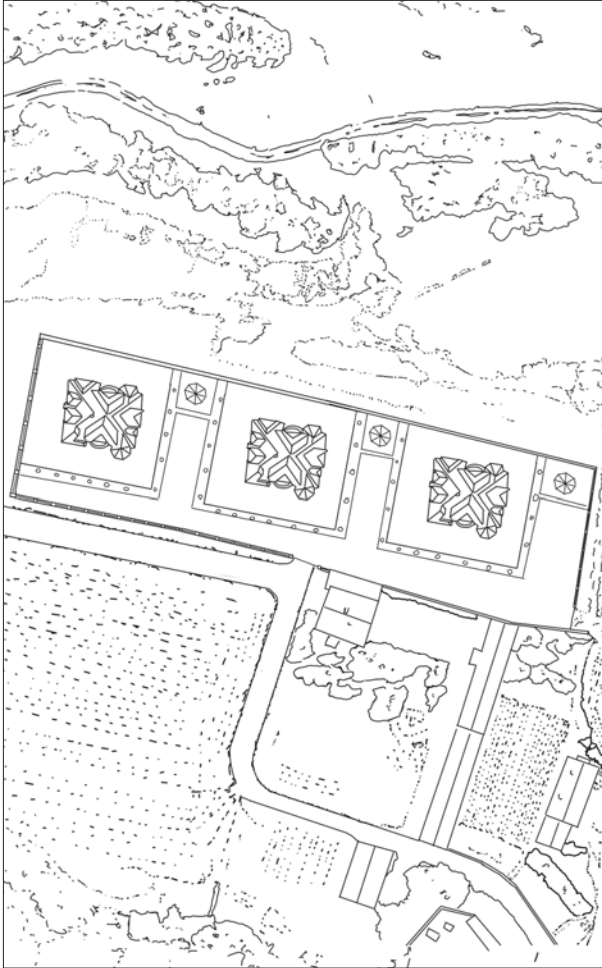
typology not topology...-analysis

Typology: gastarbeiter.fingers

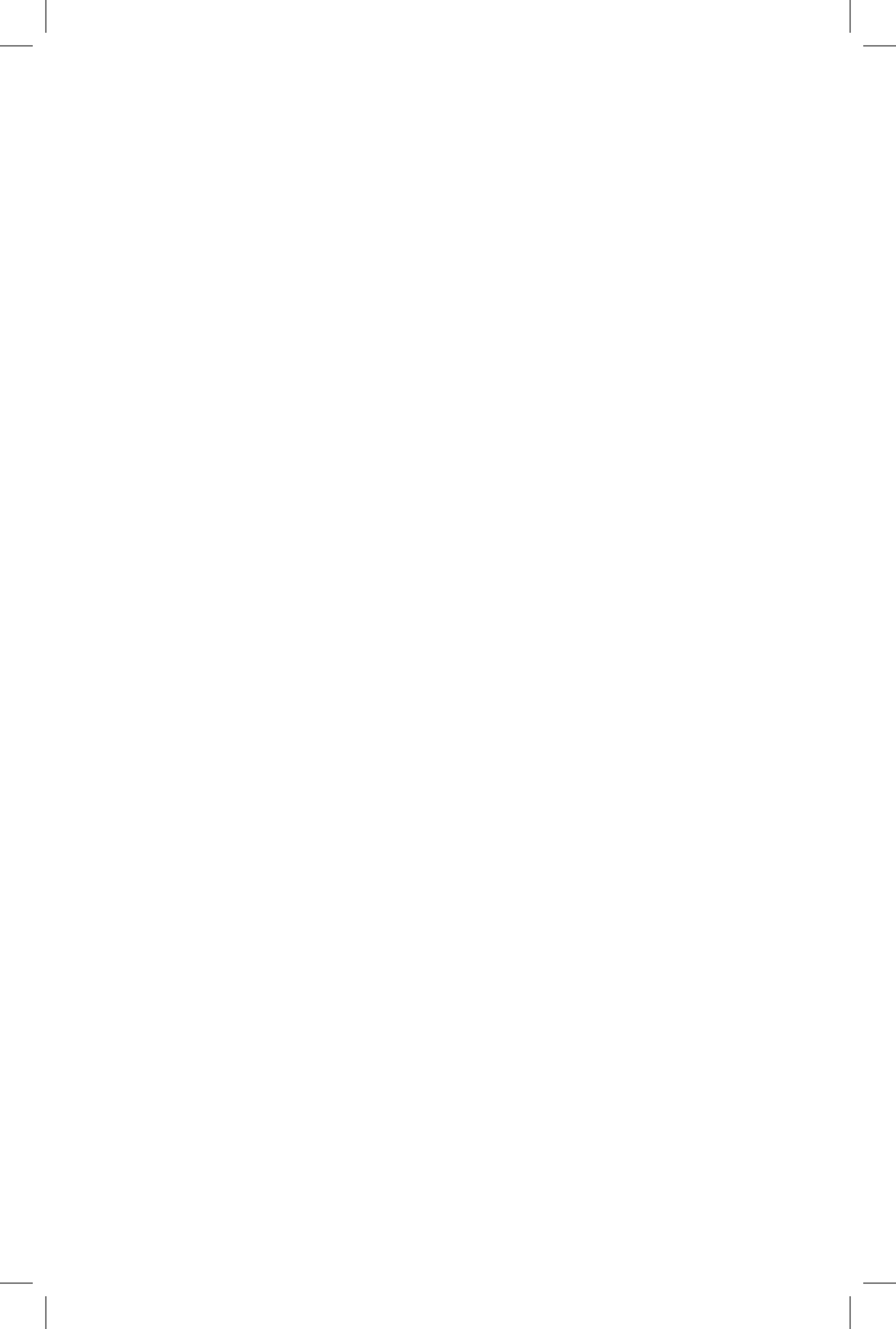


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Typology: diaspora. x marks the spot



typology not topology...-analysis



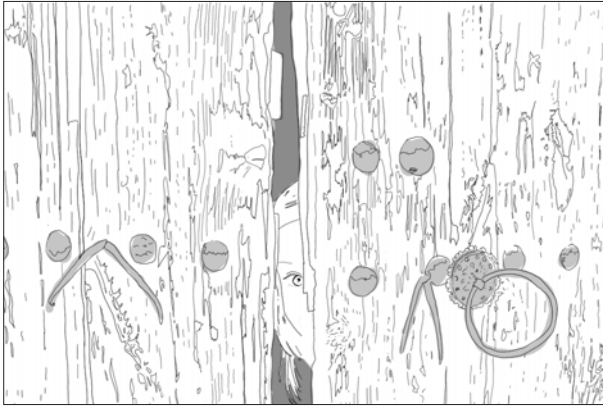
PEARLS

VIII

*Fragments of stories from people's past and present.
Three generations remember their time, their homes,
their lives.*

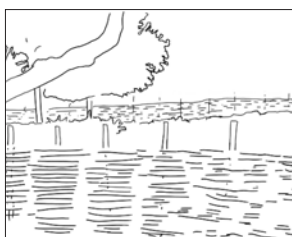
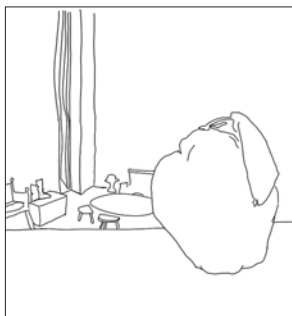
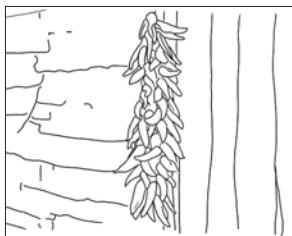


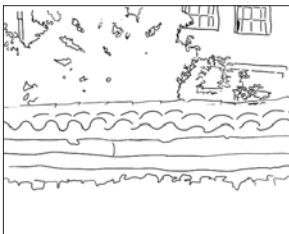
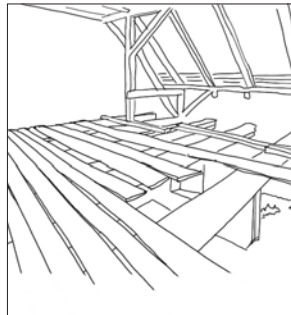
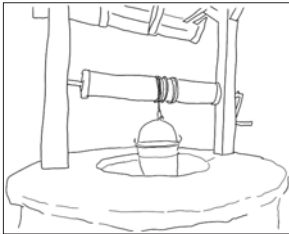
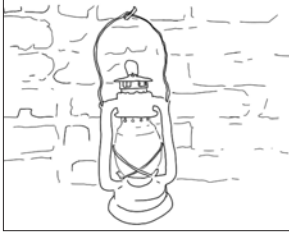
Shadows of the past



pearls-fragments

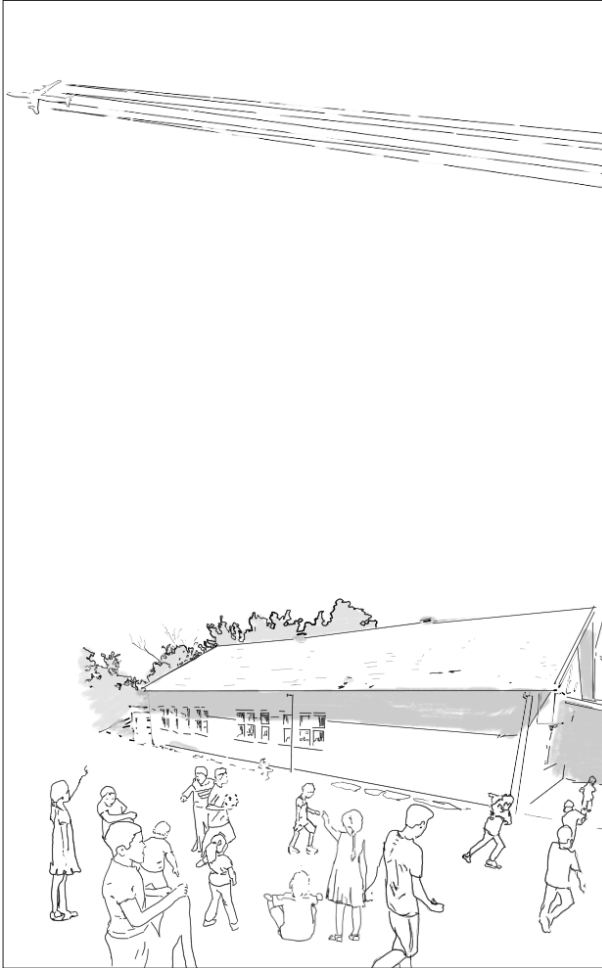
Fragments of life: vernacular





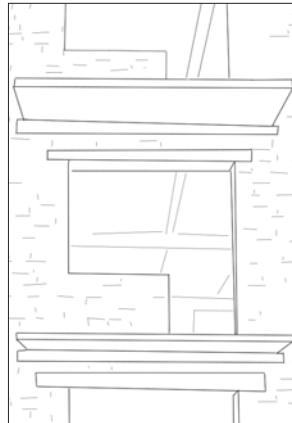
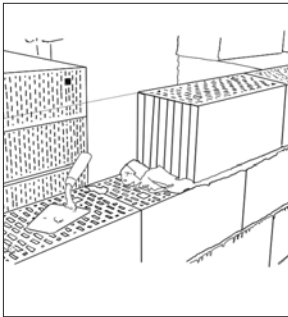


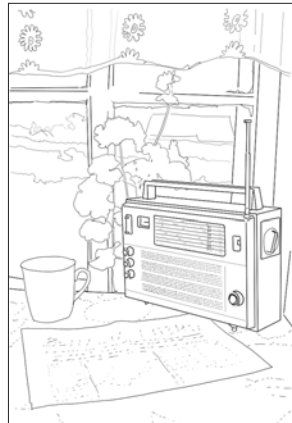
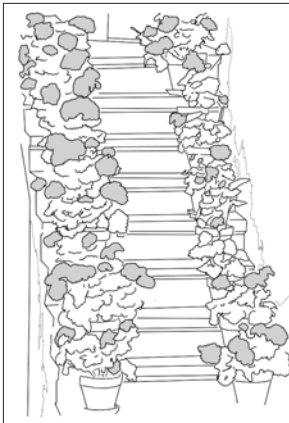
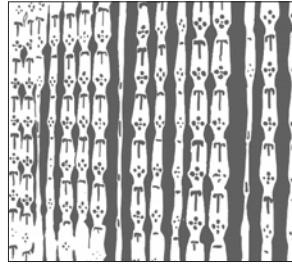
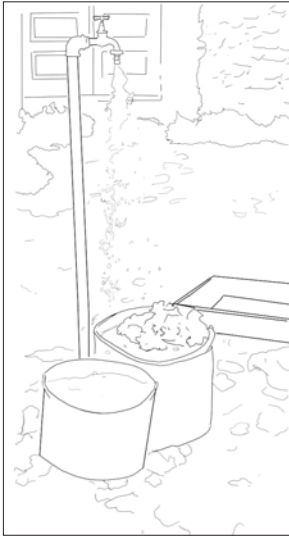
To an other world



pearls-fragments

Fragments of life: gastarbeiter





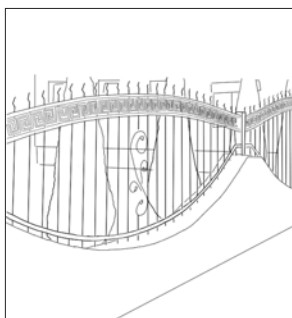
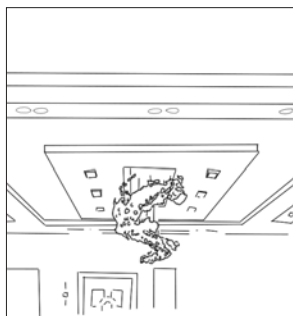


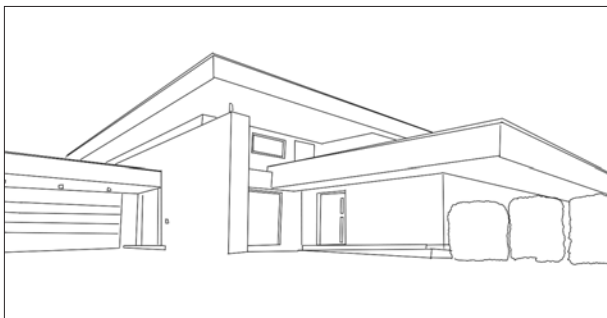
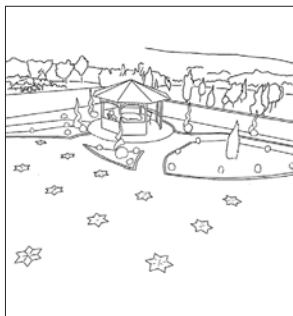
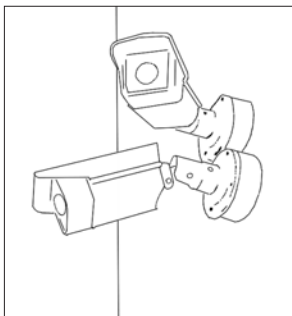
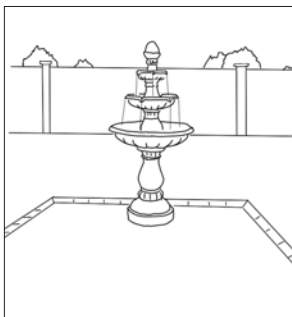
From another world



pearls-fragments

Fragments of life: diaspora







DICHOTOMIES

IX

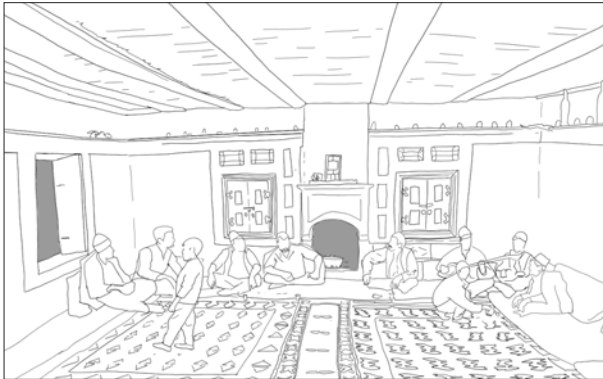
Kosovo is a small landlocked country situated in the heart of the Balkans. It is known for its rich cultural heritage, natural beauty, and geopolitical significance. However, Kosovo is also a land of dichotomies, where contrasts and contradictions coexist harmoniously.

On one hand, Kosovo has a tumultuous past marked by ethnic conflicts and political instability. On the other hand, it boasts a vibrant and diverse society that celebrates its differences through music, dance, and food. The country is home to both ancient UNESCO World Heritage sites like the Patriarchate of Peja and modern landmarks like the National Library of Kosovo.

Despite its complicated history and ongoing challenges, Kosovo remains an intriguing destination for travelers seeking to explore a land that embodies both resilience and optimism in equal measure.

