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Masters of Architecture – Lund University Department of Architecture and Built Environment

Project Bunker

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Rethinking the relation of Albanian bunkers with the landscape and the society by aiming to reinvigorate the meaning of the bunkers and Albanians' collective memory.

September, 2021
Lund University

Course: AAHM10
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Supervisors: Jesus Mateo & Andreea Marcu

Acknowledgments

To my supervisors Andreea Marcu and Jesus Mateo

You have been key figures not only during this thesis but all my time at Lund University. Your advice, questions and your personal connection to this thesis not only elevated my work but made me incredibly lucky and happy. I will miss our never-ending conversations and meetings. Thank you for motivating me and allowing me to pursue my dream about this project. I am incredibly fortunate to have worked with you.

Thank you

To my family: Pëllumb, Fadile and Fatmir

You have supported me, cared and loved me through out all my student life and I can never say thank you enough. Your dedication, advice and enthusiasm have had an impact not only this thesis, but to every project I work on.

I hope this makes you proud.

Thank you

To my partner Elizabeth Anne Read

You have been incredibly supporting during all my student life, especially during this thesis. Your advice, inputs and creative ideas have elevated me and this thesis greatly. Without you, this would have not been possible. Your genuine support and dedication made this possible. Thank you for being who you are, and thank you for being by my side.

Abstract

Albania is a country situated in the western Balkan peninsula, it is a parliamentary democracy and a transitional economy. Its population is approximately 3.5 million with 870.000 populating its capital Tirana.¹ The Mediterranean country underwent its most difficult times during the communist regime, where the dictator Enver Hoxha ruled the country with an iron fist for 40 years. His policies exercised brutal Marxist-Leninist tactics and ideologies which resulted on imposing a dreadful totalitarian regime upon the Albanian people.

Under the regime of Enver Hoxha, the Albanian people lived in constant fear and paranoia. Hoxha's isolationist policies culminated in the "bunkerization project" the construction of over 700.000 bunkers all over the country. A great financial and human cost to the nation. Today Albanians are living with the complicated and painful legacy of the regime, surrounded by bunkers. Struggling to make a transition from the painful and difficult traces of its past communist regime, today Albanians are finding new ways of co-existing and reusing the 700.000 bunkers which dot the whole landscape².

This thesis focuses on the collective memory of Albanians and investigates their relation to the bunkers. How do Albanians relate to the bunkers? What meaning do they carry and how did that change overtime? How do Albanians co-exist with these structures? And most importantly can these bunkers become a mediator or a metaphor of Albanians traumatic past and a possible brighter future, in coexistence with the bunkers? This thesis and report are based on theoretical research on the socio-psychological impact of painful/contested culture heritage and aims to reflect upon the possibilities of reinvigorating the meaning of the bunkers in relation with the landscape and the Albanian's collective memory. The main outcome of the thesis is the "Project Bunker" film, which aims to stimulate attention to aspects that matter, rise questions and perhaps answer some, it also intends to authentically express and transmit the experience I personally had during my visit in Albania and in some way to allow the audience enter my thought process.

¹ Gyler Mydyti and Elian Stefa, *Concrete Mushrooms Reusing Albania's 750.000 bunkers* (Barcelona dpr-barcelona, 2012).

² Ibid.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	2
Abstract.....	3
Table of Contents.....	4
Introduction	5
Research Problem and Aim	6
Outline of the Thesis.....	7
Part I	8
1.1 Theory research/Literature review	8
1.1.1 Military Architecture and Bunkers	9
1.1.2 Classic Architecture of Albert Speer	10
1.2 Difficult Architectural Heritage and Painful Collective Memory	13
1.3 The Turkish dilemma.....	15
1.4 Introduction to the Albanian Context	16
1.4.1 The start of an isolationistic state.....	16
1.5 The bunkerization (bunkerizim) project	17
1.5.1 Typologies of the bunkers	18
1.6 The fall of the Communist state and recent years development of the bunkers	19
1.7 Theoretical analysis on the bunker-people-landscape relation.....	22
1.7.1 Theoretical classifications and Pike’s subcategories	24
Part II	27
2.1 Empirical research	27
2.1.1 Interview transcript: Elian Stefa on the Albanian Bunkers	27
2.2 An Albanian adventure	30
2.2.1 Conclusion of the Albanian adventure.....	47
Part III.....	48
3.1 Architectural/artistic methodology – The future and the film.....	48
3.2 Project Bunker	50
Conclusion.....	53

Introduction

The great challenges of today's rapid urban and rural fabric changes and densification sets up new tasks for architects, designers and urbanists. In the midst of these rapid and economically driven urbanization there are hidden gems that are part of the urban patterns of cities and our built environment. These hidden gems take various shapes and meanings and are often associated with the culture, history, and political background of the context.

Highly densified areas bring to us indisputable challenges with straightforward problems on the table. Therefore, most of our solution finding techniques are concentrated in urban settings. While being part of these dynamic settings ourselves we naturally aim to impact our surrounding, our communities and therefore our cities. In the last decade architects, designers, artists and urbanists have been analysing, conceptualizing and rethinking the future of our cities and the way we can ensure a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable future.

While being successful in the European context we have gradually started neglecting the complexities and the importance of the rural and the countryside and what it has to offer. As in the urban context, part of the rural fabric often there are more significant and ominous hidden gems that are closely related to the history of the place, and that have been underseen mostly being referenced as sites of no significant relevance to our dynamic everyday city life.

By shifting our efforts towards revitalizing and rethinking our relationship with the rural and its potential we can start rethinking the notion of social sustainability in a more democratic way.

Research Problem and Aim

This thesis will focus on hidden gems mainly concentrated in the outskirts/rural areas consisting difficult and painful ideologies associated to certain structures, buildings and objects which quite often are part of the courtesies of the history, culture and tradition of the representing context.

Often associated with negative and difficult memories these objects take an utterly more powerful meaning by being constant reminders and physical traces of painful pasts with vigorous continuous impact on the collective memory of the people.

The chosen research context due to personal experiences is the country of Albania, specifically Albania's troublesome communist legacy, which still remains evident to this day. For over forty years Albania was the most isolated country in the world, a self-proclaimed atheist and symbol of real socialism, Albania underwent its toughest and most destructive times during the rule of the dictator Enver Hoxha.