“shtëpia e shqiptarit është e zotit dhe e mikut”

Oda: for men and guests



dichotomies-social phenomena

"bukë e kripë e zemër"

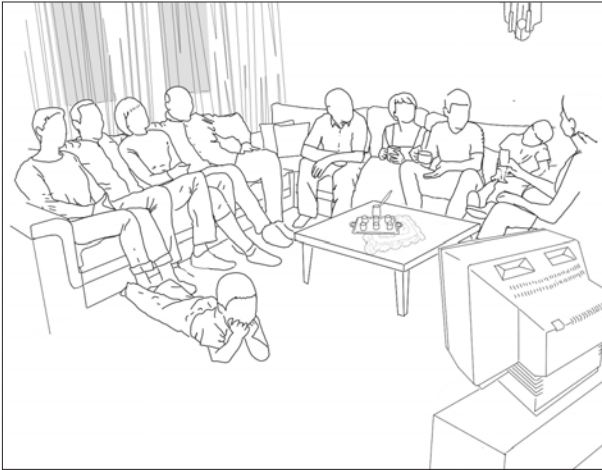
Firehouse: where life happens



dichotomies-social phenomena

"bashkë burra e gra"

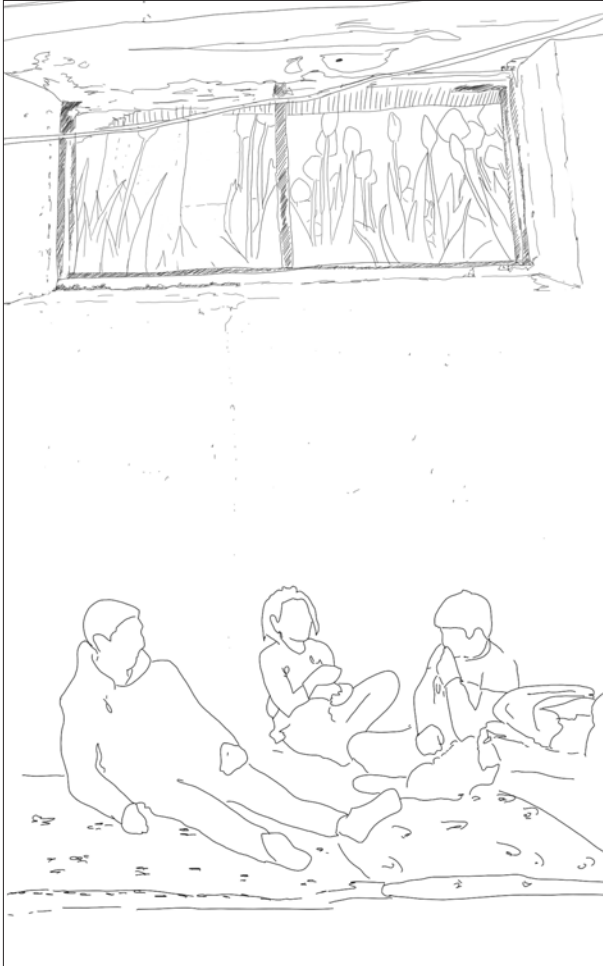
Salon: all together now



dichotomies-social phenomena

“shtëpinë tre katë e krejt jetën n'podrum”

Cellar: everyday life



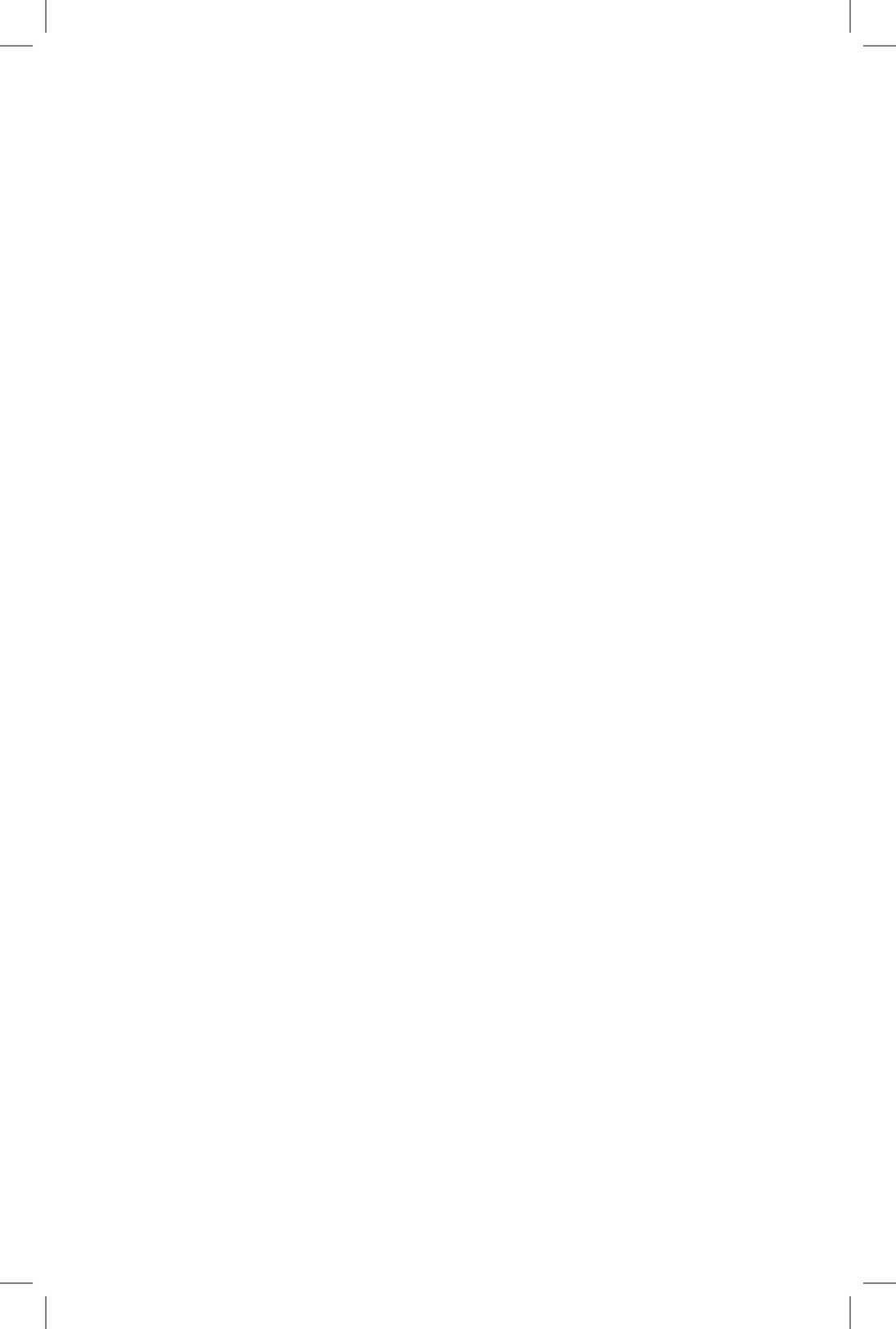
dichotomies-social phenomena

“me trup këtu, por me mendje e zemër në Kosovë”

Apartment: virtually alive



dichotomies-social phenomena



KARTE BLANCHE

X

"It's on my land, what's the problem" Mr. Krasniqi quizzically asked the elders.

I had lucked out and joined the town meeting. Well, it had little to do with luck and more of the fact that my brother is the mayor now and probably steered the meeting date and topic to align with my visit some.

A few weeks earlier I had brought up the subject of construction in the town. I wanted to know what was going on and if anything interesting was being built. Really, I was just fishing for ideas. As I was still a dry well when it came to my thesis. There was something, something still scratching at me about what to do. Don't get me wrong, I could choose many things as a topic or intervention: renovate a cafe, adapt a school, improve a town-square or maybe even a new park. But that was just not satisfying enough. It felt that it was neither the time or possibly the right thing to do for now.

But that conversation ended up being a bust, mainly because my brother is not much of a talker, well at least not on the phone, ok, honestly not really at all but he made up for it with today.

The town "shura" I called it mockingly, met in the old school where my brother worked. We all slowly gathered into a dusty old classroom with cracked plaster walls, stacked dated texted books (ones I probably used as a kid) and simple utilitarian desks and chairs.

Like entering a surreal dream, passing through the school, it was the same. The worn chairs, the polished desks from too many children scribbling away on paper, the cracked door frames from a settling foundation. Even the dust, the light dust that always seemed to cover every surface in the building, it was all the same, like time had stopped.

We began to move the small tables away so we could circle the chairs and converse, but I was quickly retasked with erasing the chalkboard and checking how the water for the tea was coming along. Fighting my instinct

to protest, I accepted the task, as my brother began to greet the small crowd. Some I knew, few were new to me, and some were both as they had aged since I left for Austria years ago.

"A lot has changed in the last couple of years..." my brother stated, almost reading my mind, he continued as he introduced the topics of the evening, and me, to the sitting group as they prepared their tea and coffee.

During the meeting we broached the topic of construction, and what was to be done with farmland and plots that were not being used in and around the town. The year before some land had been allotted to build the new school to serve the area and because of that a few more ideas had been popping up for improvements around the town.

But as always, as the meeting wore on and more coffee and tea were drunk, the group became more and more reminiscent of the old days. They spoke of people that have come and gone, the weather, and... now with help from my brother's prodding, back on the subject.

Building without planning permission?

Illegal construction in Kosovo has a long history but raged out of control after the 1998-1999 Kosovo War. During the war over 200,000 houses were completely destroyed or severely damaged including numerous public and communal structures.⁹⁹ With the war ending and people returning home, having a roof over their heads was the most essential and expedient need. This urgency drove for a quick solution was the exacerbated and instigated the endemic illegal construction that is plaguing Kosovo even at this present time. The lack of any controlling authority in place was due to the dissolution of regulating bodies inside of the country. The authority in place, not knowing its role and the enormous influx of returning refugees created an especially toxic atmosphere for regulation of construction.

Post-war Kosovo was administered by one of the UN's largest peacekeeping efforts ever. UNMIK or United Nations Mission in Kosovo was built on four pillars: I. management of refugee return, II. Tasked with setting up civilian administration, III. democratization, institution building, and organizing elections, and IV. Reconstruction and economic development.¹⁰⁰

Initial priorities at the time were the winterization efforts of 1999-2000.

"Efforts to ensure that returning Kosovars survive the winter of 1999-2000 were viewed by some as an early indication of the ability of the UN and participating donors to cope with the challenges in Kosovo. With the objective of providing shelter for 350,000 people, nearly 60,000 emergency repair kits designed to allow residents to have one warm, dry room were provided, more than 10,000 roofing kits distributed, thousands of tents supplied, and accommodation centers for those with no other alternative made available. Targeted food distributions were made to more than 900,000 people. Wood stoves and firewood were distributed, and conventional heating systems repaired."¹⁰¹

Despite all these hurdles UNMIK reached its initial objectives in reconstruction in this time, but still had a deficit in institutional power and regulation of the further and continued reconstruction.

UNMIK was faced with the unclear mission of setting up an entirely new country from scratch. But without a clear purpose or end conditions, it was still unknown at this point if Kosovo was to be an independent state or would remain under Serbian control, UNMIK was hesitant to proceed with its own mission set and the people of Kosovo unwilling to invest in an uncertain future. Lacking guidance and facing a humanitarian crisis not seen in Europe for half a century; regulation, inspection, and approval of desperately needed housing and settlements was discarded.

On the 17th of February 2008 Kosovo declared independence, and was immediately recognized by the US, most EU members, and others. UNMIK took a supervisory role in the new Kosovo government and once again construction and regulation fell to the wayside, as critical institutions and services had to be re-established under the new government.

Why such a jump in cost in admin?

Today even though twenty-four years have passed since the last war in Kosovo, the situation of building illegally has hardly changed at all. According to the Minister of Environment, Spatial Planning, and Infrastructure Liburn Aliu in 2022, 352,000 buildings were built without permission in Kosovo. A number that makes up 75% of all constructions, of which only 46,000 are constructions without permission in the capital of Kosovo, Pristina. Almost 90% of them are generally found in rural areas, but cities also have many.¹⁰²

karte blanche-irregularities

Looking deeper into the legalization process one can find that not only are there issues with the legalization of the building itself, but also with the ownership of the property. Property is often to be found under grandfathers' names or even to owners who sold the property decades ago. Even land that belongs to private citizens often has government entities as owners on paper. Despite this or because of this, the tradition of buying with just a handshake continues.

A citizen of Prizren, Lendita just bought property on the outskirts of the city. She bought .2 acres of property from her two future neighbors. After she had already made a deal with the owners and paid, it was revealed during the legal process of registering her property under her name.

That the property belongs to 26 different people. For decades the property has been sold by handshake. During the process, she was unable to find the families of each of the owners, so her property is under her name with the condition that there will be a possibility of ownership challenge in the future.

When asked her feelings, she claimed "We are used to living with compromise and uncertainty. The very existence of our state and our future is an uncertainty. We just put our hopes for the best."

Lendita's case is not an isolated one, but rather a common issue.

There are various reasons why people build without a permit: ignorance or lack of information, long bureaucratic processes, the obligation to pay property tax, freedom of finding the place to build, freedom on the size of the object, avoiding process payment fees, lack of knowledge of laws, lack of law reinforcement and consequences and the list continues.

Compounding this is the fact that Kosovo has been and still is the most population dense region in southeast Europe. This sounds strange, but when compared to its neighbors, Bosnia, Serbia, and Albania for example, there are more people per square kilometer despite the lower population and land mass.

To further complicate the problem there are several forms of illegal structures, ranging from private single houses to multiple story apartments, from public buildings to renovations and extensions, and even unfinished constructions. Even expiration of construction permits fall under the classification of illegal construction. This variety and quantity of structures divests the enforcing agency's abilities to focus on and engage the problem.

For example, the legalization sector at the Directorate of Urbanism of the Municipality of Prishtina "has had and finds it impossible to implement the tasks assigned by the aforementioned Law (Law 04 / L-188)" due to lack of funding, lack of personnel and lack of support among the people.¹⁰³

Why a direction change?

Such a variety of structures has led the Kosovo government to break them into 3 categories:

CAT I- Unauthorized Constructions - Residential Buildings and other low-risk facilities, CAT II- Homes, CAT III- high risk or of national interest, to divide up the workload among agencies and municipalities, and to ease the process and understanding for the people of Kosovo.¹⁰⁴ But despite the attempt to ameliorate the situation, there has been little engagement.

At times despite being awarded a permit to build, various illegal actions are to be found, such as not respecting the approved plan considering the height, the number of floors, or the building itself. This approval was gained through bribing the officials in charge.

"Si n'bahçe t'babës"

The Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning, and Infrastructure, was established with the purpose of working in continuity with municipalities and other local institutions for the purpose of implementing legislation in the field of spatial planning, construction and housing.

Supported by various donors and organizations such as USAID, GIZ, UN Habitat, OSCE, European Commission, etc. The organization also takes

part and represents the country in international conferences on the subject matter. Despite all the support from various organizations little or no success stories are to be heard.¹⁰⁵

*For many years the issue of illegal buildings has been written or talked about, but no improvement has been made. The question of what to do with the illegal buildings remains.*¹⁰⁶

The issue of building illegally not only concerns Kosovo, but the entire Balkan region. So far about 2 million buildings are illegally built. These phenomena are having an impact globally and were addressed by many international organizations. "The Vienna Declaration on Informal Settlements in Southeast Europe" was signed by Balkan countries in Vienna on September 28th, 2004, followed by Kosovo in Prishtina on March 17th, 2005.¹⁰⁷

This cooperative agreement envisions the eventual legalization and sustainable improvement of the buildings, as well as the prevention of illicit construction. The Vienna Declaration's fundamental principles include: The basic principles of the Vienna Declaration are: "equality of all citizens for having the same standard of living and the right to enjoy equal rights as well as legal obligations, the sustainable regulation of the space by which informal settlements are required to be integrated into social, economic, spatial and legal frameworks."¹⁰⁸

This joint agreement foresees improvement in legalization and sustainability, and prevention of building illegally in the future. As "Western Balkan [committed] themselves to undertake measures to address issues and to initiate and implement reforms in the wider orbit of sustainable development and social housing."¹⁰⁹

It only took 9 years for Kosovo to implement the law, and enforcement is almost non-existent.

The political instability and change of governments very often only make the process endless. The law "Law no. 06/L-024 on Treatment of

Constructions without permit," which came into power on the 20 of August 2018 is a work in process.¹¹⁰

The new government in charge in Kosovo from February 2020 claims that the law needs to be edited further, because the law fails to cover so many issues. It seems the focus is currently on the law itself and there is a distinct lack of taking steps on the whole issue.

Contributing to the melee of chaos is the lack of professionals in the field making decisions, the people missing clear guidance on handling the issue properly, political instability, and corruption.

This leads to an environment where in most cases even if a building does have a license, it won't fulfill the basic criteria in some manner or form.

Can outsiders affect the positive outcome of a nation?

The last appointment to apply for legalization of structures was the 4th of September 2022 according to "Law No. 06/L-024 On Treatment Of Constructions Without Permit" for all buildings built before 5th of September 2018 with a simplified process that includes low tax payment and fewer documents, if not applied the structure runs the risk demolition.

The deadline came and went, once again, and Minister Aliu, Minister of the Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure is proposing to extend the deadline once again until 2025. According to Mister Aliu, this will give the government enough time to rework the law as well as organize and build mechanisms for implementation.¹¹¹

Throughout the years, there have been numerous attempts to motivate the population to start the legalization procedures, but unfortunately, all efforts have been unsuccessful.

While politicians continue to talk and argue about what to do during parliamentary meetings, the actual construction process continues like

karte blanche-irregularities

the old Albanian saying "like in my father's garden" (Si n'bahçe t'babës).

The lack of construction professionals plays a major role and just this year the "Law No. 08/L-102 On the chambers of Architects and Engineers in the Field of Construction" was passed that "regulates the membership, headquarters, status, role and scope of chambers, professions, licensing, disciplinary responsibility and continuing education of architects and engineers in the field of construction."¹¹²With the hope of addressing this issue.

The idea that the illegal building issue can be solved without direct engagement with the people, but by simply passing laws, cannot be done.

Am I allowed to Laugh?

In partnership with the legal woes is also the large amounts of questionable decisions seen in Kosovo in regard to construction. While they may not be "illegal" in any sense sometimes they just make you scratch your head and say "Why?"

Either as a good idea fairy gone bad or to spite their neighbor in a long-term feud, questionable construction, and design can be seen all over Kosovo.

Personally, I know a house where a brother built as close as he could to another brother just so he could eavesdrop from the kitchen. I've seen a four-story house with a cantilever over an open garage area and dubious build quality.

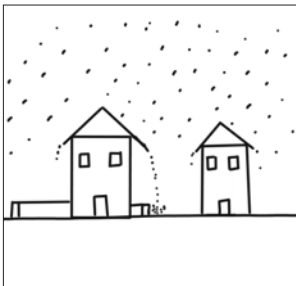
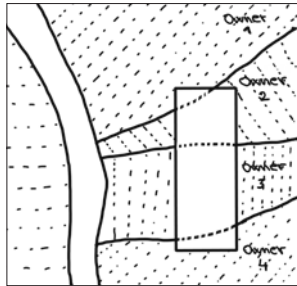
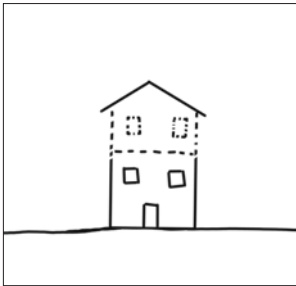
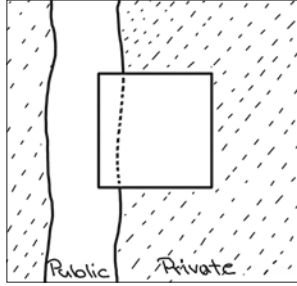
Other times I cannot for any reason understand what the designer was going for. Each floor and roof seem to be designed by a different person with no coordination with the others.

All these illegalities and irregularities build the architectural space of Kosovo. A true Wild West of construction. A blank check and a blank canvas with all the colors of the rainbow at your disposal.

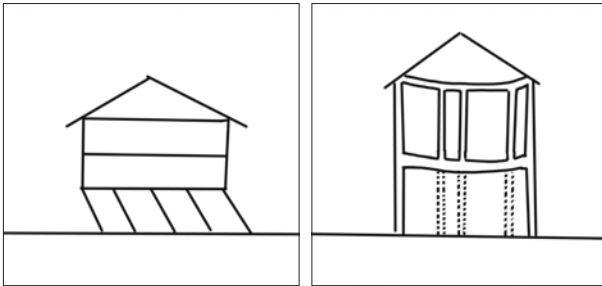
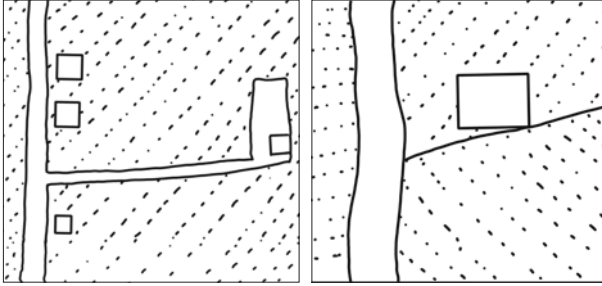
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Irregularity Collection

Fragments of life: irregularity

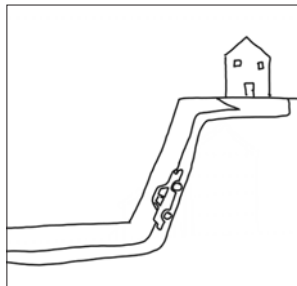
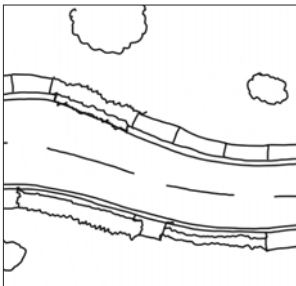
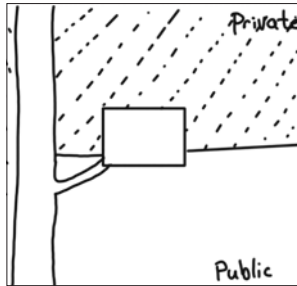
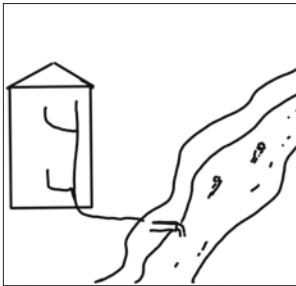
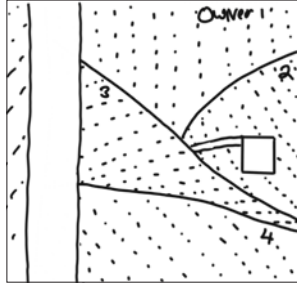


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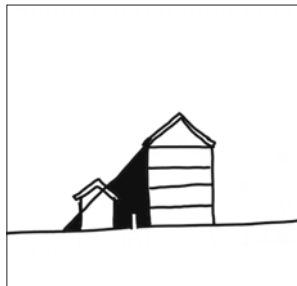
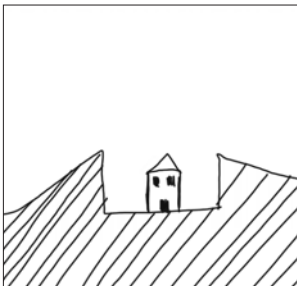
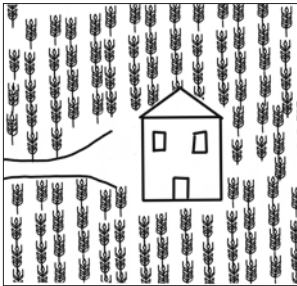
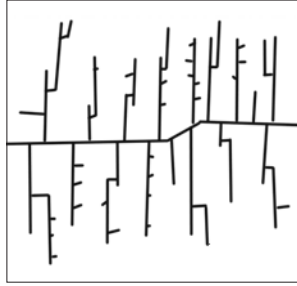
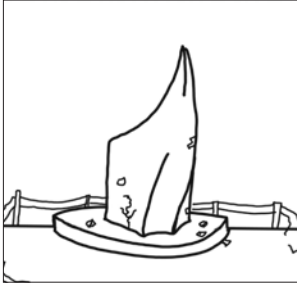


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Fragments of life: irregularity



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karte blanche-irregularities



RED DIRT

XI

"After World War II were the hunger years. The war was bad but what came after was not any better. Once Communism took over..." he coughed a little and then continued "every household had to give to the state the products that they would produce, like wheat, milk, meats, etc. On paper, it was supposed to be a ratio that we had to give, but when they came, they came and took everything. We then receive a timeline when to give our 'leftovers,' or so they were called but it was all a lie."

"Those who didn't meet the deadline would be tortured and sent to jail and get a name like 'the traitor of the country.' Thank God at least we had milk. We would mix some milk and anything green on the field and eat the mix; if we were lucky, we have a few drops of wheat it was even better." The old man rambled on without a hitch.

"But you know that was just not enough. I remember how I couldn't make it, walking to school. Luckily, we had a good teacher, who was getting bread from the state, so he would walk down the road feeding us giving his portions to the kids so that we would make it to school."

"Many people died of hunger or by getting poisoned by the field greens they consumed. Ahh. still hate hearing little kids cry. reminds me of the cry for hunger."

"We usually made sure that the men and the elderly had more to eat, the rest of us less because we were younger and didn't work as much as the men did. One thing is sure, we all remained hungry. Security was sent to watch over the land. If they saw chimney smoke, they would come for inspection to see what we were cooking. They would take the entire wheat out of our storage. Solidarity is what helped us survive, we shared everything we could get with others."

I jotted what notes I could on the scrap piece of paper I had in my pocket, trying to capture this precious yet gruesome moment. The cruelty and demonization of the people never fails to stun me.

How can a nation of farmers starve?

What causes a country with almost three-fourths of the entire population working as farmers at that time have their food supply collapse? Could this happen now? Since agriculture in Kosovo is mainly "subsistence farming, characterized by small, fractured land plots, lack of technical expertise, poor transport infrastructure, irrigation, storage or processing, and lack of mechanization"¹¹³ it is easy to see this happening again.

Agriculture is ubiquitous in Kosovo, either as a safety net or as a main source of income, but because of this it becomes a social question for many the population.¹¹⁴ The country's economic future looks bleak: almost half the people are unemployed and human capital is depleting as the able-bodied look elsewhere, and self-sufficiency is still a primary or secondary means of livelihood for many households.¹¹⁵

Characterized by a high population density and numerous small settlements with small per capita agricultural areas, nearly 62% of Kosovo's inhabitants are rural dwellers, making agricultural soil possibly the most important resource in Kosovo.^{116,117} Agriculture is a leading GDP contributor behind wholesale and retail trade and manufacturing at around 10% of the GDP.¹¹⁸ Employment for men in Kosovo is at 51% and 18.5% for women in 2021¹¹⁹ and remittance from the diaspora ranges from 10% to 16% of the GDP depending on the year and sector resulting in heavily dependent on subsistence farming.¹²⁰

Small plots speckle the land and farms are archaic, relying on manpower more often than technology. Faulty infrastructure, irrigation, processing, and lack of mechanization all reduce Kosovo's effectiveness and competitiveness in the European and global markets.

In an overwhelmingly underemployed socio-economic structure, which suffers from the draining of human resources and talent due to emigration, subsistence farming remains a facet of everyday life. While listed at only 4.4% as employed in agriculture the reality is closer to 35% due to the

substance farm taking a secondary role.¹²¹ Many will have a primary job such as principal or construction worker, but continue to till the fields or pick fruits and harvest vegetables after their normal shift, on weekends, or when business is slow.

The average agricultural lot in Kosovo is under two hectares. While a farmer may have more land in total, this land is often broken into several smaller lots reducing efficiency. These lots, once larger, due to the tradition of breaking up land for inheritance have resulted in fracturing the landscape. Not only this division, but true ownership of the land over time has been lost and forgotten, documents poorly maintained or faked, and owners leaving never to return have created a boulder in the road of land development and usage.

Not all farmland should be some sort of communal land, as happened in communist states. The difference can still be seen in satellite pictures of the old border between East and West Germany. We all know how that worked out. Nor should the land become a part of some mega-corporation to be a monoculture producer. Such as in Brazil with soybeans, where when the market falters the whole economy collapses, but rather a balance needs to be found.

For example, grains such as wheat and corn are most economical when harvested in large lots, by industrialized machines which increase speed, reduce manpower, and ease transport. These three problems that Kosovo needs to deal with, but due to the small size, irrigation, care and harvesting machines cannot be used. Corn production is also driven by its uses as livestock feed, whose demand has increased in the last ten years, but Kosovar farmers' inability to get loans, the high cost of business, and insufficient land, make the small farmers very risk-averse to expanding in order to gain a foothold in the growing feed business. Especially now with the war in Ukraine, far-off markets are clamoring for grains, due to the Russian destruction of Ukrainian crops and blockades, but still, Kosovo cannot mobilize to capitalize on the moment.

Due to the stagnation, lack of economic development in agriculture, and the high agrarian density, the future estimation for agriculture is bleak. Many households are searching for alternatives, adding to the rural-urban migration, only furthering the lack of manpower needed in future orientation toward manpower intensive crops.

What about importing manpower?

The total area of urban development has grown by 57% between 2000 and 2018, yet another aspect afflicting Kosovo's rural land, urban sprawl, infrastructure, and coal surface mining encroachment.¹²² This is nothing new to Kosovo, in the 1970s agricultural land was lost at a higher rate per year¹²³ but with such a low productivity level and more than half the land being left fallow, the output was so low that in following decades of development the loss was compensated for.

The changing demographic of Kosovo is also affecting Kosovo farmers. With nearly 64% of Kosovo's farmers being over the age of forty, the trend is that this percentage is only increasing.¹²⁴ This depopulation of the countryside only increases the reliance on technology and education levels, and whole villages have the possibility of becoming extinct since Kosovo has land, but no farmers. Current agrotechnology is reliant on wider space, leading to increased research and development or investment into foreign companies-- a budgetary factor that Kosovo does not have.

Not all is bad, despite the decrease in crop areas, efficiency is up. More is being produced per hectare with the help of artificial fertilizer, small improvements in irrigation, utilization of adaptive crops, and newer agriculture technology. However, this increase in efficiency cannot offset the reduction of crop yield per capita.

With over 60% of its population living in rural or transitional rural-urban zones, land usage is critical to Kosovo's past, present and future.

Because Kosovo is the most population-dense Balkan country, the line between rural and urban blurs, depending on the method of measurement/classification one uses. When using the EU new standard 2011 topology method and traditional administrative boundaries, there was over a 16% difference in what was considered rural and urban.¹²⁵

This difference was an average across the board, but differed from region to region depending on the sprawl and or how tightly clustered the

villages were with a 34% difference in the Ferizaj region for example.¹²⁶ With the difficulty in defining exactly what rural is, we can define what it is not: urban, densely packed, built up, with supporting infrastructure with little or no ties to agricultural or forestry activities.

This leaves us with the rural areas specifically being tied to activities, rather than population densities in Kosovo.

Because of this high rural-to-urban ratio in Kosovo, the economy of Kosovo is driven by agricultural, forestry, and mineral exploitation. Despite this, most rural dwellers are only self-sustaining substance farming, with little or no surplus going to markets.

A vast majority of Kosovo's food is imported, whether urban or rural. This food is due partially to the high production cost of the low-efficiency use of Kosovo's rural land when competing against larger industrialized farms in other lands.¹²⁷

However, demand for domestic goods has increased over the last decade. Despite the increasing demand for domestic goods and exportation to produce revenue, Kosovo's rural sector is suffering from emigration. And once again most investment and purchasing power is heavily reliant on remittance.

The importation of products including foodstuffs has also become a hot topic recently when it was revealed that a discrepancy of value and volume has been going on when importing grain (and other products) from Turkey.¹²⁸

So, no manpower from outside, now what?

Land fragmentation, low labor efficiency, and high production costs are characteristics of Kosovo's agriculture.¹²⁹ The majority of plots are very small in size, 80% are smaller than 4 ha with less than 0.6% being larger than 10 ha.¹³⁰ This land fragmentation is mainly due to the inheritance tradition of breaking land down equally to give to inheritors.

Over many generations, once large usable tracts of land are broken down and left fallow. The problem of fragmentation is only compounded by other factors such as: incomplete registration, unfinished land consolidation, restitution claims, unresolved conflicts, absentee ownership, fake documents, and illegal construction on agricultural land.

Even if these factors can be overcome, others arise, and the lack of credit for purchasing land during reconsolidation efforts and lack of public land for re-distribution in aid of during these times of reconsolidation and continuity efforts limit the impact of any program set in place.

Has financial support from International and Kosovo governments helped?

"The results show that the lowest income farmers benefited from agricultural policy support, particularly from investment subsidies. Direct payments helped narrow down the income gap between the poorest farmers and the medium of the distribution, but the gap between the two tails - poorest and richest incomes has widened."¹³¹

But with so many structural problems facing Kosovo, the rural problem is not something one can just throw money at.

The development of irrigation systems,¹³² the lack of technology and the lack of education and training, and the lack of coordination are also cited as challenges to rural development in Kosovo.¹³³

The largest reason for leaving rural land fallow is most probably the low profitability of farming. It's cheaper and easier just not to do anything other than trying to break even with crops that no one is buying.

Who is moving to where?

One of the largest challenges is the changing demographics of the rural areas of Kosovo. This is substantially hindering development in the area, as the urbanization of Kosovo is continually drawing little financial aid and investment away from the countryside.

The urban population in 1953 was approximately 15%; in 1981, it was 32.4%; in 1991, it was around 36%; and in 2021, it made up roughly 45% of the population. To put this expansion into perspective, 71,000 people lived in cities in 1948; by 1991, that figure had increased to 730,000.¹³⁴

The urban population increased from around 388,300 in the years 1953-1981 to about 600,000 in the years 1953-1991 a 307% increase.¹³⁵ Approximately 45% of Kosovo's population now resides in cities, which is 8% less than the global average.¹³⁶ In towns and villages, the housing stock and its resources are growing. The number of flats in Kosovo's urban areas increased from 21,000 in 1951 to 88,000 in 1981.¹³⁷

This reduction in population is most notable, first in the more mountainous areas due to the small size and lack of infrastructure, then areas bordering the contentious area with Serbia, due to a lack of security and finally to the rest of the countryside as inhabitants seek a better life and work in the cities and abroad.¹³⁸

The most notable symptom of this disease can be found in the low number of students attending schools. During the 2021/2022 school year an overall drop of 30.3 % in primary and secondary was recorded with leading municipalities Kamenica and Junik at -53%, with Rahovec, Dragash, Viti with -45%, Gjilan and Suharekë with -41% following.¹³⁹ In Drelaj Village in the Rugova area, a school that had over one hundred and twenty students before the war, now is closing due to have no students to teach.¹⁴⁰

To hammer the point home some more: Prapashtica had over a hundred families now only fifteen causing the local schools to shut down. one of them closed three years ago the other one will close this September.¹⁴¹

Finally, the story of Leugzim Halili a student from the village of Murgullë, who travels daily to a different municipality by a specially chartered bus to continue his fourth grade schooling.¹⁴² These examples are just symptomatic of the decreasing population in rural areas. As the move toward urbanization, combined with a large percentage of the population that will move abroad once Visa liberalization takes effect in early 2024. A catastrophe of abandonment could ensue, swallowing the countryside.

A web of dreams or a donut of despair?

A practical and illustrative example of the rising rural sprawl dilemma can be seen in the small village of Optrushë (See Illustration: Year 2004/2018 sprawl-Optrushë). By overlaying and tracing the growth of the small town between the years 2004 to 2018 the growth of the town limits is obvious.

At first, it's moderate growth along paths of travel, normal, everyday sprawl. But what makes this sprawl unique is that despite the increase in the surface area the town covers, the population has dramatically decreased. With even more of the town's population living abroad or in larger nearby cities, the villages are starting to resemble croissants. Light and crispy outsides, but hollow and full of nothing in the center.

The hollowing out of the centers of towns. as the established areas are abandoned by the families. are moving to the outskirts to plots to build newer, more modern houses is widespread.

The web of development reaches out along roads connecting small towns and villages, leading in some cases to a conflict of authority, and utilities (See Illustration: 2004 vs 2018).

While some of these merging towns join peacefully into larger incorporated units. Conflicting ethnicities and religious differences inside of Kosovo are a powder keg ready to explode When ethnic autonomy is seen as a right, how are conflicts mediated and solved? These are deep structural problems that will come to rise in the next decades.

This work has no intention of diving off the deep end into the ethnic conflict mega-center that is Kosovo. But it does recognize the contributions of the divisions and clashes between the ethnicities, that have formed the structure and constitution of the fledgling country.