Comrade Enver Hoxha ruled Albania with an iron fist, exercising power and given order of rule towards his citizens and political opponents. Due to his vulgar Marxism-Leninism motivated tactics the Albanian people lived in constant fear and paranoia.

Contested Communist heritage is present in Albania almost everywhere³, in apartment buildings, schools, community buildings, hospitals, urban setting, and above all, in the 700.000 bunkers.

These concrete mushroom style bunkers dot the entire Albanian landscape and therefore are the most prominent and obvious reminders of Albania's communist past. They are a concrete and constant reminder of Hoxha's policies, and in general its totalitarian regime. These bunkers were a great financial and human cost to the nation and Albanian people are currently living with the complicated and painful legacy of the regime, surrounded by bunkers.

This thesis rises the following questions: What is the relation of Albanian people with the bunkers? What meaning do the bunkers currently carry and has that changed overtime? What was the real reason behind the bunkerization project? Why are they a contested sensitive almost taboo topic within the Albanian society? And the last: Can the meaning of

³ Marjolein Helena van der Boon, "Bunkers as Contested Culture Heritage " (2019).

the bunkers change and instead of being constant reminders of painful pasts, perhaps they could carry a bright and hopeful meaning for a more prosperous future.

The aim of this thesis is to provide possible answers and suggestions to the risen questions, it also aims to stimulate a more active discourse about the contested topic of the bunkers, and closely reflects upon these structures architecturally and artistically.

Based on theoretical and empirical research this thesis at the same time suggests architectural and artistic ways on how can the meaning of the bunkers be reinvigorated.

Outline of the Thesis

The structure of this thesis includes a thesis report and a film. This report is complementary to the film and is a wholistic and comprehensive outlook on contested, painful and difficult architectural culture heritage. The report mirrors the structure of the film “Project Bunker” which also consists of three parts, the past, the present and the future.

Part I of the report includes a research on associated topics and has a theoretical approach upon which the Part II (empirical research) and Part III are based. The theory research consists of analytical reflections on literature regarding Military, Classic architecture, Nazi Architecture and analysis on defensive architecture. Further on, the history, trajectory and the events which lead to the “bunkerization project” are explained.

Part II (The Empirical research) is based on multiple interviews of architects and experts in Albania. A field trip in Albania was conducted and reflections are written in a journal format, where the entire field trip is thoroughly described as experienced. This particular description of the field trip is done in order to express authentically the dynamics of the Albanian landscape and bunkers in general.

Part III of the report includes the architectural methodology which speculates on a possible future of the bunkers influenced by the land art discipline. The final part and the total outcome of the thesis is a film. The course and the minimal content of the film is going to be explained briefly in the report, however not many aspects of it are going to be revealed. This is due to the structure of the thesis and the film’s artistic purpose.

The film is going to be seen for the first time by the examiner and the jury members during my presentation. This is done in order to allow a more dynamic, engaging and spontaneous conversation during the final presentation.

Part I

1.1 Theory research/Literature review

Military and ideologically reflected architecture have been a significant part of stylistic and cultural discourses within social theory and its paradigms. Its ability to carry impactful reputation and meaning throughout time has shifted the attention of architecture theorists and social scientists on revisiting these issues and analysing its socio-psychological impact on people.

The impactful literature of Paul Virilio's *Bunker Archeology* and Léon Krier's thorough analysis on the classic architecture of Albert Speer, has redefined and reimagined how military and classic architecture have been interwoven and have been used to impose a given order of rule⁴.

Paul Virilio's extensive research and analytical approach to military architecture and the bunker as an architectural object has broadened the overall outlook of fortifications, bunkers and military architecture in the occidental.

While Léon Krier's *Albert Speer Architecture 1932-1942* attempts to confront the difficulties of extricating the architecture and his urban planning strategies from its political intentions. Krier aims to shift how monumental, classic and military architecture often have been subjected to biased analytical theories and have been therefore not focused on the wholistic aspects of its architecture⁵.

⁴ Leon Krier, *Albert Speer: Architecture 1932-1942* (USA: The Monacelli Press, 2013).

⁵ Ibid.

1.1.1 Military Architecture and Bunkers

Defensive architecture is therefore instrumental, existing less in itself than with a view to “doing” something: waiting, watching, then acting or, rather, reacting. To live in such a place is not so much to “dwell” there as it is to “take it on” for an act for which the casemate is the instrument⁶ – Paul Virilio

One of the similarities of the Western bunker and the Albanian bunker is their instrumentality. The bunker is a military-architectural object intentionally designed for nothing but truly specific aims to protect, to open fire from, or cause harm. Always related to fear, impulse, “uncomfortability” and paranoia, it is almost the strongest permanent function attached to an architectural object. The impact of that is evident, especially in the scenery of the Albanian landscape where the bunkers, after being ignored for years bear an even more heavy, dark and destructive meaning.

Virilio’s Bunker Archeology is an extensive study of the fortifications and bunkers built by Nazi Germany in the coastal areas of Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium and France (Atlantic Wall). His attention is on the bunkers abounded along the coastal of France. Virilio elaborates on these alien-like ominous massive bunkers that will remind us in the next century of the battles, destructions and oppression of war and an attempt for total control.

Intelligence and social control became the heart in the spirit of defense; the radio informed on everything, immediately, and you were thus protected from unpleasant surprises, but, in return, you had to alert the authorities by telephone of any odd occurrences taking place in your immediate surroundings. This was one of the forms of civilian combat for the citizen of the totalitarian state, for the inhabitant of Citadel Europe⁶. Paul Virilio

⁶ Paul Virilio, *Bunker Archeology* (Princeton Architectural Press New York 1994).

Internal and total control through different channels of propaganda was one of the most common tactics of totalitarian states. When defensive and military architecture became part of peoples' surroundings and became almost a normal pattern of the landscape, this was used by the state as a mean to normalize people with a given order of rule, and impose total control.

Understanding the bunker typologies of the Atlantic wall is essential for reading bunkers as a military architectural object. The military space, territory and the military technology used, had a direct impact on the general strategy of how the war was fought, therefore this effects the means and typologies of fortifications. The bunkers of WW2 are a result or a counter-reaction of the industrial technology of that certain period.⁷ Even though they change in form and tend to adapt differently to the landscape, the bunkers have various qualities in common: mainly single material usage, massive structure thickness, mainly being passive structures, and with small openings.