Alcoves inside of subdivisions, inside of partitions is the name of the game inside of Kosovo's borders. Isolated pockets of uniqueness which arose

in the rise and fall of empires that swept through the land are still visible today (See Illustration: Zaqishtë 2023). In Zaqishtë a village of less than seven hundred people, a small enclave of Serbian families settled in a predominantly Albanian area.

For as long as anyone can remember the families lived in harmony, until the Kosovo war in 1999. During the war, the whole village was emptied and burned. What little that did remain was limited in scope and ability to provide shelter to the returning families.

Rebuilding the town UNMIK constructed an enclave of houses that were never to become homes. In a project that cost 1.8 Million Euro, thirty eight houses were built in 2006 only to be left empty. Another three houses were constructed in 2012 despite the failure of the original resettlement.¹⁴³ The Serbian minority refused to return, leaving once again a depopulated center in the already thinning towns (See Illustration: Zaqishtë 2023).

This bald spot developing in Kosovo's villages is not isolated nor limited to minority groups or ethnic divisions (See Illustration: Retijë 2023). When exploring the town of Retijë, the sheer amount of abandoned and uninhabited homes comes to light.

There is nothing special, for better or worse about Retijë, it is just a common small rural village in Kosovo, yet I estimate approximately 70% of the structures in the village are uninhabited or seasonally uninhabited (diaspora).

During the rush to rebuild, the staggering number of unpermitted structures in Kosovo is and will become an even larger hurdle to its future development. Tied in with anomalies, traditions, parallel law, and quite frankly a good bit of stubbornness, this giant furball will take decades to unwind. The Gordian Knot looks like a tied shoelace compared to the behemoth of legal and personal hurdles in Kosovo's wilderness of permit-less construction.

In the town of Studençan, approximately 600 structures inside of town

limits, only three structures are permitted. The spectacular thing is there is no difference between the permitted building and the unpermitted.

It is not a public building or a building of value. It is not in any way noteworthy, yet there it is, a single permitted building in the sea of permitlessness (See Illustration: Legal/Illegal Studençan 600 Buildings 2023). Again this is nothing remarkable. Other towns examined, Retijë and Zaqishtë, suffer from the same blight (See Illustration: Retijë & Illustration: Zaqishtë). Not a single blemish to the sea of black in Retijë and Zaqishtë suffers from just a lonely dot. Unruly expansion is eating up limited and precious agricultural land, land which Kosovo can little afford to lose.

With improved technology and practices, it may be possible to offset some of the detriments of this sprawl, but technology is expensive, and manpower is becoming even more limited and forming a bottleneck in Kosovo's rural development.

Map Collection

Year 2004/2018 sprawl - Oterushë



red dirt-rural usage

Year 2004/2018 hollowing out - Oterushë



red dirt-rural usage

2004 - Zaqishtë, Optrushë, Samadrexhë, Studençan, Retijë

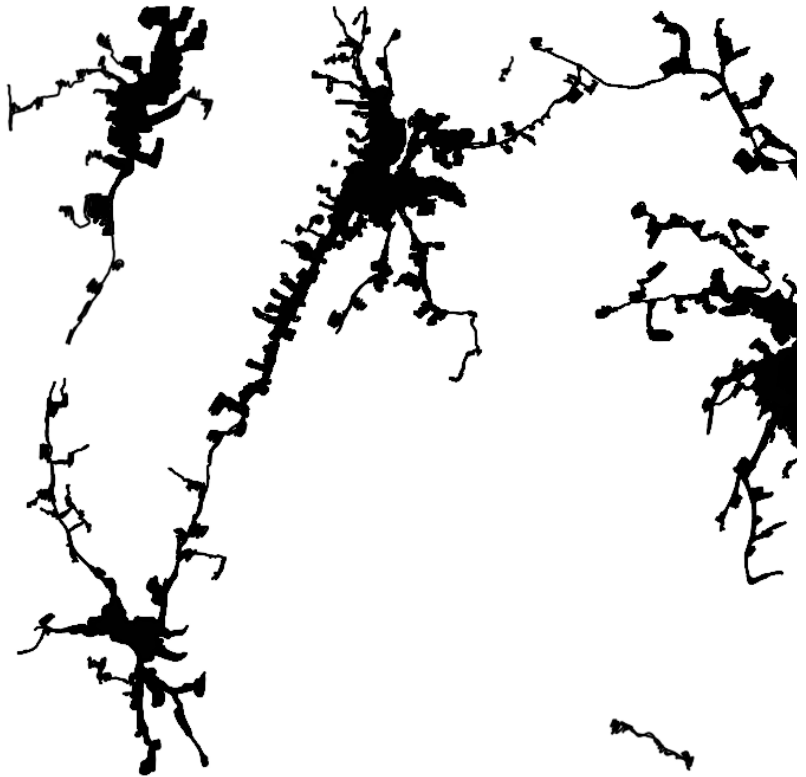


red dirt-rural usage

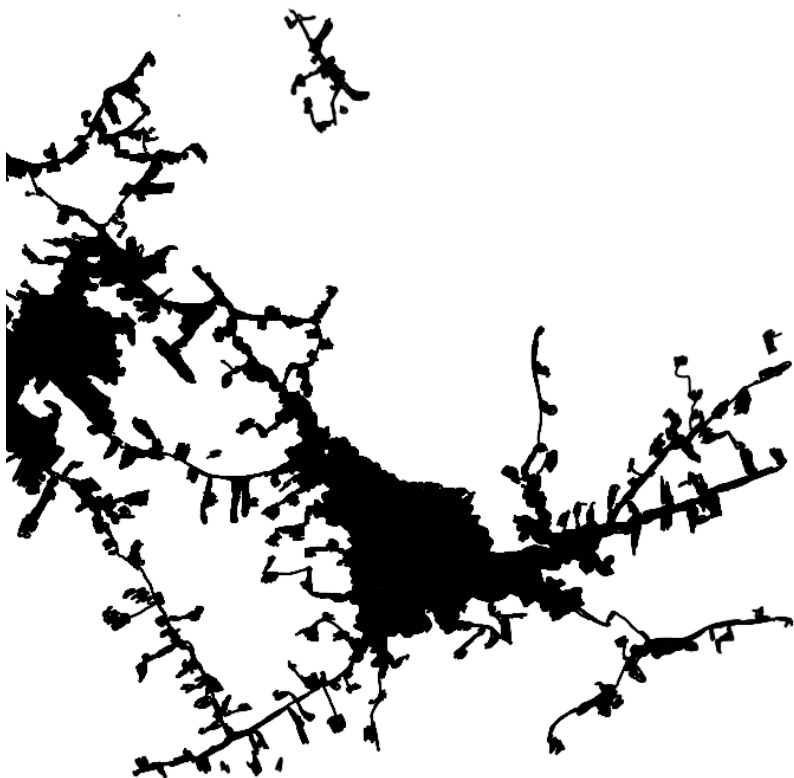


red dirt-rural usage

2018 - Zaqishtë. Opterushë. Samadrexhë. Studençan. Retijë



red dirt-rural usage



red dirt-rural usage

Legal/illegal Zaqishtë 2023



red dirt-rural usage

Legal/illegal Retijë 2023



red dirt-rural usage

Legal/illegal Studençan 600 buildings 2023



red dirt-rural usage



red dirt-rural usage

Zaqishtë 2023



red dirt-rural usage

Retijë 2023



red dirt-rural usage



WHERE TO HITCH UP THE HORSES?

XII

"The road was difficult, but life was good. From the month that cherries were ripe until snowfall, we had all kinds of fruits and cold clear water. I had 5 ha of land and I kept up to 200 sheep. Do you know what kind of life it was?" His eyes glassed over in nostalgia, "We had everything. We worked a lot though, not like the youth today. I started working as a child. When I was eleven, I was already taking care of the sheep and cows, and I would go to work in the fields. I would get up before sunrise and come back home after sunset every day. We would get some fresh baked bread and salted yogurt drink from the women at home. We have so much more today, and life is easy, but no joy is left." Ymer continued.

"We had guests staying for weeks. Every night, we gathered with the neighbors, drinking tea, talking especially about working land and profit and politics. We laughed a lot also... argued a lot but didn't carry it on the next day. Ehh, today rarely anyone comes by. We all got spread all over the world and there is no place to meet anyone."

All dressed up and where to go?

The last issue to tackle, but not the least, is the lack of public space in Kosovo, in particular Kosovo's rural areas. An increasingly divergent demographic in a rural area means increasing difficulties in building communities that are necessary for the functioning and flow of rural life. And due to the growing importance of the agriculture section of Kosovo's economy these communities are desperately needed.

Historically little is known of the public spaces from the culture and traditions of the people around Kosovo before the Ottoman Empire's Islamification of the area. Medieval traditions of the pre-Ottoman conquest are expected in the area, but a lack of any historical documentation during this period and the numerous conflicts which washed over the areas afterwards have left a hole in the collective knowledge of this period. The southern Slav invasion was followed closely on its heels by the Ottoman invasion during the 1400s, which would then go on to subjugate the area for almost half a millennium.

where to hitch up the horses?-public space

Medieval public spaces were driven mainly by religion, administrative purpose, commerce, and above all defense. Medieval fortification and city defense took precedence over the rest of city planning during this period, and hence influenced the placement of markets, churches, and open commune spaces greatly. These spaces dictated the placement of the only two public spaces noted during this period- streets, and markets. Open spaces around churches, fortifications, administrative buildings, and the streets connecting them were bustling with market activities and trade, but more can only be guessed.

Ottoman architecture and public spaces reflected the imposed or adopted cultural behavior that beset the region after its capture. A new religion brought new standards and ways of living to the region, affecting many things. Towns and cities began to reorganize around public space of great importance, the bazaar, but also the garden was an important aspect of Ottoman architecture which can be seen throughout Kosovo. The development of residential-only areas also arose and connected to the other parts of cities through a network of streets and roads. But like its earlier medieval origins, public spaces were determined through three things religion, commerce, and defense. Even in small rural villages the public space of Kosovo now can trace its position by aligning with a mosque, market, and a tower house Kulla used as a defensible positions. Finally, the Mesire, or natural parks that served as meeting places for walking and leisure, were an important part of socialization in the larger cities. Despite the variety of public spaces available, they were not available to all inhabitants. Women and children were often limited to the houses or gardens of the houses. Public spaces were reserved for men, which contrasted greatly with the medieval and pre-medieval period, where women were often integral to public life.

Public life in Kosovo changed greatly, once again in the 1900s after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Great changes arrived in Kosovo with public lectures in science, history, etc.

Music, sport, and cinema were all introduced during the interwar period, but were still greatly limited to the capital of Prishtina. Little changed in the rural areas defined by fortress houses, farms, and religious buildings. Little changed in rural Kosovo with the women being sequestered in their homes and /or gardens and the men having access to the larger public spectrum until the fall of Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

where to hitch up the horses?-public space

How far is it to the bottom?

Although sport stadiums and facilities were being built in droves during communist Yugoslavia time, few of these made it out to the rural areas, where children played in graveyards instead of soccer fields. They climbed trees rather than having gymnastic equipment and they ran through corn fields instead of tracks. The great socialist dream was just a dream for most, and the public life of those who lived in the isolated regions of Kosovo did not have access to that dream.

One of the most basic challenges facing Kosovo's rural communities now is based on the very essence of their existence. Cities and towns developed to have regular and predictable spacing between each other as described in Walter Christaller's Central Place Theory or its newer dynamic iterations set forth by Veneris.¹⁴⁴Kosovo is no exception, but it is rather unique in the closeness of its settlements and the fact they are emptying out, creating ever larger gaps between facilities, services, and public interaction.

The isolationist regimes that trapped the people of Kosovo for centuries resulted in rather high-density towns and inhabitants in its rural land; this is however changing.

The reduction of Kosovo's population through migration is reducing the rural density to a more baseline level for Europe, which is still rather high, but this new reduction is leading to the abandonment of farms, homes, and whole villages.

Isolating the local populace, which in turn gives incentives to move to more urban areas, only intensifies the conditions, like a rash that will not stop itching. This abandonment of the countryside is expected to accelerate and by 2050, half of the populace is expected to live in urban areas.¹⁴⁵

For a country that is heavily dependent on substance farming, this increased urban population will be increasingly dependent on imports, and the pitfalls associated with that. For example, the impending collapse

where to hitch up the horses?-public space

of global trade, due to the energy crisis, will only exacerbate the food shortage in Kosovo, revealing the critical role that rural communities play in society.

Public spaces are needed to increase public participation in local planning and government. The Spatial planning law in 2013 was passed to increase the participation and coordination of local municipalities.¹⁴⁶ The initiative was successful, but with the better engagement of the people, ease of construction permits, and encouragement and planning of expanding business, public spaces need to occur. These new public spaces are needed for socializing in an ever-dwindling populace to prevent isolation and support the Kosovar populace.

Unorganized and uncoordinated efforts are being made to help Kosovo's rural areas are slowly crawling out from the 500 years of Islamization where women were locked away from public spaces and foreigners were shunned. New public spaces in rural areas are popping up, but without any focus.

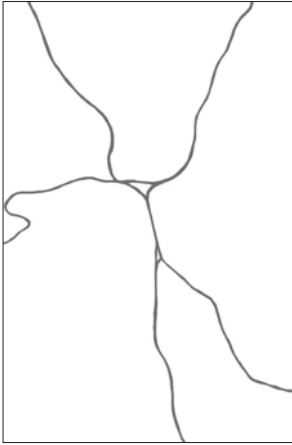
The future needs to improve the inclusivity of new immigrants and increase the engagement of women already there who are essential to the future agriculture efforts and will be critical to Kosovo's rural areas.

But beyond any specifics, the need to socialize, the need to exist and feel included in an area, even if not from that region, is essential. This was achieved previously in Kosovo by clustering. (See Illustration: mosque | church | school) The black figures signify major structures inside the town's limit, with the center of the town constructed around a small mosque being the central pivot for the roads, sending them off in different directions.

Clustering by family, or by ethnicity, (See Illustration: family districts) In our example town, one can see the different fill patterns representing different "family districts" inside of a town. These areas inside of a town often have the family name on the streets, if ever listed, and house numbers are rarer still. Strangely enough, two different clans of the same family name will be in the same town, giving the illusion of a very large part belonging to the same name.

where to hitch up the horses?-public space

Village organization



public space



mosque / church / school



family districts



land formation

where to hitch up the horses?—public space

Traditionally and even to this day, it was unusual for a stranger to inhabit a family district, even if he had married a daughter of the family. The husband will be seen as a foreigner and viewed with suspicion.

The traditional centering of public spaces has been around low traffic roads that crisscross the countryside. (See Illustration: public space) And by roads, whether dirt or paved, with walls and gates built right up to the street boundary. The heavily channelized streets become an encased public space where people go about their business.

Funneling the public into the center of the village where, almost always is marked with a mosque or a church with a tower and an administrative building with a single room.

Since the main source of income is subsistence farming in Kosovo there is a very close connection to the land. (See Illustration: land formation) Grouped houses are centrally located and determine the layout of the plots of land extending from the streets. These lots are often just on paper where multiple smaller lots are conglomerated together by a single family. This fragmentation of plots only further hinders the future development of public spaces. Even if eminent domain is called upon, properly compensating for the land taken would take monumental efforts even in the smallest of towns.

Differences in gender effects where activities are executed. Women and children, while before were often isolated to homes and private land, running for cover at the sight of foreigners, now spend their time on the streets, either playing or running errands. For men, the tradition of the Turkish coffee house continues, yet the architecturally ornate and extravagant coffee houses have been replaced with mundane functional rooms.

When one passes through a village either groups of men, or a child scurrying along to pick up something from the store is visible. Very rarely are will be women out and about.

One of the most public events in Kosovo, the wedding, traditionally used to last multiple days, hosted at the home with an almost open invitation to the public. Now private weddings are held outside of the small towns in ornate and yet, sterile, closed "Wedding Salons." Once an event to be joined in by all, now has become an event of exclusivity. This is also the

where to hitch up the horses?-public space

first step of the breakdown of the guest-receiving tradition resulting in the privatization of the home and exclusion outside of the nucleus of the family.

Where did they all go?

I had time pressure, I had to leave soon, to head back to school. On my way to explore the countryside some more, going from one village to another was difficult to impossible with the minibus. In most cases, I needed a car, so I managed to barter a ride with my brother. Usually by taking his kids off his hands for a few hours, which was never a problem, or sometimes, like this time, just to run errands with him as we traveled.

"This is a complete new territory for me." I marveled while going down a hill towards a seemingly empty village.

"I know, me as well." My brother mumbled. Both of us were amazed about the foreignness of our very own village. We just never needed to go this way and the oddity of this struck us both.

Row after row, new houses had been built on the hillside as we walked on uneven and rashly constructed sidewalks a rarity in Kosovo's small towns. While I meandered a little bit further, a strip of identical houses caught my eye.

I turned down a secondary road heading towards a row of eight identical houses. As I walked on the street, I noticed that a woman was looking at me while cleaning windows, another one was staring at me from her garden. Finally, I could see a few people around, but I started feeling uncomfortable.

The more I walked down the muddy road, the more I became aware that I was a stranger penetrating someone else's territory. As I departed the sidewalk to visit the strip of houses, a thick clay-like mud clung to my

where to hitch up the horses?-public space

shoes, it became harder to walk, almost like walking in heels on marbles. I picked my way along the path, hopping from grass patch to patch until I stopped at some point and took a stick to remove the mud which had built up under and around my shoes. Suddenly, this felt like childhood all over again.

While I was busy scraping the mud off my shoes, I noticed a grandma's presence, she was close but in her garden. I greeted her and asked if I was in trouble.

"Not at all, I was just thinking that a foreigner was walking through taking pictures, and that made me curious." She replied with a warm smile.

Great! Now I don't even look like I belong here.

In a traditional way, she started a conversation by asking how my family and I were doing, something we always do when we meet someone.

In turn, I asked about her family, actually quite interested, rather than the nominal politeness of the tradition. She mentions her eight brothers and their family that all live abroad are doing well.

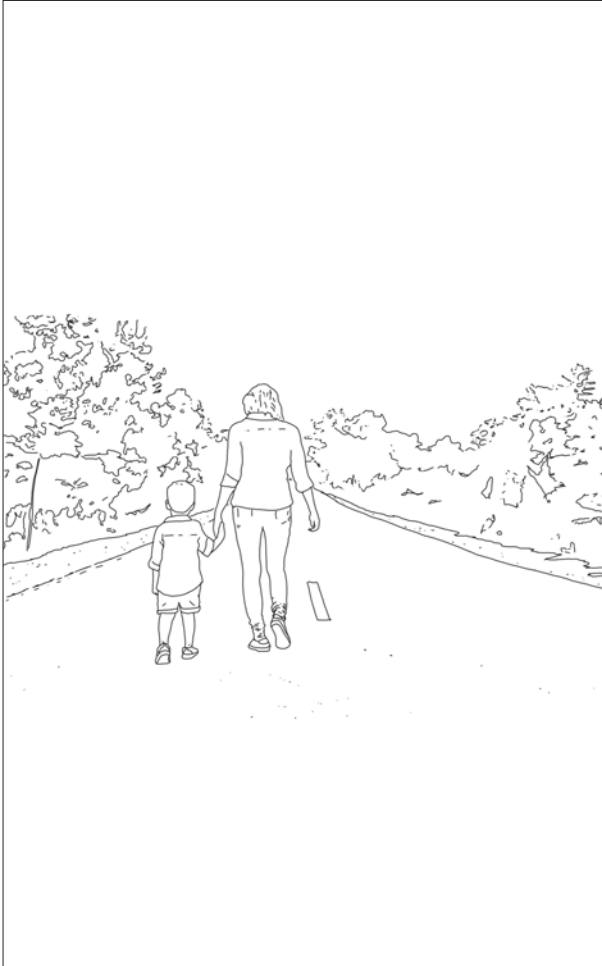
"That is good to hear." As I eye the row of eight houses understanding them now for the first time. I begin to quiz her some more.

"Usually, they all stay at the first house. It was built where their parents live. The other houses are built for future usage," she said. I persisted, trying to get some more information about the other buildings around, but she replied.

"Don't really know them, they belong to another bloodline".

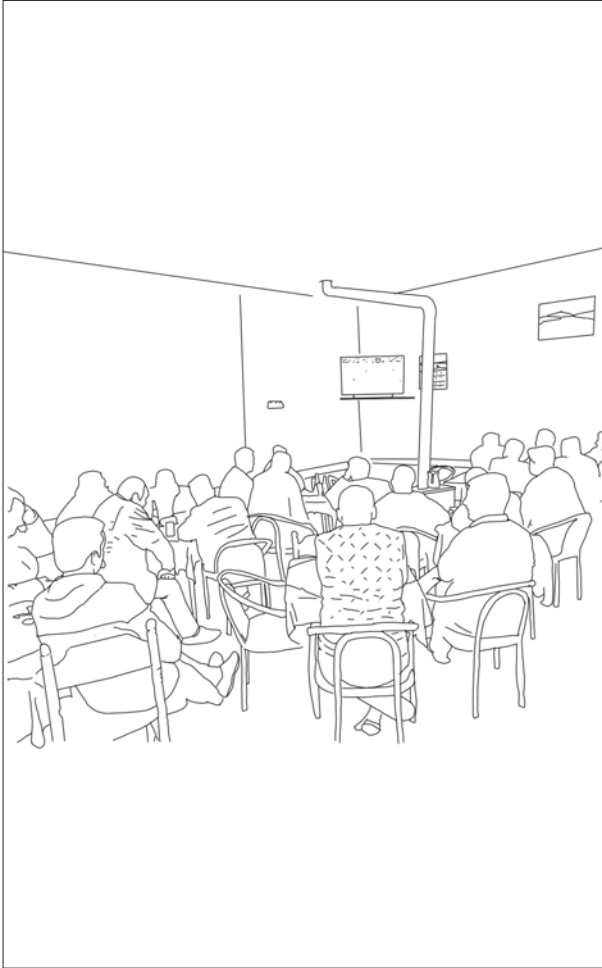
Social-phenomena Collection

Space: female



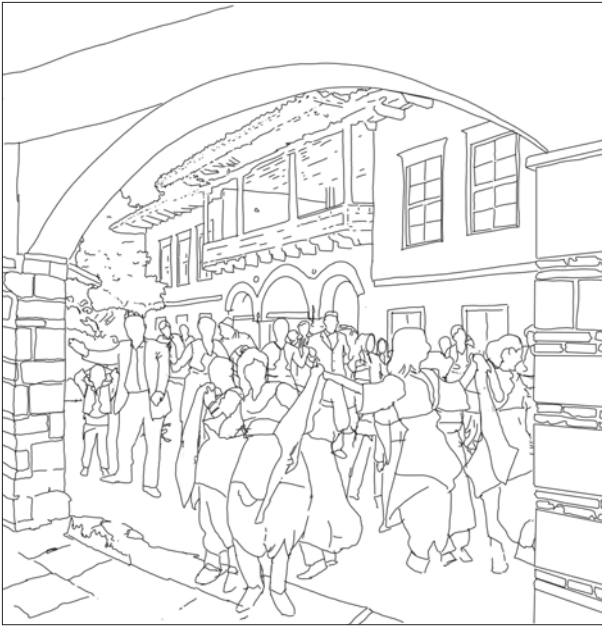
where to hitch up the horses?-public space

Space: male



where to hitch up the horses?-public space

Space: past



where to hitch up the horses?-public space

Space: present



where to hitch up the horses?-public space



THE END OF THE BEGINNING

XIII

"So, what is your thesis going to be about?"

"I don't know."

"How can you not know?"

"I don't know."

"What do you mean you don't know?"

"I don't know."

"What abo..."

"I don't know, I don't know!" I cut my train of thought off. The constant bickering in my own head was getting to me, but I did have a point.

Multiple trips, countless months, piles of books, innumerable cups of tea, coffee, and even sometimes a clear harsh-smelling cleaning fluid (they say it is drinkable) during interviews filled my memory. Hills, valleys, bugs, and running away from loose wildlife. Yes, a cat counts as wildlife! I can even say I survived a pandemic and multiple global crises, and still didn't know what exactly I am going to do for my thesis. This is doubly funny as this is my conclusion chapter. But maybe that is the point; this is just the end of the beginning of this... this thing. A subject, a topic that will take many more years and many more miles to complete. Saying all that, there is a point to this, there is a methodology to my madness.

On the way home from that site trip in Albania I passed empty village after empty village. Whether they were vacation homes, homes of people abroad, or just internal migration to larger cities, I kept passing empty house after empty house. At the same time, there were countless construction sites and gravel pits for concrete mix. I just had to ask myself: Who are we building for?

The question that became an idea, that then became this work was so

the end of the beginning?-conclusion

simple, which I found it so difficult to answer. "Who" became "why" then in turn became "where... which... how..."

You get the picture.

While the population of Kosovo in rural areas is decreasing through migration and with lower than normal (for Kosovo) birthrate, there is a comparatively large amount of construction happening. Despite building a house being the most intensive financial and temporal investment which people consider, construction is not dwindling. Many continue to build for the future even though many will not stay. Recent history shows that the diaspora do not return for good, and the son did not live in his readymade house in Kosovo.

The history of Kosovo does not treat structures well, especially ones that are abandoned. One of the most iconic examples which fell to "destroy the old, build the new" effect is the Bazaar of Prishtina. After losing craftsmen, merchants, and intellectuals for decades the Bazaar became decrepit and dangerous (fires). This brain drain of Kosovo is happening once again.

Some of the best and brightest of the current generation (all that I know) are dreaming of scraping enough cash together to move, study, and live abroad. And I'm questioning what opportunities will be left in Kosovo or abroad for the next generation, due to the changes that are rippling through Europe and the world right now.

The question is will these changes abroad and at home affect Kosovo or will Kosovo plod on as it always has, nestled in the mountain valley of conflicts and dichotomies? A parallel law governs the rural areas continuing in line with the current state of things. A set of rules that are underneath and yet above all other laws in the land.

Above all is the questionable economic development of Kosovo. This is the true driver for everything. Farming, technology, and architecture are so dependent on continued economic development, which is also the most unclear.

Recent tension with the USA, Kosovo's largest supporter, illustrates this change and the purchase of military technology shows a possible realignment of the country towards Turkey, a rising self-reliant industrially

the end of the beginning?-conclusion

advanced regional power. How this influence will affect life in Kosovo is yet to be seen as Kosovo is geographically, culturally and economically the pivot point between the east and the west and the question is what direction will Kosovo go in the future.

No matter what future alignment, new migrants will arrive. Desperately needed to work the land, they will be let in in droves. The question arises how the country and communities will handle this.

The watchful eyes and suspicion I had suffered while wandering the countryside quickly dissipated once I spoke to them. But what happens when this communication cannot happen? What happens when the villages continue to drain out and the only ones left, are eyeing each other's houses and compound walls with suspicions and maybe even jealousy and hate? More questions, more things to kick down the road.

Kosovo is trapped in this strange Hegelian dialectic spiral of development, will the same vernacular forms that arose over time be reinterpreted and reused? Maybe not, but as the diaspora houses become ever more tower-like, and the few remnants of the extended family are economically forced to live together, rather than build multiple iterations of the same house, it seems the original Kulla form, the isolated lonely mountain guard tower that protects the land, is returning. Just reinterpreted and re-visioned.

But protect the land from what? From ourselves maybe? The continued misappropriation and spastic uncontrolled growth, which not only ruins the arable land, but also the public space and neighbors' space has been violated by anomalous constructions: overhanging structures, concrete slabs in the middle of green fields sit there and rot, roads leading to nowhere and the ever-present destruction of forestry resources needed for construction.

Mismanagement of resources that should be shared and profited upon in order to help the public, can be seen as just another way to take public space away from the few people who remain.

Public schools and squares are empty, and resources are spent to try to support those few left in the abandoned villages. A single child is bused kilometers away to attend school, or the last cafe in the town closes leaving the few remaining elderly nowhere to congregate, and the list goes on.

the end of the beginning?-conclusion

This list is not limited to just Kosovo. These problems are widespread throughout rural Balkans and by no means do I want to misrepresent that this is a special or isolated case. These are region-wide problems, global problems, and they are problems that will be solved together, it is just a question of exactly how and when.

Visiting my hometown year after year made me realize a question had been burning in my head like an incandescent light bulb. Who are we building for?

And that was the question I never found an answer for.

And by "we" I mean a non-exclusive: I, they, them all, people that are building and those who will build. With so many interested parties and changing situations it was not possible to point out a single user, a single group, or a single project.

Even when I did narrow it down some, to rural Kosovo, with the majority of Kosovo's population included in this group, it did not narrow much. And despite the worldwide trend of population loss, Kosovo is still estimated to stay about the same. The world is trending to nearly hit 70% of people living in urban areas. Kosovo is slated to stay at a maximum of 50% by 2100. (See Illustrations: Population & Rural Percentage)¹⁴⁷

As a side note, it is a little disconcerting to see that the world population is set to go down by about two billion in the next seventy years. Rather than the Malthusian overpopulation myth, we are going to run headlong into a problem of a different sort.

Lack of qualified skilled workers, and even possibly a lack of young adults to maintain the current level of civilization. Akin to Calhoun's Universe 25 experiments, is it possible that the human world has already begun its spiral into extinction? Probably not, but possibly some parallels can be drawn.

While writing I sourced a lot of stories and tales from the "boomer" generation. Knowing that this generation will be gone, and their experiences and hardships lost, also led me to really drive this book as a form of documentation of their time, their experiences as well as analyzing, filtering and processing the patterns that led to the current situation and problems.

the end of the beginning?-conclusion

Just as important as their experience is my own generational experience. My experiences growing up were once in a lifetime when I compared them to my sibling's children. The rocky fields we played in, and the bustling and overcrowded school environment are in stark contrast to the current generation of mini electrified handheld devices and vast empty classrooms.

I tried to connect to my nephew about games I used to play as a child. Only to come to the harsh reality that there are nowhere near enough children to play a simple game of dodgeball (which I hated, so good riddance).

The fleeting nature of each generation's experience drove me to investigate further. How did the architectural space around them affect their life and vice versa?

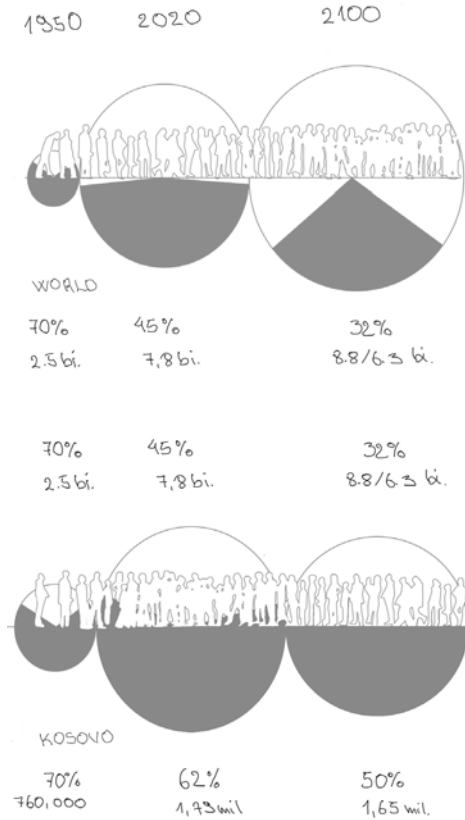
Small architectural details from previous generations often get lost when capturing the past driving me to ask questions and document answers before they are lost. I threaded childhood stories and memories from interviews as well as my own throughout this work to illustrate this fact; creating the fabric of this work, just as small but consequential architectural details weave in and out of daily life. Architecture is connected to people and their stories whether it exists in the past, present or future. One is not detached from the other.

The rural ways of living are not popular or "fashionable" and fall by the wayside in the public and/or researchers' eye. Rural architecture can seem simplistic and not particularly "spectacular" when compared to brutalist monuments in disrepair at the center of a bustling city center. But this is a superficial and limited view, the complex intricate nature of rural living and the subtle equilibrium is more than meets the eye, and warrants the attention and intention of further documentation and research.

And finally, my motivation is to make something that would be useful to others as a starting point for future research. When I started my journey, I had no references, no resources to guide me on my first steps dealing with rural architecture and everyday life in the countryside. This work is to be a resource, a springboard for others' work, as well as my own future research.

the end of the beginning?-conclusion

Population, rural percentage



the end of the beginning?—conclusion

Keep on Keeping on . . .

Since I moved to Graz, I noticed that with time I no longer had an interest in visiting my hometown. I was constantly stuck in the house with nothing to do, nor any place to go.

One day, I decided to go pick cherries just as I had as a child, my brother told me that the path to the trees no longer exists. Nature had taken over since children were no longer skipping along the trail to the orchards. The paths were abandoned long ago and so I abandoned my wishes to get out of the house that day.

Abandonment and emptiness can be seen at all levels, unworked parcels of land, dilapidated houses, and even rooms that seem enshrined for family members who rarely visit anymore, if ever. (See Illustration: Levels of Emptiness)

But what can we do about this? What can architecture do about this? I firmly believe that architecture is more than just designing and constructing buildings. It's about integrating and solving problems that affect such structures as well. And this abandonment that is occurring is a major problem.

As we tackle this problem, our first hurdle, maybe our greatest hurdle is getting things moving forward in the first place. This goes back to my motivations for this work. There is a myriad of problems, which are complex and run deep. But just as complex as these problems are, the solutions are just as problematic. They come from many different sources and rely on a variety of motivations and machinations.

Governmental, technical, and social. At the intersection of these driving powers, we will find our solutions, whether it be through new laws, new technology, or new architecture. (See Illustration: Circles of Influence) And although it sounds like an empty plaction or a motivational speech once we start building, once we start making changes, we need to be willing to do our part, remain focused and always remember: Who are we building for.

Keeping that idea in mind, it becomes our guiding path and a way to keep on track. This will help set goals, expectations and make appropriate decisions.

the end of the beginning?-conclusion

Kosovo is trying to get on the right path. Legal changes are clearly being made in the right direction, but needs a combination of enforcement, buy-in from the populace, and continuing stewardship from administrative and political leadership. But legal changes and elected officials respond to the demands of their constituents making this path a to be solved by grassroots organizations with broad support and appeal. However, the complexity of just starting grassroots movements due to all the other social media distractions has become problematic. How does a mundane, somewhat anticlimactic concern of abandonment really compete with XYZ (insert the newest trend) that is blowing up on traditional media and social media.

Solving this Gordian knot will take perseverance and planning (See Illustration: Gantt Chart) with multiple lines of attack and parallel programs, initiatives, and funding all just to... not build anything? Because that is what it is coming down to, a hiatus of construction. Doing the best with the materials we have for just a little while, ok, several years, but on a geological scale... ok, ok, I'll stop trying to sugarcoat it. It will take time. These societal, climatic, and political changes that Kosovo, the region, and the whole world is going through will take time.

This long process to meet our goals, whatever the goals may be, will be determined and decided at a later time by a later generation once a clearer, fuller picture of the situation and how we get to that point is available. This is almost akin to setting off on a long journey knowing the starting and end point, but realizing the rest of the map will be needed to be filled in along the way.

For instance, lets see what our future demographics will look like once we get there. Who stays, who leaves, who returns, and how many. We have hints and predictions, but until we get a clearer picture, we need to move forward carefully, negotiate the unexpected turns and hold back a little until we have a better view of what's ahead or risk skidding off the road and getting into more trouble.

And that is where this work comes in, this is the beginning of the documentation and hypotheses that future leaders, decision-makers, researchers, and architects will use as a basis and inspiration for their work.

Whether it be urban planning, new regulations on plots of land and neighbor rights, or the layout of new homes and material selection.

the end of the beginning?-conclusion

For example, the Illustration: "Consolidations?" is something that just took me a few minutes to sketch, a possible merging of plots to improve land usage, but in reality, would take decades to solve, with much work and negotiations.