Throughout history, fortifications have revealed themselves as structures to ensure protection and territorial integrity. Fortifications are structures which most of their time remain passive in relation to their functionality, even during events of war, fortifications are active as part of the war in very specific moments. These defensive structures perform their intended functionality to its peak during their active phase, which means they are directly involved in the war. However, when they are silently waiting, cautiously observing, even when abandoned, time reveals that the fortifications perform a philosophical and physiological functionality during post war times as well, which often is more powerful than during their active phase.

1.1.2 Classic Architecture of Albert Speer

First published in 1985, *Albert Speer Architecture 1932-1942* by Leon Krier is a luminous, comprehensive analysis of the important classical architect of the 20th century. Yet at the same time it is much more, an analytical and philosophical reflection on Modern Architecture and politics on art, on the notions of good and evil.⁸

Krier asks the dangerous question “Can a war criminal be a great artist?” Here he intends to demonstrate that Adolph Hitler’s architect of choice, Albert Speer was responsible for

⁷ Virilio, *Bunker Archeology*.

⁸ Krier, *Albert Speer: Architecture 1932-1942*.

one of the most audacious architectural, artistic and urban plans of the 20th century⁹. Furthermore, this book analyses and reflects upon the most powerful and successful propagandist projects of 20th century, which is defined still to this day by its images, slogans and its architectural and urban stylistic approaches, whether positively or negatively, consciously or not.

I am not sure I agree with those critics who assign an ideological content to my architecture, tracing it all the way to the street lamps on the Berlin East-West axis. Our means had no ideological grounding, but were politically demonstrated: they were inspired by the experience of the political struggle for power¹⁰.

-Albert Speer-

In 1937 Hitler decided to redefine German capitals starting with Berlin and named Albert Speer as the architect in charge of this mission. Berlin was thought to be the capital of Europe, stretching from Atlantic Ocean to the Ural Mountains, and would be influenced to its major sectors and institutions, by the new Germany. The city was thought to be transformed to a metropolis of the continent and Speer was appointed to design the monuments, palaces and squares which would focus to become the symbolic center of a continent ruled by the Nazi Germany¹⁰.

Speers most prominent works stretch from urban projects to monuments, palaces and tombs. While most are unbuilt his most distinguished ones are: The great square, The great hall, High command of armed forces, Hitler's palace, and his built ones: New Reich chancellery, Lichdom (Cathedral of Light) and Zipelin-Field, Salzburg-Munich Autoban Entrance Monument, Atelier Josef Thorak.

The author in this book tries to elaborate and speculate that the cultural monument or an architectural entity should have been preserved, as it shows that fanatical moralism has turned "culture" and architecture in its own enemy. The extend that Hitler, his regime and his architect went to promote a certain ideology or political power is exceptional. The propagandistic architecture here is extraordinary, it clearly aims to simulate, and grant feelings of awe to its visitors/participants. This was so excellently done that it had its perceptual, philosophical, phycological effect not only on its people, but on all the world, still to this day. Expanding from urban planning to the detailed design of lamp posts, a regime was not proposed, but smartly imposed to the people of the world. The logic of

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Krier, *Albert Speer: Architecture 1932-1942*.

Industry and war had become the supreme master and teacher of Nazi architecture and urbanism.¹¹

The Nazi propaganda regime and that of Communist Albania can be easily compared, and parallels can be drawn between the Nazi Architecture and the bunkerization project of the Albanian communist regime. It is clear that architecture, and urban planning are used as instrument of politics, and therefore ideologies are promoted by them. In case of Nazi Germany, they were used to promote elegance, classicism, modernity, dignity, grace and grandeur to a dreadful regime and in the case of Communist Albania - to promote, unity, integration, self-respect and self determination to a totalitarian communist regime.

¹¹ Krier, *Albert Speer: Architecture 1932-1942*.

1.2 Difficult Architectural Heritage and Painful Collective Memory

*The mixture of architecture and ideology
is powerful but a dangerous
cocktail¹²!*

Leon Krier-

Perhaps if democratic values are integrated in architectural practices the result wouldn't be so dangerous after all. The difficult traces of architecture spreads from urban fabrics to rural and countryside landscapes, marking territories and characterizing them with certain ideological agendas inherited from the history, culture and reputation of the context. As objects, structures, architectural entities and buildings are associated with painful memories of violent pasts, they often become the identity of a site, disregarding and overwhelming the qualities and potentials of not only a context but a whole society. Hence the architectural practice and its ability and quality to be the mediator of many challenges should start shifting the attention towards the effects of the ideologically painful architectural entities.

These architectural entities, monuments and buildings have a profound effect on the socio-psychologies of humans and there is a need to investigate ways to revitalize and bring new meanings to these entities. The architectural entities and buildings which carry similar meanings present themselves in numerous ways, many are mistreated, disrespected while some come as preserved, refurbished, and given new life. In extreme cases, as in post Nazi Germany and post-Communist Albania some of these structures have been demolished in order to wipe out any traces of the painful history which they used to carry. The cultural and architectural discourse of the ways these objects and buildings would be treated takes numerous turns, however it can be considered that the fanatical moralism might turn culture and architecture in its own enemy¹². There might be attempts of carrying projects of obliteration of buildings burdened with painful ideologies but that does not ease the memory of the people, nor does it re-write history.

Contextualizing it, structures of various purposes and eras, dating from middle age to modern times can be mentioned. These structures come in different forms and typologies depending on their context, ex. The Surrounding defensive Walls of Constantinople, the 700.000 bunkers in Albania, July 15th Martyr's Bridge (Bosporus Bridge), The Aurelian

¹² Krier, *Albert Speer: Architecture 1932-1942*.

Wall of Rome, The ruins of Ani-the city of 1001 churches, The entity of Colonization of Sicily during the fascist regime, etc.

Architecture throughout history has been used as a tool to materialize certain kind of ideologies and regimes which rises challenges for the practices of today. The way architects and designers are currently dealing with these architectural entities enables and materializes an architectural discourse that seeks exploration of their impact on society and the landscape, and lays the necessity to explore how architecture of today can be the mediator of the past and the future. Collective memory is one of the constant impacts of painful and violent architectural heritage. The long-term socio-psychological effect is inevitable, people see objects and buildings and relate to them personally, emotionally, even more so if these architectural entities are part of a troubled past.