Further examples of possibilities that arose for a viable project but was decided against pursuing have been illustrated in "Fragments of Opportunities: Possible Interventions." Hiking trails, and public spaces; densification and reforestation are but just a glimpse of opportunities that are ahead of us. But all hang on the single thread of: Who are we building for?

Multiple levels of community engagement, compensations of individual rights, research, and historical documentation will be needed to make a few simple line changes on a piece of paper (or pdf), not to mention the herculean efforts it will take to start looking at ecological, geological, or environmental concerns.

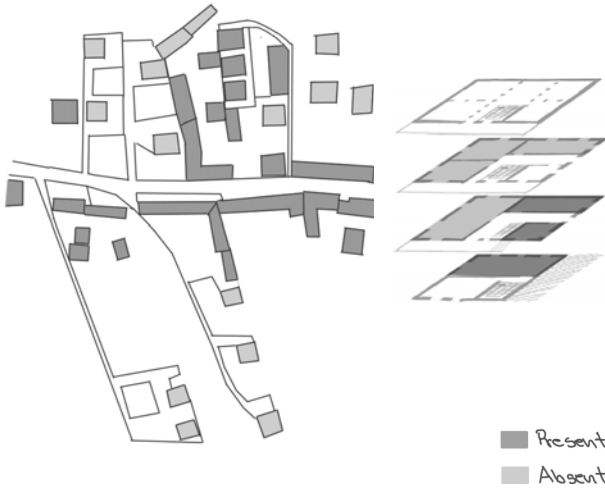
Let's not even speak of the development, education and opportunities that the country and the countryside needs to provide in order to entice and maintain a qualified professional class preventing migration to other lands. Something this complex needs lots of work, on lots of levels, but even before the first step is made, we need to start with raising questions.

In order to try to understand the complexity and timeline of the situation I attempted to create a Gantt chart. And I say attempted because the size and complexity would be such a multidisciplinary project drawing on specialists from various different fields and I just simply do not have the required expertise nor connections (and funding) to bring in people with the experience to complete this critical planning document. This attempt was what really solidified the project for me. Posing questions and finding that there are more question marks than periods in the story of Kosovo at this time woke me up to the issue and that maybe that is a good thing. It means that the status quo will no longer work for the future and that Kosovo's future will be decided by the questions we ask now.

Deep contemplation and meditation on the motives and end goals of the process will be needed in the present and future. But like the famous Gedankenexperiment that delivered Relativity to the physics world, if done with the correct input and effort, the thought experiments with the architectural space of Kosovo will be impactful and long-lasting.

the end of the beginning?-conclusion

Levels of emptiness



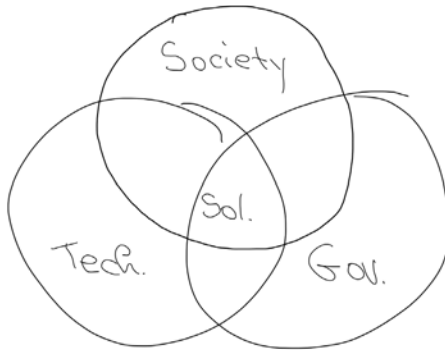
the end of the beginning?-conclusion

Consolidation?



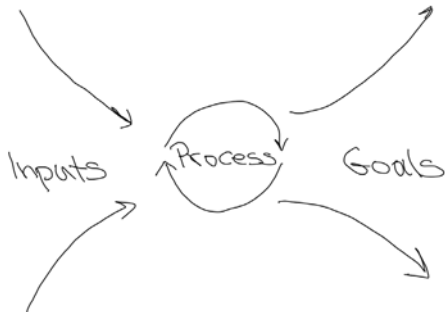
the end of the beginning?—conclusion

Circles of influence



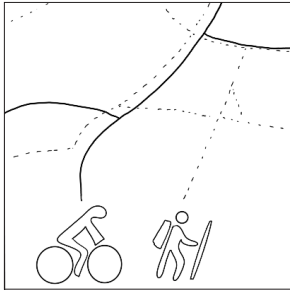
the end of the beginning?—conclusion

Step three profit

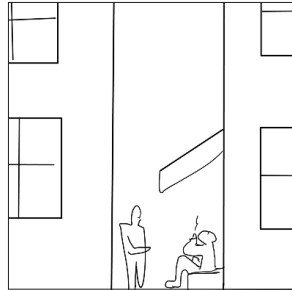


the end of the beginning?-conclusion

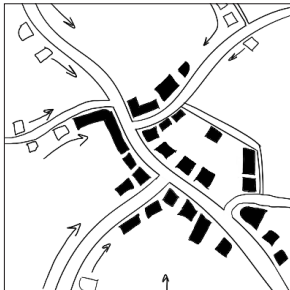
Fragments of opportunities: possible interventions



hike & bike trails



in between



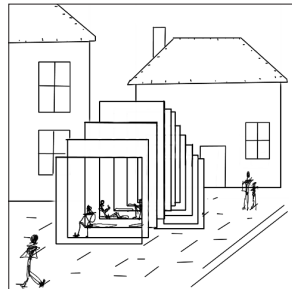
resettle the center



reforestation

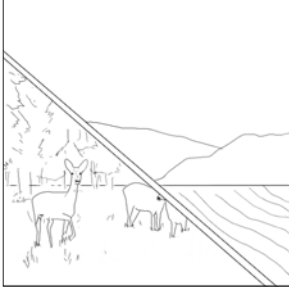


bee huts

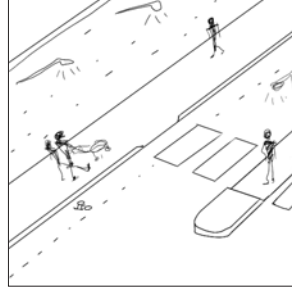


public space

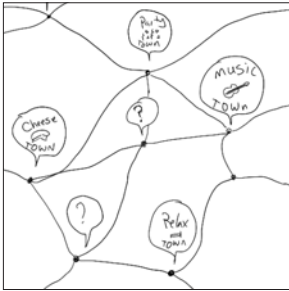
the end of the beginning?-conclusion



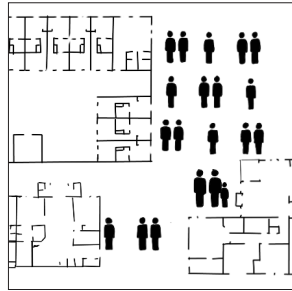
rewilding



walkable communities



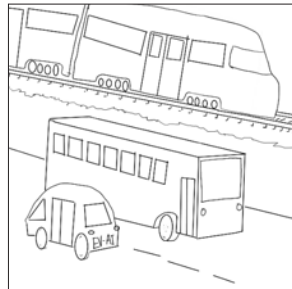
village identity



new living typologies



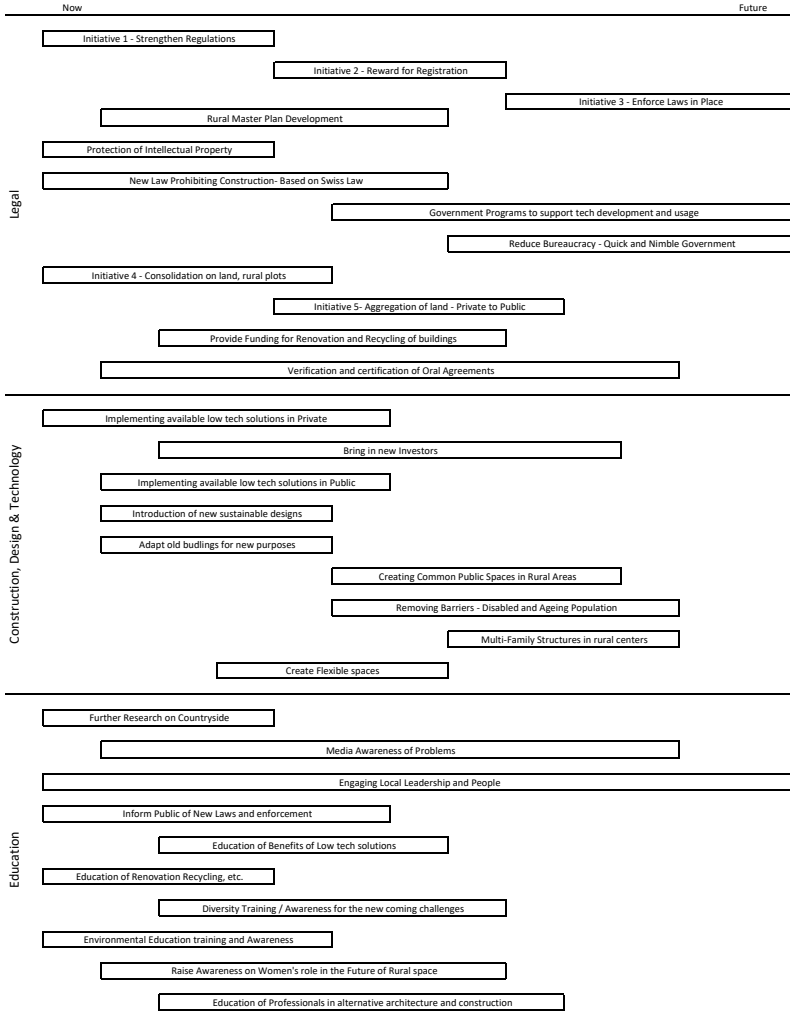
renovations



integration & innovation

the end of the beginning?—conclusion

Gantt chart



the end of the beginning? - conclusion

If I were King (Queen) for a day?

I dove into this journey not knowing what exactly my goals are or what type of project I even wanted to end up with. It turned into a journey of exploration and research for me, culminating in invaluable insights and lessons, gathered along the way.

The pursuit of knowledge is an ever-evolving process, marked by trials, errors, and the occasional revelation. Throughout my endeavors, I encountered unexpected challenges, celebrated triumphs, and discovered nuances that expanded my understanding. It serves as a testament to the growth and maturation of my ideas, showcasing the transformative power of diligent investigation and intellectual curiosity.

Reflecting upon the lessons learned, a few bits of wisdom drawn from the heart of my journey follow, and hopefully these discoveries, in no particular order, will guide and inspire future generations of scholars and thinkers.

First, learn from the past. Too many times I saw and see the same thing over and over again. The same mistakes seemed almost baked into the land, into the people. The last three generations seem to be making the exact same mistake: Building for the next generation. Stop, just stop. Let the children decide where to live and what to build. This generational building is short sighted values masquerading as long-term investment and insight.

During my research I ran across foreign countries and regions that set-in law moratoriums and conditions for expansion and construction in order to fight sprawl. The Swiss law that set a twenty-year hiatus and limits construction to residents that actually live in the town and village would be a good starting point for my first decree as sovereign.¹⁴⁸

Speaking of values, learn to value what you have. Especially before you start building something new or abandoning it. So many times, I saw houses, perfectly sufficient houses, just completely abandoned and right next to it the newest "all Shiny" house pop up. Even though the new house does not meet the needs of the family in it, as seen by the constant scurrying in between the two, yet there it stands, and the old house crumbles. Value the structures, the spaces, and the voids in between, and work with them first. There were so many opportunities to renovate, to restore, or just

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restore, or just a simple add-on that were missed due to being blinded by the "shiny lights."

There is a trend of "Staring from Zero", instead of valuing the existing structure. This ties in to learning from the past as well. This "start from scratch" mentality is hampering and hindering. Almost as if, as soon as something goes wrong, you tear the whole country down and start again.

Ignoring the fact that this tear down and restarting is a problem in itself. This starting and restarting is a schizophrenic journey of impatience and frustration forced upon the world and needs to stop.

Next is to value the right things. This ties into being blinded by "the chic" and getting stuck into the generation construction rut mentioned before. I'm not putting forth that all that is new is bad, and especially not going to say thinking of your children's well-being is bad. But rather, think deeper about motivations and outcomes, and try to imagine the whole extent of the "big picture." It seemed that so many times people were just focused on "my land" or "my house". As if that was the only place of influence the people had.

This brings up a counter intuitive point as well. There is a saying that if you: "make sure your house is in order the rest of the world will be in order." I understand this and accept it to a certain point, but in execution it fails miserably. Too often I see perfectly manicured gardens inside of walled compounds, with the trash and clippings being dumped over the fence. Ignoring the countryside and villages around them, as if those spaces didn't even exist.

So how do we get these things done?

Engagement, engagement, engagement. Just start asking questions. And I hope that through my travels in and around Kosovo I have already started this process with everyone I spoke with. Even without me ever dictating to them what they should do, perhaps, they themselves started to ask the very same questions to their neighbors and their neighbors did the same in turn... Maybe they will come up with even better answers, will dive deeper and go wider than I. Just asking my family, my neighbor, I have already noticed a difference in their thoughts and behaviors just by raising questions, I raised their awareness.

the end of the beginning?-conclusion

Finally, a conundrum and an eternal truth. Things have to start somewhere, and no one will ever be around to see "The End." There is just a continuity and as the most successful parents give their children the skills and capacity to succeed without their constant guidance, we need to look at preparing "Now" to be suitable and sustainable for the future. We need to set the framework of the next generation correctly, while at the same time let them take the lead and make the hard decisions that will affect their life and the next.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying I know the best. What I am trying to do is just express, notate and elaborate on things that I perceive and things that I see are critical. And by no means, I myself, or someone else alone, can execute an intervention to solve all the complex problems. As the saying goes: it takes a village to raise a child. And this child will need the whole world's help. No one person can take a magic wand and make things happen, and even I, as Queen, would have to work with a team of subordinates, and treatise and parlee with other foreign powers and dignitaries to run a nation.

Interaction and cooperation with others needs to be seen as a positive aspect of the process rather than a hindrance. Yes, it will take more time and coordination, in comparison to ruling from dictate, but with more shoulders to carry weight more work can be done. Just as in the kanun the one who sets the stones carries the weight in this life and in the next. We all need to carry the weight of changing the world in this life and understand that the next generations will carry it as well.

One final outing?

This work became just like my homeland “a little bit of everything everywhere.” Unique and raw, for better or worse, the country takes what it is given and does the best it can with what it has, and I doubt this will ever change.

It has been a while since I walked through the village that I grew up in. My niece decided to come along and join me for a walk. As we walked, I regaled her with my childhood adventures and the stories of how things changed. Stories of catching tadpoles (thinking they were fish) in the creek brought smiles to her cheeks while horror stories of serious injuries her uncle sustained while running in a cornfield kept her morbidly enthralled.

Roads are paved now, not muddy, or rocky anymore but they do feel hot during summer and are just as dusty. It seemed like every curve brought a new field or old structure that I had a history with. This village where I grew up running up and down hills and doing so full of joy has changed drastically now. The most surprising was the emptiness.

Despite many newly built houses, there were no elderly shambling around, greeting everyone they met, no kids’ voices screaming at the top of their lungs, nor the sound of running feet, slapping at the earth with abandon. No chickens are to be seen nor cows with their bells quietly clanking in the distance. It seemed like everyone, and everything was just suddenly asleep.

Our talks gradually tapered off as we were enveloped in silence. The sound of ripping air as small kombis tore-by on their way to another construction site with their branding splashed on the hood and doors begging you to take notice, but at the same time driving way too fast in the emptiness for anyone to catch a glimpse. The emblazoned kombis replacing tractors and farm trucks as construction dominates the landscape.

By the end of the main road, a little girl greeted me politely. I was so happy to finally see someone on the street.

“Where are you from?”

“From here?”

“Why did I never see you before?”

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ONWARD RESEARCH

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When was the last time a wedding or family ceremony took place in village? How many inhabitants does the town have? Ratio woman vs man? What is the age breakdown of the town? What are the reasons for the age break down that way? Is the age breakdown changing? How many are employed woman vs man? Has this changed over the years? Is it changing? Source of income? Has this source changed? How many people live abroad? Has this changed? When? How many live in the city? Where do they live in the city? On the outside? In the center? Why do they live there? How many returned from living abroad? Why did they return? How many returned from living in the city? Does anyone commute daily? How do they commute? Bus. Car? Do people go between villages, or the city? Where do they commute to? Do they like commuting? Why don't they move? Do people combine dual living week in the city, weekend in the village? Who buys land property that gets sold? Did anyone from the city or another village move in into town? How many people still work on the land? How many buildings are illegally built? Why not build with a permission? Do they know they need to register? Are you planning to apply for the legalization process? What kind of public transport do you have? How many times per day does it run? Where is the bus station and the timetable? What's your main transport usage? What is the largest household you know of today? How do you spend your free time? Where do you

onward research?

gather with friends/family? How many new buildings have been built last 5 years? Are there renovations? Can anyone move in in the village? Why do you not grow your own vegetables/fruits? Is the knowledge of farming passed on to new generation? How many children are there in town? How many children go to school? Where do they go to school? Is there stigma associated with certain places in town? Doing certain things in town? Is there a village "fill in the blank"? Drunk, idiot, wiseman, ... Is the town divided by social status? How is the town divided? Changes people have observed in the village (i.e. roads, schools, health, water, afforestation, etc.) Impacts of change on aspects of rural life (i.e. did it open up opportunities, Which aspects need more improvement? Is there enough water? Electricity? Trash disposal? If not do you have to come up with your own solution? What is that solution? How do you take care of things the community lacks? Does the community lack certain services? Is pollution a concern? Is contamination of water a concern? What types of crops grow? Barn size and set up? Do you get any government or investor aid for agricultures? Have you received any advice on new farming techniques? Where did you learn to farm? Are changing crop types possible? Why would you change crops if you did. Because of profit? Change in demand? Other? What is forestry like? Is a forest harvested and re grown? Where is the source of wood for construction? Do you vote? Are you politically active? Does your job/position affect your political view? If you changed your job would you change the political support? If instead of farming you moved to city to work as a banker for example? What are your views on organic farming?