The regards to the condition of objects in architecture increases and decreases. The later emergence of architecture's particular concern in post-continental philosophy and object-oriented ontology, a progressive addition to philosophy speculates that we are at the peak of interest in the meanings and values of objects, in contradiction to the numerous theories of past twenty years. It is not the time to define an architectural object-oriented ontology, artefacts and fortifications suggests to it in various respects, disclosing affinities between object-oriented ontology and architecture's own method of dealing with the object¹³.

Historically architecture and our built environment has been greatly influenced by the culture of a certain period of time and has been used by greater powers as means of expressing or enforcing certain ideologies. Monuments, artifacts, palaces, military objects such as bunkers are the substance of ideologically afflicted architectural entities and therefore these structures have almost an omnipresence throughout time. The relation of people to these structures and objects expands in various ways, often these are viewed as sensitive topics therefore the overall discourses tend to be bias and controversial.

In order to judge or have an analytical architectural discourse about architecture which expresses any ideological and political content especially painful and negative, the general public firstly should be able to create a safe ground and focus our discourse towards a further reaching goal and investigate the relation and the effect of these structures to people overtime and how has that changed. In order to achieve this there is a need to normalize these certain types of topics.

Shifting the efforts into conceptualizing and analysing the socio-psychological impact and the caused trauma by these structures overtime, these taboos might be overcome and the

¹³ Jason Payne, "Projekti Bunkerizimit: The Strange Case of The Albanian Bunker," pp.161-168, no. Anuone Corporation (2014).

aim into reinvigorating the meaning of these structures will not be overpowered by the sensitivity and controversiality of the discourse.

1.3 The Turkish dilemma

As mentioned above there are numerous examples of these architectural entities in the world and one of them is the popular cross continental Bosphorus bridge of Istanbul, which connects the European and Asian side of Istanbul, now its name has changed and it is called the July 15th Martyrs Bridge.

July 15th Martyrs Bridge (Bosphorus Bridge) took the new name after horrendous events that took place on it, in 2016 Turkish coup d'état attempt was carried out by a faction within the Turkish Armed Forces, which led to over 300 people being dead. The starting point of the coup d'état attempt was the July 15th Martyrs Bridge (Bosphorus Bridge) and where 30 civilians and 7 soldiers were killed. The Bosphorus bridge was renamed as the July 15th Martyrs Bridge in memory of those who died while resisting the attempted coup.

During the 90^s the bridge underwent a crisis of suicide attempts, where more than 70 people within 7 years period had jumped and committed suicide, as a result of that, the bridge is permanently closed to pedestrians¹⁴. The bridge was and still is the epicentre of many protests in Istanbul, in the past it was also used as a venue to host events, sport competitions and different cultural activities. Once seen as a national pride, a romantic getaway, now its reputation has shifted.

Opinions of the bridge's reputation vary, but one is established that between the people of Istanbul, the bridge is a constant reminder of violent acts, deaths and painful memories and it is used as an object of permanently remembering them.

¹⁴ G Cetin et al., "Suicides by jumping from Bosphorus Bridge in Istanbul," (2001), <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/11182267/>.

1.4 Introduction to the Albanian Context

Albania is a country in southern Europe and it is situated in the western part of the Balkan Peninsula on the Strait of Otranto. Its mainland border is with North Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Greece. Albania currently is a parliamentary democracy with a transitional economy. Its population is approximately 3.5 million with 870.00 populating its capital Tirana.¹⁵

Being less economically developed in comparison to its Balkan neighbors, Albania is making a difficult transition to a modern open-market economy and this is mainly due to the difficulties the Albanian economy underwent during the communist regime, especially during the governance by dictator Enver Hoxha¹⁶.

During its history Albania underwent several occupations, its last one being under Italian Fascist occupation, which led to the formation of the Albanian Communist Party. One of the main resistances against the Italian occupation came from the Communists Partisans and Albanian Communist groups led by Enver Hoxha, which eventually resulted into the total liberation of Albania. Later the Labour Party was formed with Enver Hoxha as its first secretary. Enver Hoxha then became the prime minister of Albania from its liberation 1955, ruling Albania until his death. During the beginning stages of Hoxhas regime the Albanian economy was revolutionized. Farmlands were confiscated from landowners, the industry received huge amount of investment and electricity was brought to almost all the Albanian territory including rural districts¹⁷.

In order to impose his totalitarian program, Hoxha exercised brutal Marxist-Leninist tactics and ideologies. His government imprisoned, tortured, executed and exiled thousands of political opponent, scientist, athletes and people who dared to oppose his strategies and his legacy. Private property was confiscated by the government, all religious activities were banned and punished and all intellectuals were forced to serve the communist rule and the Labour Party¹⁸. Using all means of propaganda and enforced power of rule all aspects of life were defined by the Labour Party and everything was done for the party.

1.4.1 The start of an isolationistic state

As an intense nationalist as Hoxha was a communist, he denounced any communist state that threatened his legacy and power, and the territorial sovereignty of Albania. After a

¹⁵ "Albania". Encyclopedia Britannica., 10 Mar. 2021., accessed 6 September 2021., <https://www.britannica.com/place/Albania>.

¹⁶ Mydyti and Stefa. *Concrete Mushrooms Reusing Albania's 750.000 bunkers*.

¹⁷ "Enver Hoxha. Encyclopedia Britannica.," (2021, April 7), accessed 06 September 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Enver-Hoxha>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

series of failed alliances with Communist nations Hoxha broke relations with all the allies and decided to withdraw Albania from the Warsaw pact leading to a short-lasting friendship with China which came to an end after the death of Mao Zedong and China's rapprochement with the West. Hoxha refused and disregarded all the world's powers, declaring Albania the only model of socialist republic on its own. This resulted in a total isolation of the country, where all the borders were closed¹⁹.

1.5 The bunkerization (bunkerizim) project

With the generated paranoia and imposed fear and violence towards its people Hoxha slowly but surely gained total power over the country. Hoxha's isolationist policies culminated in the "Bunkerization Project" the construction of over 700.000 bunkers all over the country, which resulted on a great financial and human cost to the nation. The extensive number of bunkers was not built only due to possible external invaders, they also contributed to and were a major part of internal propaganda, enforcing fear and paranoia within the Albanian society. This resulted in imposing xenophobia in the minds of Albanians, keeping them at work for over 40 years²⁰ while constructing bunkers all over the country.

In Hoxha's mind Albania was surrounded by enemies and his propaganda machine was so successful in imposing these ideas on his people that to this day they are still evident.

During the first stages of the "Bunkerization Project" the bunkers were built following various military strategies, however later on, they were built in places of no strategic significance. Soldiers and ordinary people were ordered by the regime to build them everywhere, whoever opposed this strategy was exiled or declared traitor of the nation, therefore none opposed.

The difference between the military strategy of Albania and the rest of the world was very evident and significant. While western and Soviet powers were invested in more advanced and technologically enhanced military and warfare systems, Enver Hoxha was dotting the whole Albanian landscape with five-meter square pill-box bunkers. These bunkers were out of a clear and strategic pattern, constructed everywhere and easy to notice, these bunkers would not fulfil any military and defensive requirements during the Cold War or any possible conflict²¹.

Daniel Howden in his BBC article (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2098705.stm>) about the human and material cost of these bunkers estimates that they cost more than two times as France's

¹⁹ Britannica, "Enver Hoxha. Encyclopedia Britannica.."

²⁰ Mydyti and Stefa, *Concrete Mushrooms Reusing Albania's 750.000 bunkers*.

²¹ Ibid.

infamous Maginot line and consumed more than three times concrete²², meaning that the bunkerization project was a great human and financial cost of the nation.

The bunkerization project and the amount of fortification that was built in Albania created the most extensive level of protection Albania has experienced, although the bunkers were never used as the country was never invaded²³.

For tourists who visit Albania 700.000 comes as a shocking number but for the ruling regime this was the legitimate thing to do²⁴. Today the bunkers represent a painful legacy of a paranoid and isolated past which reflects and symbolizes an Albanian totalitarianism.

1.5.1 Typologies of the bunkers

The bunkers were built along mainland borders, on mountains, fields, lowlands, cities, etc. They are classified to three main types: Small pill-box bunkers, medium pill-box bunkers and big-nuclear resistant tunnel bunkers. The ones which dot the majority of the landscape are the small and medium sized pill-box bunkers²⁴.

Small bunkers are designed to host one soldier. They are the most common and are found throughout the entire territory especially along the Adriatic and Ionian coasts and along land borders²⁴. They present themselves in one shape, that is a semi sphere of a diameter of around four meters with an opening, which can be used to open fire. In lowlands and in coastlines these bunkers are found in groups of three, connected by a tunnel which serves as a corridor providing circulation between three bunkers.

Medium size bunkers are thought to host or protect groups of people or host small artillery. They are in different sizes, some of them can host up to ten people and heavy artillery. These types of bunkers are found everywhere in the Albanian Landscape²⁴.

The tunnel style big bunkers are able to host hundreds or even thousands of people and they are mainly built to host the ruling regime of Albania²⁴. These bunkers are specifically designed to withstand nuclear attacks. They are usually found carved into mountains, or excavated in the ground.

²² "Albania's relics of paranoid past," BBC NEWS, 2002, accessed 07 September 2021, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2098705.stm>.

²³ Eglu Luca, "Re-use and Revitalization of Military Bunkers in the Albanian Riviera," (November 2016).

²⁴ Mydyti and Stefa, *Concrete Mushrooms Reusing Albania's 750.000 bunkers*.

1.6 The fall of the Communist state and recent years development of the bunkers

“Dear Madam/Sir You have to understand me, I love Albania, it is my country. I do not say this for patriotic reasons. Albania is the person I loved and still love. She was violated, something terrible happened to her -- to someone I love. The scars left over from these wounds are Albania.

Cathedrals come to mind!

Cathedrals are beautiful and the bunkers are ugly. Cathedrals have been built through slavery and poverty -- on the backs of those without rights.

The bunkers are our cathedrals, our wounds, they are part of our face.

If i want to love Albania, then i also have to love it with its scars. We have to live with these bunkers, give them new purpose.

This is Albania, -- a violated loved one, that the new generation of this country has to work with, and help.

They have never known another Albania²⁵”

Unknow

A quote from Mushrooms of Concrete Documentary by Marijn Payens.

²⁵ "Mushrooms of Concrete Documentary," 2012, accessed 08 Sep 2021, <https://vimeo.com/50512991>.

Comrade and dictator Enver Hoxha made sure he has a secure succession of a younger generation of leaders. In 1981 he ordered the execution of multiple leading party and government officials, later to turn over most state functions to Ramiz Alia, a trusted state person to Hoxha²⁶.

With the death of Enver Hoxha the Socialist Peoples republic started to grow more vulnerable in all its political aspects overtime. Following multiple protests and major events initiated by students in Tirana and all Albania, the communist regime fell in 1991, leaving the country in major debt and overall, in political and economic crisis.

The fall of Communism resulted in changes such as farmland and lands to be returned to their initial owners²⁷, initiations to have an open market Albanian economy, and a gradual shift towards a more libertarian way of life. While land owners were receiving their property back, this time their property came with bunkers in them. The unused and freshly constructed 700.000 bunkers dot all the Albanian landscape, including private properties, city squares, city street etc. When suddenly having these strange creatures in your garden and your surroundings, the normal and logical way to deal with them was to appropriate them, and use them for personal purposes.

Enver's Bunkers throughout this time were reused in many ways. Many of them are used for farming purposes in the countryside, some of them are refurbished and reused as restaurants, bars, tattoo shops, and beach bars, places to brew raki, while some of them in urban fabrics are now museums²⁸. However, the extensive number of them made practical life difficult. They were obstacles and hazards for many aspects of life, particularly farmers greatly disliked them. They were a major obstacle to farmlands since they took great space and made farming difficult. Therefore, many of the bunkers in lowlands and fields are either destroyed or buried under the ground.