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What are your views on pesticide usage? On GMO? Where are the chickens? And the cows? Is reuse of furniture or materials of the old house possible? Where are the trees? Why is the yard paved fully? Why do identical houses built when different family size? Is there sisterhood houses row too? How would it look like if woman were in charge? Can a woman have a drink at the store? Who can buy the land? Can a woman join the village meetings? Population age? How would it look like if woman were In charge? Can a woman have a drink at the store? Can a woman move in with her husband and family? Who can buy the land? Population age? What will you do with the abandoned empty house and barn? Do the students after university return? Is any house on sale/land? How do you deal with the annoyance of selling? Are there any foreigners? How do you handle waste disposal in your household? Are you opposed to owning a cow? How do you deal with extreme weather conditions in this region? How does your community maintain a sense of community in the digital age? Are there any challenges related to internet connectivity? How does your community celebrate traditional holidays and festivals? Are there any local artists or craftsmen known for their work? How has the relationship with neighboring communities evolved? Are there any ongoing collaborative projects or partnerships? What is the general attitude toward outsiders visiting your area? Are there any local initiatives for documenting oral history? What are the main challenges and opportunities facing your community in the coming years? How do residents envision the future of their region in the next decade?...

onward research?



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Illustrations

all Illustrations and graphics contained in this work are made by myself (Xhyllferije Kryeziu).

the basis for the maps:

Illustration: Year 2004/2018 sprawl - Opterushë

Illustration: Year 2004/2018 hollowing out - Opterushë

Illustration: 2004 - Zaqishtë, Opterushë, Samadrexhë, Studençan, Retijë

Illustration: 2018 - Zaqishtë, Opterushë, Samadrexhë, Studençan, Retijë

Illustration: Legal/illegal Zaqishtë 2023, Legal/illegal Retijë 2023

Illustration: Legal/illegal Studençan 600 buildings 2023

Illustration: Zaqishtë 2023, Retijë 2023

<http://geoportal.rks-gov.net/search?municipalityId=20>

Illustrations: Standing in the middle, Kosovo: high to low, Where is everybody?, Here ... and now there.

Illustrations: Typology: kulla, defense, banesa, compounds, Typology: gastarbeiter, fingers, Typology: diaspora, x marks the spot

<https://www.google.com/maps>

the basis for the charts/typologies:

Illustration: Population pyramid comparison

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Kosovo

Illustration: Everybody is here...almost

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emigration_from_Kosovo

Illustration: Population, rural percentage

<https://unhabitat.org/kosovo>

all the other Illustrations are created through Interviews and observations



Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my family and friends who supported me throughout my academic endeavors and bore the brunt of this project and the stresses it caused.

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A special thanks to Reni. You have become a friend and a great help over the last few years, and I always look forward to coming to the institute knowing that you will be there.

And finally, I would like to thank all the participants that took part in this work. Your stories made me smile but at times also brought sadness. Thank you for your honesty and candor, without it this book would not have been possible.

Faleminderit!



what

where

how

WHO

are we building for?

why

when









Xhylferije Kryeziu, BSc

Who are we building for?

short journal and journey through time and space in Kosovo
– photography journal –

MASTER'S THESIS

to achieve the university degree of
Diplom-Ingenieur
Master's degree programme: Architecture

submitted to
Graz University of Technology

Supervisor
Univ.-Prof. Dipl.-Ing. Architekt, Andreas Lichtblau

Institute of Housing

Graz, February 2024



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I declare that I have authored this thesis independently, that I have not used other than the declared sources/resources, and that I have explicitly indicated all material which has been quoted either literally or by content from the sources used. The text document uploaded to TUGRAZonline is identical to the present master's thesis dissertation.

Date

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The things I captured

The many chapters that follow show things that one can see as a part of villages everywhere. Xërxë, Bishtazhin, Fortesë, Atmagjë, Dujakë, Korishë, Lubizhdë, Mushtisht, Medvec (Prizren), Landovicë, Tupec, Zojz, Reshtan, Zahaq, Gjonaj, Romajë, Glllogjan, Rezallë, Magurë, Kishnarekë, Radostë, Piranë...

While there are titles for each chapter, the pictures are to be seen, to be interpreted, to be perceived. The experience is presented raw and unfiltered avoiding the pitfall of much photojournalism of presenting a beautiful picture or conversely how horrible things are.

This photo documentation is presented so that these photographs can serve as a starting point and will inspire intervention: placing sidewalks, organizing bus stops, planting trees, trash cans, renovate an abandon store, or what about the areas where the monuments are? or where the graveyards are?...



Stepping off

The gust was warm and dry as I stepped out dim fuselage and onto the white boarding stairs baking in the afternoon sun of later summer. The plane was full of expats and was lively as ever. The few non-Kosovars were easy to spot. I wonder how I appeared in the human menagerie of mass transportation. It didn't really matter; I survived another plane flight and this was the beginning of my final trip for this project and time to buckle down.

Luckily, I was traveling light, just a simple blue backpack stuffed with a few essentials and my camera case slung over my shoulder. I wove around the throngs of human traffic and slowly floated through the snaking boarder control lines only to hesitate; once I go through those final doors, I will truly be home in Kosovo.

Taking a deep breath, I glided through the sliding door into the main hall of the "Adem Jashari" International airport. No matter how many times I make this trip I feel that it is the first time I am seeing the airport, so many changes, so fast. Now just to navigate the final few steps to find my ride for the week.

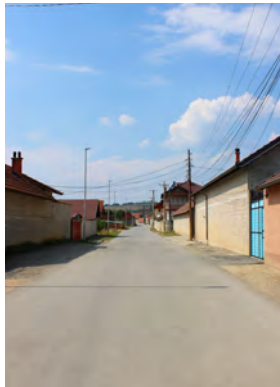
I enlisted the help of friends and family for this final round about. I had lots of places to go and things to see, but also this was to be a bit of an attempt to see what Kosovo looks like from an outsider's perspective. How would I as a foreigner see my home for the first time, what would I notice. Maybe there were things as a native I took for granted, especially in my little corner of the country.

I also had a list of things I wanted to capture; things that I know are there. The "Brotherhoods" that finger out from the main roads, the palatial diaspora homes, the towering minarets and church steeples that mark the center of the villages and the decaying sprawl that is consuming the countryside.

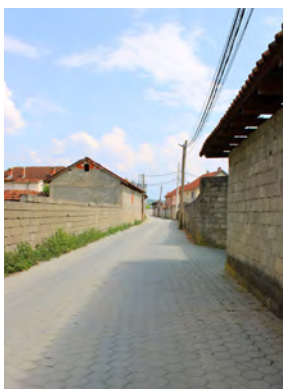




Where stories unfold ?



where stories unfold ?



where stories unfold ?



where stories unfold ?



where stories unfold ?











where stories unfold ?



where stories unfold ?



where stories unfold ?





where stories unfold ?



where stories unfold ?





Can't breath



can't breath



can't breath



"My brother built his house just a meter away from ours despite the deal that we made all those years ago."



can't breath





Roots and resilience



roots and resilience



roots and resilience



roots and resilience



roots and resilience



roots and resilience



roots and resilience



roots and resilience



roots and resilience



roots and resilience



roots and resilience





Celebrations

“Well, you’re going to have to reserve it two years ahead in summer, but it’s completely open the rest of the year.”



celebrations



celebrations





Standing on their own



standing on their own





Moving on

"Where do you want to go first?" My driver for the day, my brother, asked.

"Honestly, to get a bite to eat." I answered. I was craving some good grilled meats and vegetables and knew the best places to eat in Kosovo would be found outside of town along the highways that connect the small cites that speck the map.

We had been driving all day and were on the outskirts of Gjakova. Tediously going village to village to see if we could chance on something interesting to shoot. It had taken a few days to get our rhythm on how to execute this excursion, but we finally got there. Waking up early to skirt outside of my hometown before the first good morning light hit was difficult to do. To do it day after day while trying to capture the golden hour light in the evening while driving, hiking, and walking all day was starting to wear on us. Tomorrow we will take a break. But tonight, something good to eat before the drive home.

Luckily for me, Kosovo is small enough that I could operate out of my home for most of the photo-shoot. Being able to reach the other side of the country in the same amount of time it would take me to travel to Vienna from Graz was a plus for my endeavor. That also goes to show the remarkable transformation that Kosovo has gone through in the last twenty years.

The improvement in infrastructure alone, lightning-fast highways, and electrification even up in the remote mountain towns remind me the most of how far things have come. The dirt roads that I traveled along as a kid are all gone. The candle lit evenings and trudging under the weight of water carried as well.





Never to forget



never to forget



never to forget





The hive symphony

*"Make sure to save me a few jars of your best honey for
next summer when I get back"*

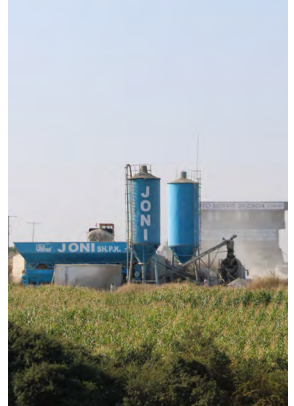








Alchemy towers



alchemy towers

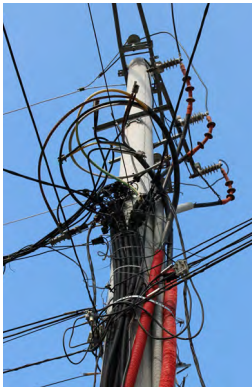
"I told you that construction is the second largest industry in Kosovo."



alchemy towers



Bird nests



bird nests





Brother "hoods"



brotherhoods



brotherhoods



brotherhoods



brotherhoods

“The grandparents stay in that first house there and take care of the other four. They’re empty so they all stay in the first when they visit.”



brotherhoods





brotherhoods



brotherhoods



brotherhoods



brotherhoods

To be continued...



brotherhoods



brotherhoods



brotherhoods



brotherhoods





Splashes of clean



splashes of clean



splashes of clean



A side-view photograph of a yellow truck's cargo area. The truck is parked on a gravel surface. The side of the yellow metal body has the word "Kundenarbeiten" written in bold black letters. The truck has a grey diamond-plate metal floor. Below the body, there are red fenders and a single black tire with a metal hubcap. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Kundenarbeiten

Wheels of progress

"In the morning and evening they buzz around the streets like bees."



wheels of progress



wheels of progress





Transit tales

“Everyone knows when the bus comes but it might be late sometimes.”



transit tales





A little further

"Duck Duck Duck, get down!"

"Ok OkaAAY!" I grumbled quizzically as we sprinted around the corner and hunkered down behind a parked car.

"Sorry, but there are some people around here I really don't have the energy to deal with right now. You know they will talk your ear off if you even say hello."

What he spoke was truth, I even had a few relatives I would like to avoid in the area and had to stay on guard. We stood up and ambled back around the corner.

"Hey, how many pictures are you up to now? You've been at this for a few days already."

"Just over three thousand." I answered as I thumbed a few buttons on the camera to check the frame count. "Not bad but I need more and have a little time left."

We took the shots we had stopped to get. Hanging preciously off the side of a highway surrounded by yesterday's trash and today's high-speed traffic. It wasn't a great place to stop. But I hoped I was going to get the shot I wanted. Now to skip back to the car and home before we get chased by stray dogs or overly curious locals.

"Well that was adventurous."





Open/Closed



open/closed



open/closed



open/closed



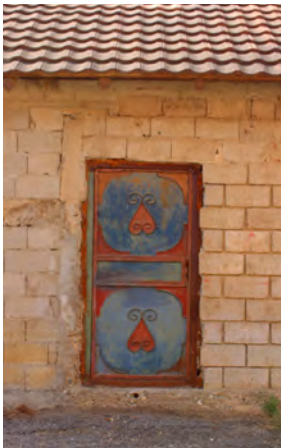
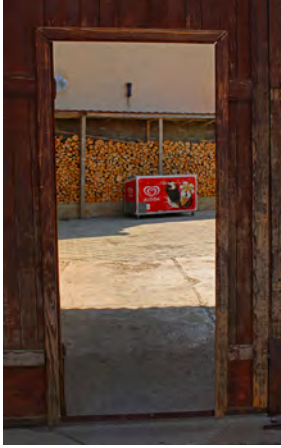
open/closed



open/closed



open/closed



open/closed







Derelict

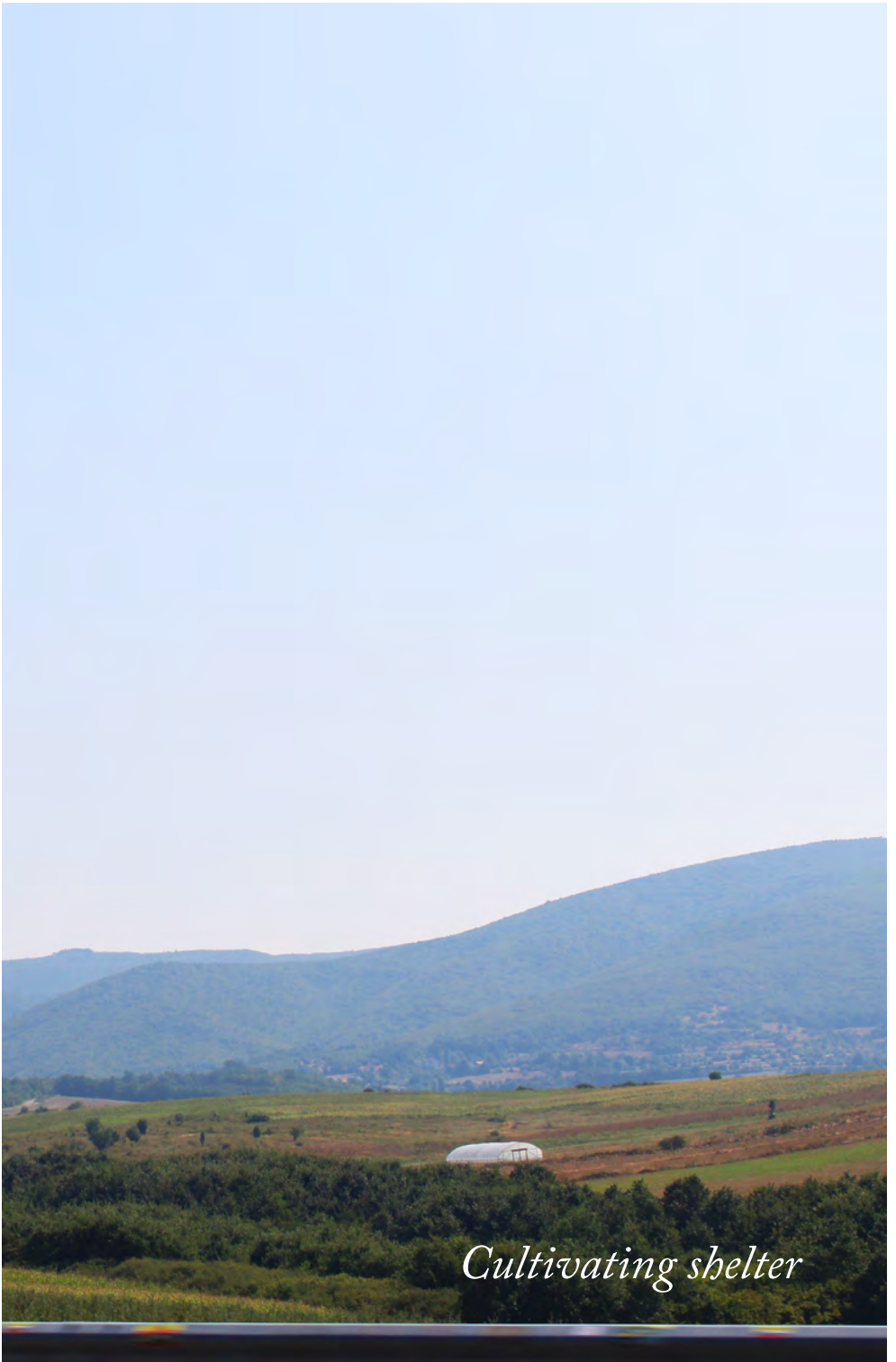


derelict



derelict





Cultivating shelter







Resurrected echoes

"We asked the mayor to build a Kulla. It's our identity".



resurrected echoes

Paths we take



paths we take



paths we take



paths we take



paths we take





Eternal gardens



eternal gardens



eternal gardens





Teathers

"In a few years we are going to be forced to combine the three neighbouring schools. Most just have about 20-40 students."



leathers



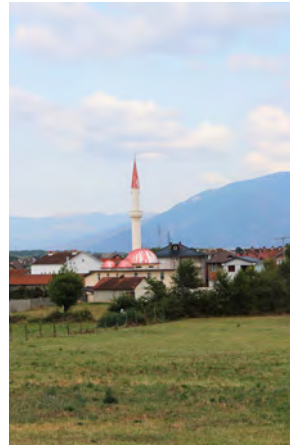
leathers





The center

"Oh, nothing really happens there except a few go to pray."



the center



the center





Smoke

"No worries, they are just burning trash."



smoke



smoke





From afar





from afar



*"I used to sled down that hill when it snowed in winter.
And would roll down the grass fields in summer."*





from afar







from afar









from afar







from afar



from afar









from afar











Almost there

"Look at that sun set."

"Yeah, its nice today after the rain." I responded. Enjoying the fresh air blowing in through the window as we cruised the small country lanes that connected village after village had turned into an unusual adventure. Small things got in our way that we had overcome, wild dogs, lack of pull off place for the car, stinging bugs and now evasion of relatives to add to the list.

I continued from village to village looking for the shot. Even though I did not know what the shot was. A glimpse into the past maybe? Looking for the children playing in the graveyard as I did, or the wedding pouring out onto the street beckoning everyone to partake in the festivities.

Maybe the next village I would find a vestige of the past, my past, to prove that it existed and was not something that I just dreamt of. Things change, they evolve, and I was not looking to find my exact past but maybe an evolution of what my life was like. But I did not realize how empty the land had become. How few men, women and children were about. And I realized how many more were going to leave. So, I took a picture of almost everything I saw now, as who knows if this would just be a memory a few years from now.