The bunkerization project and bunkers in Albania have been constantly a sensitive topic with various parties carrying strong opinions about them. After the fall of communism, the Democratic Party took power with Sali Berisha as a prime minister, his policies towards the bunkers were rigorous and strict. He initiated the de-bunkerization of the country, a massive destruction project which aimed to eliminate any traces of the communist era. This project was partially successful, with many bunkers and some communist era buildings

²⁶ Britannica, "Enver Hoxha. Encyclopedia Britannica.."

²⁷ Mydyti and Stefa, *Concrete Mushrooms Reusing Albania's 750.000 bunkers*.

²⁸ Luca, "Re-use and Revitalization of Military Bunkers in the Albanian Riviera."

destroyed in cities. However, his political mandate was not long enough to ensure destruction of all traces of Enver Hoxha.

The recent and current prime minister of Albania, Edi Rama, an established artist, painter and sculpturer had a totally different approach to the communist traces, yet with similar aim, to eliminate or blur the constant reminders of Albania's communist past. While he was the mayor of Tirana, he initiated a strategy that aimed on painting over the communist buildings including bunkers with overwhelming eye-catching bright colours. The strategy was so forthcoming that it changed the whole architectural scene of Tirana. The usage of bright colours sharply contradicts the bunkers and buildings degraded state. This strategy was personalized substantially by Edi Rama, where he would be painting the bunkers himself with local and international artists. This painting project led to Edi Rama being known to this day as "*the painter*" in the Albanian political scene.

Yet both ways of dealing with the bunkers still continue to this day. Many bunkers in recent years have been destroyed with heavy machinery to extract the steel and iron contained within them, leaving behind a pile of concrete²⁹.

While medium size and small size bunkers which are located in more vibrant and touristic areas are continuing the Edi Rama's painting tradition, these bunkers are brightly painted and occasionally are converted into restaurants or beach bars. While painting over bunkers and different communist buildings, gained popularity, people started practicing this phenomenon widely. The bunkers have been objects of many graffiti writings³⁰ and art, consisting artistic content, political and many times personal. This aspect of people – bunker relation is incorporated and reflected upon greatly in the third part of the film.

Bunkers in the current time between a part of Albanians are viewed as a public canvas where one is capable and free to write, paint anything on it, conveying any message. The content of these graffiti writings varies greatly. Many are insults, slurs especially directed to one group of people or to political leaders including Enver Hoxha, other writings are more of the romantic side expressing love, sexual desire and attraction, while few writings are nostalgic about the past.

²⁹ Mydyti and Stefa, *Concrete Mushrooms Reusing Albania's 750.000 bunkers*.

³⁰ Luca, "Re-use and Revitalization of Military Bunkers in the Albanian Riviera."

1.7 Theoretical analysis on the bunker-people-landscape relation

The megalithic mounds and stone circles, linear earthworks and various archaeological findings of prehistoric Europe, have been argued by many archaeologists that such monuments, by regulating movement on the landscape, have played a significant role in familiarizing and legitimizing unequal power relations. In People's Socialist Republic of Albania, it can be argued that the bunkers and the communist system were meant to play a very similar role³¹. The bunkers created an individual self-isolation type of mentality within Albanians where they are enforced to believe or at least claim that they believed in the possibility of foreign invasion. The bunkers created a paranoia, convincing Albanians to always imagine a threat from the window of the bunkers.

There is a lack of dialogue, of tolerance, meaning that everything that happens to us (Albanians) or if someone expresses a different opinion on any topic, is perceived as an opposition or a conflicting judgement, as an enemy view; there is no space for a culture of dialogue and these are symptoms of what I call "the bunker mentality". The bunker mentality is rooted in Albanians. It is extremely difficult to unbunkerize our minds, our feelings, these are the post-totalitarian trauma effects in the Albanian society³².

Kujtim Cashku – director of "Kolonel Bunker" film

Taking in consideration the official reasoning behind the bunkerization project, in practice their symbolic role and meaning as instruments of internal domination and total control was more significant³³. Throughout history they have presented themselves as political tools of the communist regime to impose their ideology and familiarize people with a totalitarian state. The propaganda machine of Enver Hoxha was so powerful that to this day, it still characterizes some aspects of the political scene. Everyone works, everyone contributes, among others were the main slogan used to persuade Albanians to not worry about different aspects of life and only work. To this day many people express opinions such as: at least we had jobs back then.

³¹ Michael Galaty, Sharon R. Stocker, and Charles Watkinson, "Beyond Bunkers: Dominance, Resistance and Change in an Albanian Regional Landscape," *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 12.2 (1999).

³² Mydyti and Stefa, *Concrete Mushrooms Reusing Albania's 750.000 bunkers*.

³³ Galaty, Stocker, and Watkinson, "Beyond Bunkers: Dominance, Resistance and Change in an Albanian Regional Landscape."

Bunkers were the manifestation of Hoxha's dictatorial and totalitarian tactics³⁴:

*"If we slackened our vigilance even for a moment or toned down our struggle against enemies in the least, they would strike immediately like the snake that bites you and injects its poison before you are aware of it"*³⁴

Enver Hoxha :1982

The bunkers failed to perform on Hoxha's first intentions while it succeeded in some, instead of uniting the country in a common cause towards possible external invaders, they created paranoia and self-isolation. Most of Albanians describe them as symbols of repression. To this day many people considered bunkers reflection of intimidation and total control rather than national unity³⁴.

It might seem that the bunkers lost whatever previous meanings that the Hoxha dictatorship intended them to have, however in doing so they assumed new meanings. They are widely ignored and ridiculed with its bunker appearance and intention. Even so, small carved domed stone pillbox bunkers, which is a pencil holder or an ashtray, have become Albania's leading tourist souvenir, an irony still alive within Albanians themselves³⁴.

In survey conducted in one Albanian Internet site "What do bunkers mean to you?" was asked. Albanians which responded primarily young adults in their late twenties and early thirties, used terms as "disharmony", "useless" "strange" and "wasteful"³⁴. It is well established over multiple sources and personal experiences that there is a substantial difference between how the bunkers are viewed by young and senior generations. The traces of xenophobia and paranoia are more established and present to the senior Albanians. A discourse of such, might head in different ways depending on who you talk to.

Intentions from social anthropologists and scholars who study contemporary human reactions to modern landscapes estimate that: The owner of the restaurant who sells "Bunker" pizza is joining the past to the present, yet in a different way. She exerts her own power over the production of and creation of history by juxtaposing post-communist present to the impotent past of Hoxha's regime³⁴.

Even if used as souvenirs, they have not stopped communicating, however now they are communicating different messages, a self-deprecating post-communist decorator which recuperates the past as heritage through mockery and ridiculed³⁴.

³⁴ Galaty, Stocker, and Watkinson, "Beyond Bunkers: Dominance, Resistance and Change in an Albanian Regional Landscape."

1.7.1 Theoretical classifications and Pike's subcategories

It has been argued that the bunkers and the block are material of two challenging ideologies, domination and resistance³⁵. Even though the Albanian bunker shares mildly basic characteristics of bunkers built anywhere else – concrete construction, partial burial in earth, round surfaces, small opening etc, yet the it is a unique and deviant case in the European war stage and defensive projects.

In his seminal book *Bunker Archaeology* Paul Virilio elaborates on the architectural object and the European bunker in general as more or less of a homogeneous character³⁶:

“This homogeneity, this monolithic character, is useful for u in being able to reveal several factors at work in modern warfare”

Between bunker the landscape and the way modern warfare evolves Virilio enables a theory of which their relationship for all its origin as an architectural object is rooted in military³⁶.

Albania's bunkers are rather different from any of mentioned above, they represent a sense of negativity and evil in terms of form, function and legacy. If one would argue that these architectural objects are different than the usual bunker, then the following question is, what really are they? And how the project of bunkerization might develop from here³⁶?

Therefore, one comprehensive way to view them is by the four-fold definitions of David Pike, which elaborate and argues about the current uses of bunkers in Albania³⁶.

Albanian bunkers persist as a spatial phenomenon in four forms:

1. as ruins in the landscape;
2. as lived spaces put to local use;
3. as spaces converted to new uses proper the consumption of the bunker fantasy;
4. as spaces converted to reflection on the bunker fantasy and on bunkerization such.

The first three forms are self-explanatory, these forms have become a subject of interest to scholars and tourists with specific interests. All four forms are related to Pike's interpretation of “bunker fantasy” a way of explaining the reactions towards the Albania's bunkers³⁶.

³⁵ Galaty, Stocker, and Watkinson, "Beyond Bunkers: Dominance, Resistance and Change in an Albanian Regional Landscape."

³⁶ Payne, "Projekti Bunkerizimit: The Strange Case of The Albanian Bunker."

1. Bunker as ruin. This form probably has its outweighs, it might be a point of comparison to a romantic abandoned castle in a picturesque theory, which takes the totalitarian fortification to a possible object with aesthetic qualities³⁷.

Artistic appreciation is the closest approximation to function, as the bunker requires abandonment its ruination³⁷.

2. Bunker as reused spaces for practical reasons. This form has been practiced even before Enver Hoxha's death. Farmers used the bunkers in remote areas away from the intrusive policy situation experienced near Tirana. These bunkers were used in all manners, from livestock, storage etc³⁷.
3. Bunkers converted for consumerist reuses. This is an increasing popular form aimed mostly for global consumption and attracting tourists. A lemon to lemonade approach. While some of the bunkers have been converted to hostel rooms, bars and restaurants which reflects upon the strange programme aimed to benefit from the bunkers³⁷.
4. Bunkers as spaces as self-reflective institution. This form elaborates on possible museums of bunkerization, housed in one or perhaps many bunkers. This form differs from the aimed at tourist/consumer culture, where here the audience is targeted with particular scholarly interests towards the bunkers³⁷.

The fourth form it is already happening and it will happen in the future, a selfish introversion- not necessarily physical in nature, and perhaps not so much of a product, but rather a project of interpretation³⁷. A self-interpretation of the bunkers as self-reflective entities. Whether if there is any practical value of the Albanian bunkers, it important to reveal and strengthen the efforts which have to do with less practical applications. As Pike elaborates on it "Whatever associated monetization might come of such schemes and more with a different form of speculation aimed precisely at problems of architecture. In other words, the value of the Albanian bunker lies in its architectural objectivity³⁷"

The strategies for the future of the Albanian bunkers are creating a current discourse within various parties (academics, designers, architects, citizens and artists) each having a specific interest to one of the four forms elaborated above³⁷.

Many senior Albanians who have been through Hoxha's regime have impulsive feelings towards the bunkers and therefore they would want to remove the bunkers, to somehow remove Hoxha's traces. While the younger generation of Albanians especially within architects and designers argues various forms of adaptation and reuse in order to overcome and eliminate the painful traces of the communist regime. This approach is being practiced currently among Albanians; however, the bunkers vigorous effect cannot be ignored, it takes the attention of this practicality towards a ridiculed case, perhaps with similarity to a

³⁷ Payne, "Projekti Bunkerizimit: The Strange Case of The Albanian Bunker."

colourful façade on a degraded building. Also, within the younger generations of Albanians one strategy is growing in popularity: passive preservation. This strategy leaves the bunkers alone in the spirit of passive preservation³⁸.

People often express their attitude by saying that they have grown up and lived their life with these objects in their landscape (while they did not grow up under Hoxha) and would like to keep the bunkers, perhaps not as constant reminders of a troubled past but as entities that make their surrounding unique and make them unique, a similar approach to the Easter Islanders view of the moai statues³⁸.

The future of the bunkers is uncertain, as its their present, moving from the impulsive strategies that have straight forward practicalities towards something more effective, a way to engage with the bunkers in a more sentimental way³⁸. The uncertainty of them enables the future bunkers project to have different meanings, and promote their architectural objectivity which reflects their current theoretical discourse among the people.

³⁸ Payne, "Projekti Bunkerizimit: The Strange Case of The Albanian Bunker."

Part II

2.1 Empirical research

This section of the report includes an interview transcript and the field trip. The field trip is written as a personal journal, it aims at expressing and authentically describing the field trip and its experiences from an individual personal perspective. This part of the report is greatly connected to the second part of the film, where during my field trip I filmed at multiple locations aiming to capture the current state of the bunkers.

The interview is conducted with Elian Stefa. He is the co-author of the book “Concrete Mushrooms” – Reusing Albania’s 750.00 abandoned bunkers. He is a Tirana based architect, researcher and independent curator.