A few more days, a few more shots. I already covered so much but felt I was still missing so much. How do you encompass the whole rural impression in just a few pages of pictures? How to organize and display the work I accomplished up to this point? And the trip I was on right now? These were questions that were dogging me constantly.

"Hey, let's stop to get some fruit."

"Not a problem but I haven't seen an open store or a street vender in a while."





Farm life?



farm life



farm life

“Now in Retijë in 140 households only ten have few cows.”



farm life



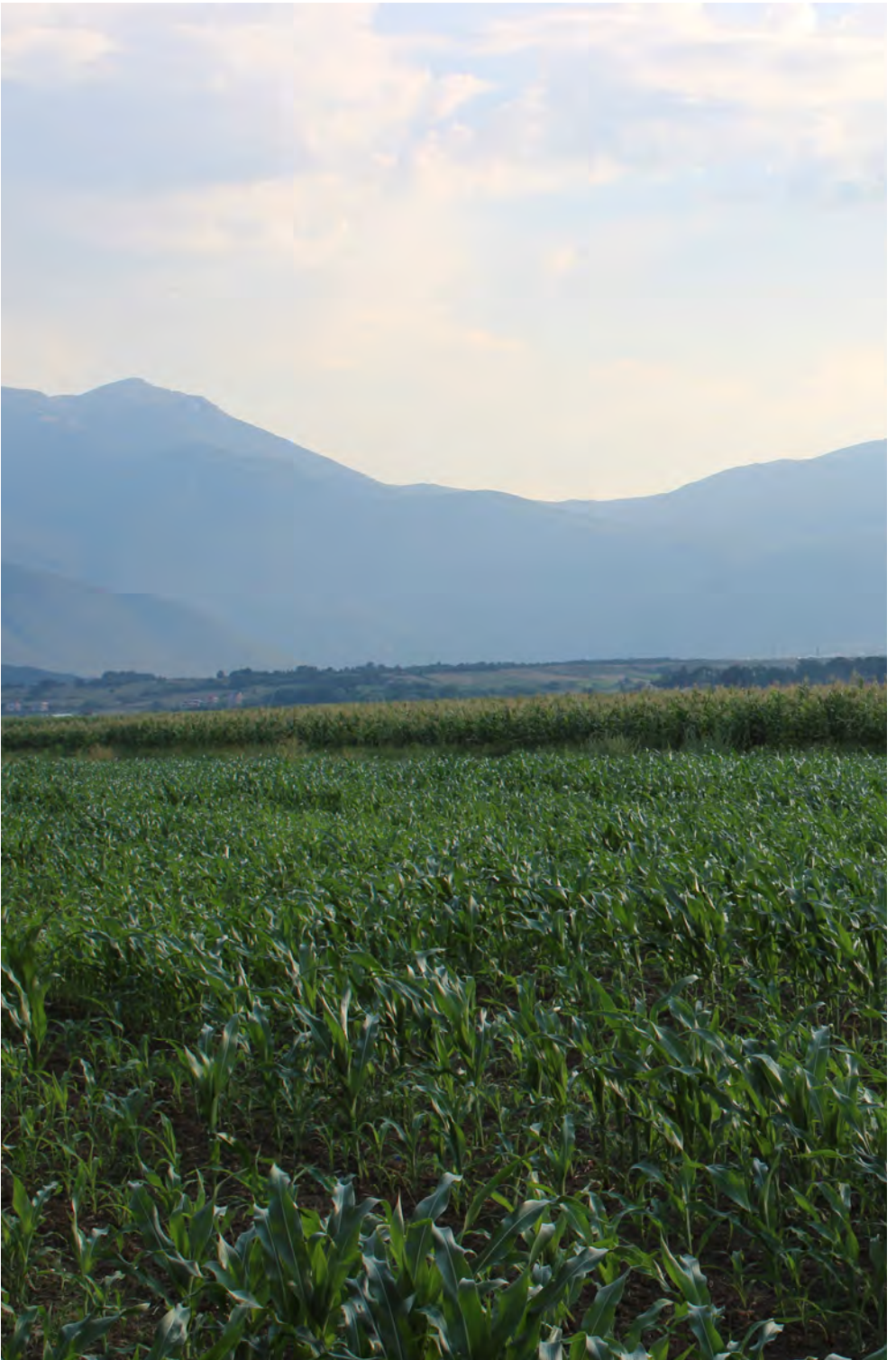
farm life

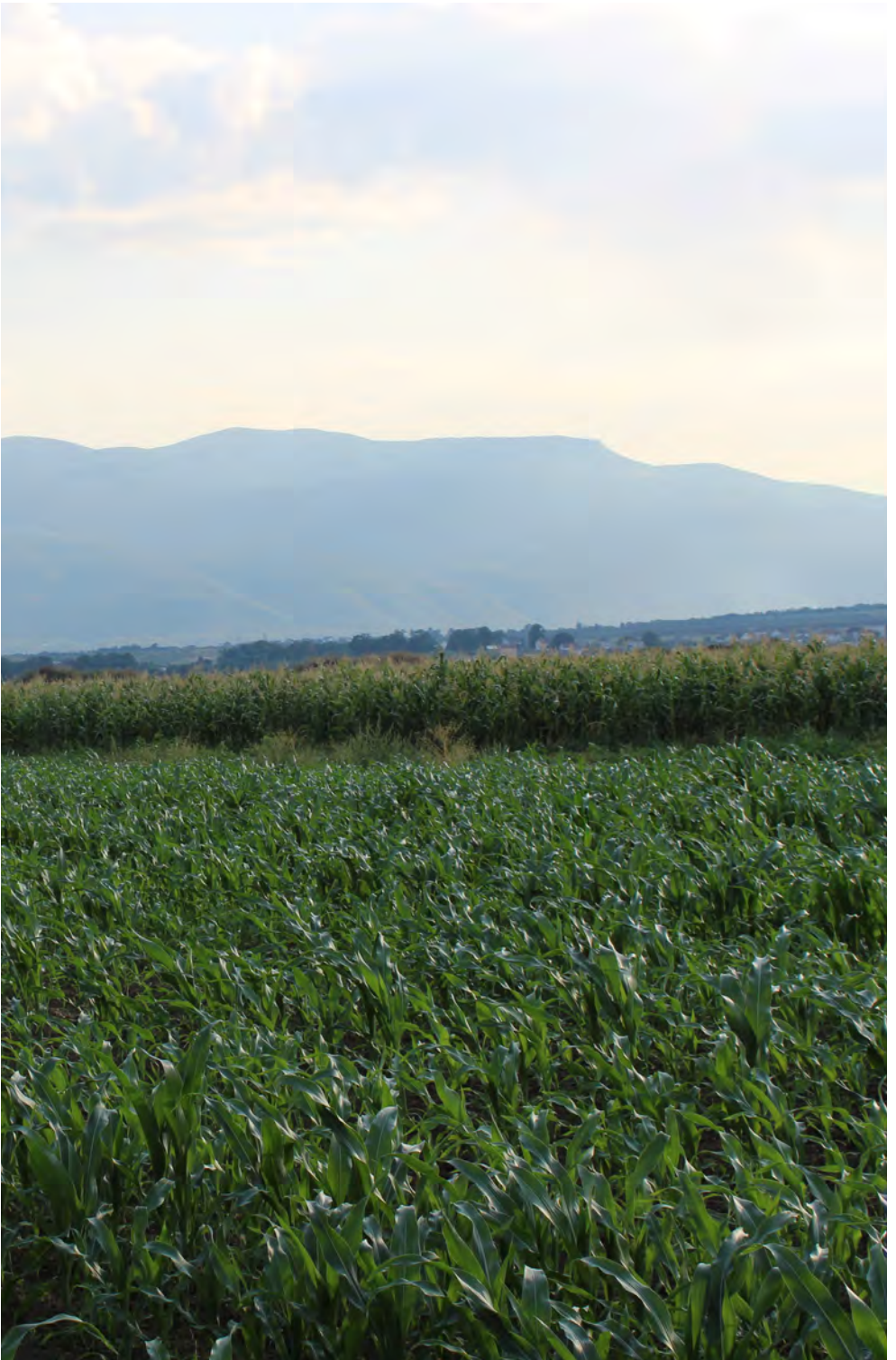


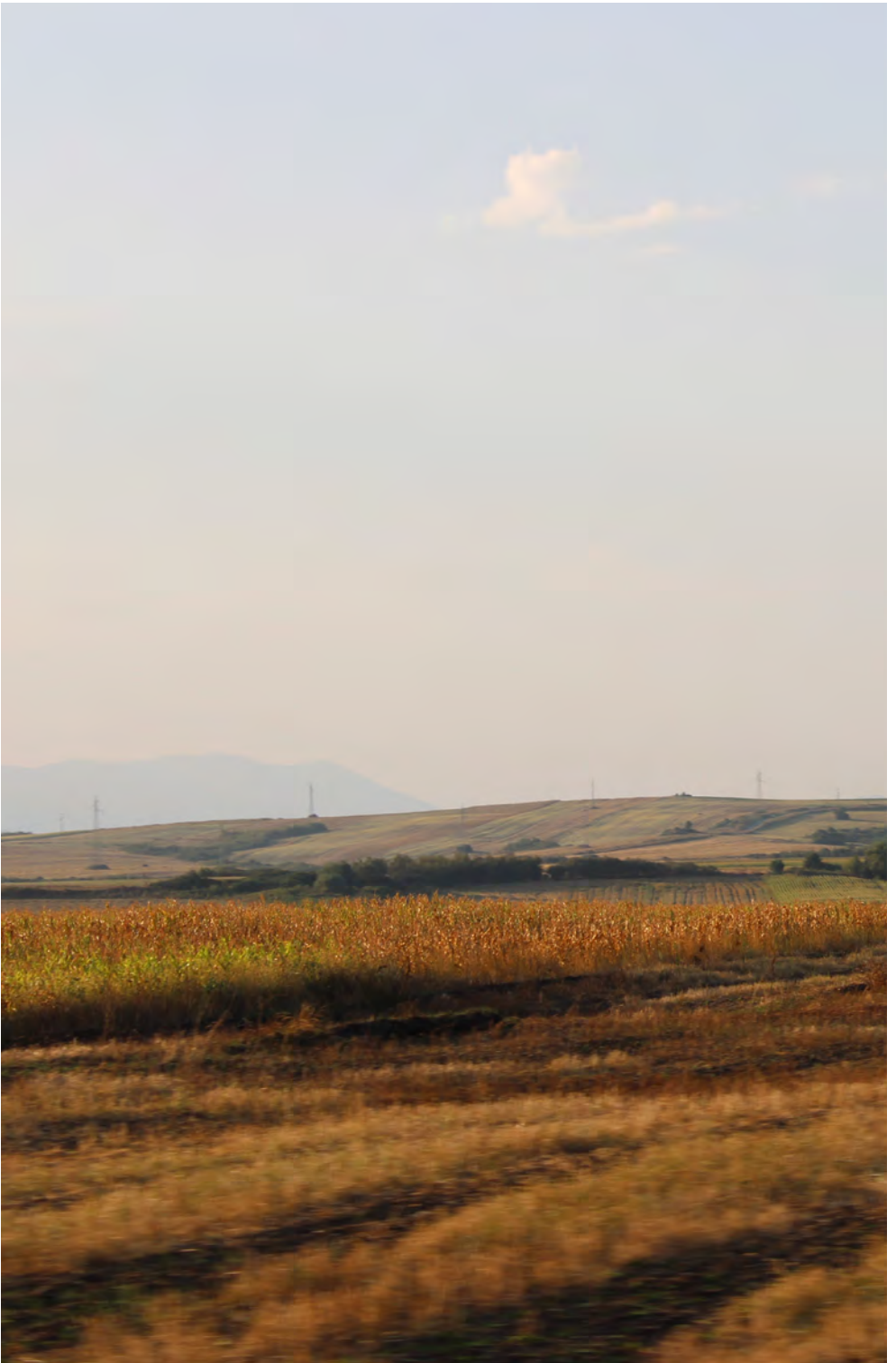


















On the move



on the move



on the move



on the move



on the move



on the move



on the move







Old-new-newer

"We built a new one because the old one wasn't fulfilling our needs. It's right next to it, now the old one is for storage."



old-new-newer



old-new-newer



old-new-newer



old-new-newer



old-new-newer





When finished abandoned



when finished abandoned



when finished abandoned



when finished abandoned



when finished abandoned

“When they finished it, they abandoned.”



when finished abandoned







It's closed

"Well we buy all our food in the supermarket."



it's closed

I sometimes go here to just pick up some bread."



it's closed



Lessons learned

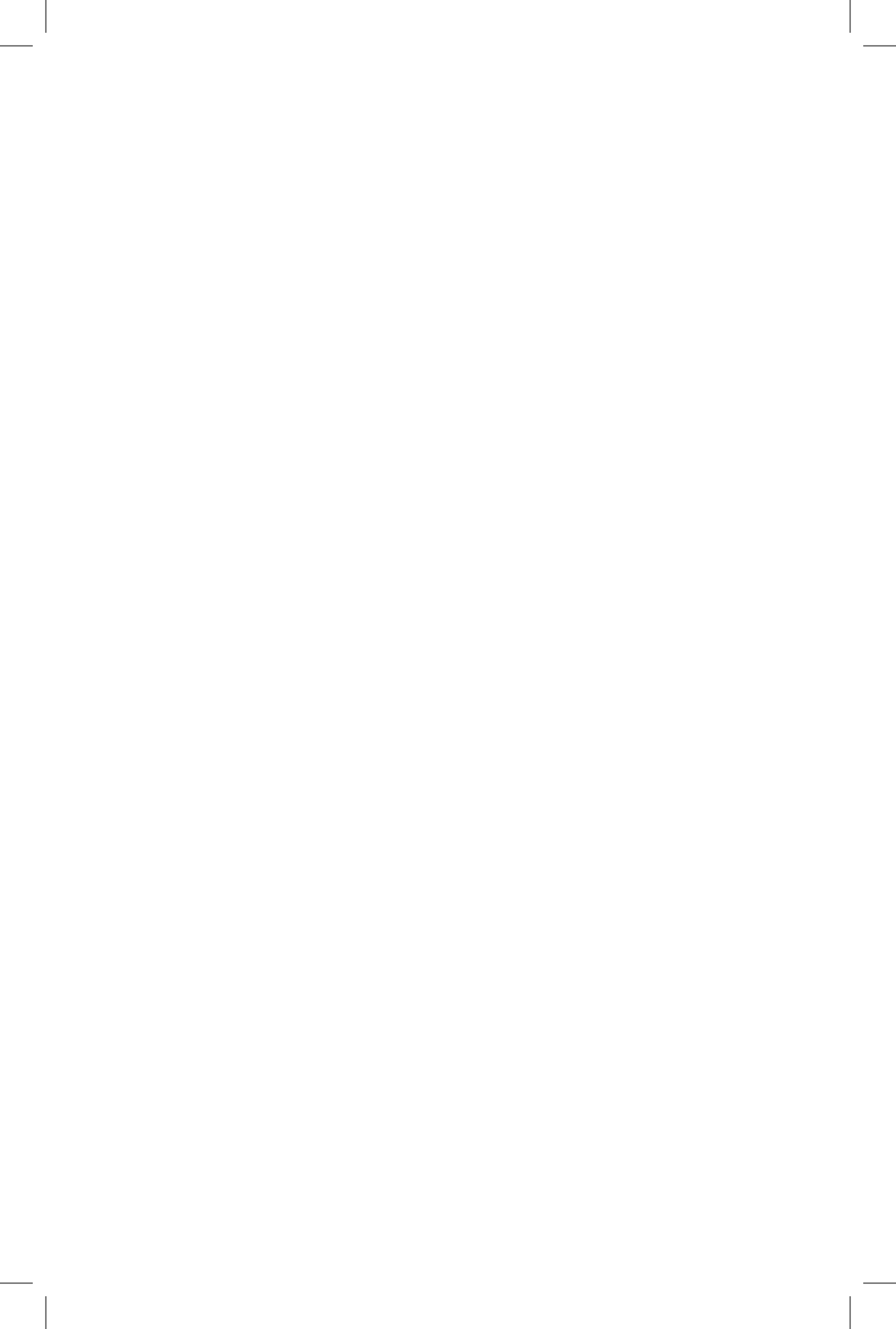
This book was an adventure. I believe I covered more square kilometers of Kosovo while working on this project than I had my whole life beforehand. From one end to the other, I scoured the countryside in search of my prey: homes, towers, far-off views and close details. All can be seen in this book.

I learned a lot on this trip. How to feign that I don't speak Albanian so I can skip out of a conversation before it even begins when time was tight and I had lots of ground to cover. Or how suspicious and wary Kosovars are. Without a doubt the strangest thing was when I stopped to take pictures of construction equipment or concrete plants. Within seconds someone would pull up with an angry face demanding what I was doing. Diffusing the situation with "Deutsch oder English?" They would respond with hand gestures and a confused face. "Architekt" I would mimic the same picture taking hand gestures. And surprisingly enough I would receive a grand smile and thumbs up with a boisterous "Architekt!"

Another thing I learned was my theory is correct. Kosovo is emptying out, and at a prodigious rate. Everytown where I had a chance to stop and talk. I would hear the same story. People are leaving, and yet there were construction sites all around. Humm curious... Another curiosity was how everyone thought that building a house was an investment. I'm not sure where they are getting their insider trading information from, but they need to fire them right away.

It's not something planned or that I have done on purpose, the reason why there are not many people in these photograph is unfortunately those are the very few people left. They are the ones that I saw and captured in the emptiness of the street. This is the reality of the villages.

And lastly as for this work, along with my first work, I wanted to make something that lasts the test of time. Or at least, be useful or interesting to the next generation or the one thereafter. I hope this work inspires someone to seek out some of the very same villages and spots I did. And document them. To tell the story of how the countryside has changed. But to have their story intertwined with the countryside just as I have mine.



All photographs are taken by me.







what

where

how

WHO

are we building for?

why

when





Xhylferije Kryeziu, BSc

Who are we building for?

short journal and journey through time and space in Kosovo
– a decade later –

MASTER'S THESIS

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