2.1.1 Interview transcript: Elian Stefa on the Albanian Bunkers

Q1. Before laying my questions, I would like to note that I am interested in thorough investigation of the impact of the Bunkers in the Albanian society, its socio-psychological effect on people throughout time and why the Albanian Bunker represents and bares such a dark meaning.

Firstly (maybe a cliché question) but I would like to know, what does the bunker represents/means to you, not as a professional artist and architect but just as someone who has seen and sees the bunkers probably every day, and did the meaning of them shifted or changed in any way or form throughout your time in Albania.

A1. My personal interest in the bunkers was actually sparked by the many visits in Albania while I was living outside of it. Every year of my 2 decades as a member of the diaspora, I would visit my homeland, and always there would be a friend or two from my host country that were curious about Albania, this little and mysterious country, opting to visit it with me. It was through their questions about these strange objects and their ubiquity that made my curiosity spike initially, but the more I struggled to answer their questions, the more I

understood that this is a very unique mystery which is representative of the country's extreme upheavals of the last century. There was never a visitor in those years who did not take a photo inside, around or on top of the bunkers.

Q2. Knowing the history and the events during the communist-totalitarian era of Albania, and the official reasoning behind the Bunkerization Project, do you think the aim of the Bunkerization project was to unite the Albanian people towards a common enemy, to display self-determination and integrity towards its neighbours? Or the Bunkers real aim and intention was internal control, enforcing totalitarianism and normalizing/familiarizing the population with a given order of rule?

A2. Many discussions that I've had with military and defence experts has pointed to the anachronism of this intervention from the Communist Regime. The bunkers themselves were easily blasted by modern military technology of any invading army, but they did present an opportunity for asymmetric warfare which had proven successful in Vietnam. I think that the real purpose of the bunkers was dual: one was to psychologically unite the people of Albania in a state of paranoid xenophobia, creating a (alb. "gogol")- (eng. monster) of anything that was seen or imagined from a bunker's window; and secondly to show our neighbours or prospective invaders how insane and willing to do anything our former leadership was. Maybe we won't win, but we'll take you down with us.

Q3. It has been almost 50 years since the bunkers have been part of the Albanian Landscape, and just recently we have seen proposals or projects related to the bunkers with a clearer strategy which also reflects the meaning of the bunkers. It is as almost if they are forgotten fully by the government and partly forgotten by the people. I would like to know your opinion why the lack of interest has happened throughout time, was it because of the unfortunate economical condition of Albania that held the interest back? Is it that the bunkers also carry a controversial/different meaning among Albanians as well? That some Albanians carry strong feelings towards them and would like to demolish them, some would like to keep them, as reminder of a dark past that would possibly encourage a brighter future? Or maybe some would like to keep them because they have categorically different opinion on the bunkers and on the Hoxha's regime as well.

A3. In essence, most of the population has completely ignored them simply because there were other and more urgent issues to deal with. The most direct relationship between Albanians and the bunkers has been that of extractivism, or rather, destroying the bunker to extract and recycle the steel inside. In this point of view, they lose completely any type of association or symbolism that they hold. Also, artists (including the current prime minister) have confronted the bunker as a physical and metaphysical object since the early 90s.

Q4. If any disagreements among various interested parties (academics, policy-makers, designers, and citizens) exist, how do you think we as architects, landscape architects, designers, artists, and urbanists should aim to exhibit the Albanian Bunkers to its purest form to an international context where we don't cause various misunderstandings as the Bunkers are being glorified (referencing protests in Tirana for the BunkArt 2 where some people were against exhibiting this fortification in the center of attention calling it "as glorifying the bunker"), or are being put to attention for specific meanings

A4. We should use the bunkers in every way possible. They were built on the backs of the people so the people should be able to get any service out of them. Bunkart 2 was protested mostly because it foresaw the building of a new bunker (instead of bringing and installing one of the thousands of bunkers which already exist throughout the land. I was offended by this action as well for several reasons. It is an unnecessary caricature which dilutes the significance of this phase of our country.

Q5. Are the Bunkers abandoned because they carry a strong controversial/diverse meaning among Albanians?

A5. I would not think this to be the case... it's mostly indifference that has done this.

Q6. Considering that the bunker is a military-architectural object and its aim being to protect, to open fire from, or hurt people from, always related to fear, and just the heavy stand of that, do you think it's almost impossible to shift its perception? it is almost the strongest permanent function attached to an architectural object. It does not only take a psychologist to see the impact of that, especially in a scenery of the Albanian landscape, so if our aim is to shift what the bunker symbolizes into a symbol of a positive future, should first the collective memory and perception of people towards the bunkers shift? Can the Albanian people view the bunkers not only as the illustration of a dark and fearful past but perhaps as something that could exhibit Albania's bright future, as something that empowers people to view the good in the bad?

A6. This is exactly the question that Concrete Mushrooms attempts to answer.

Q7. I would like to know your professional opinion what makes the Albanian Bunker so unique, and different from the other bunkers that were mostly build during WW2. What are the architectural properties of the Albanian bunker that makes it so unique (if it does)? Considering that bunkers in Europe are sort of homogenous maybe what makes the Albanian Bunker unique is not its architectural form and property, if that is the case, then

would you elaborate your opinion what are the factors, and actors that display this uniqueness to the Albanian Bunker?

A7. The extent to which the territory was fortified. This was done without a logical plan, and brings questions forth regarding the real motivation for their construction. As an object, the bunkers were mostly “pillbox” bunkers which work in unison to create trenches. These bunkers were meant to be used by militarized civilians for guerrilla warfare, and not by trained armies.

Q8. This question would perhaps be a bit more practical in regards to my thesis, and maybe would be beneficial for my field trip in Albania too. It is rather difficult to find information related to the current condition of the bunkers, and their location in a larger number, therefore I would like to ask you, bunkers in which locations are in better condition? Which are the cities which were Bunkerized the most? Which are the areas or regions where the bunkers now still remain intact? And maybe you could advise me which regions / cities should I investigate the most?

A8. Near the borders, in national parks, and remote areas where construction machinery cannot go easily (and destroy the bunkers for the scrap metal inside). I really recommend a visit to Sazan island which is the current research that I am following for the last three years.

This interview was conducted in the first stage of my thesis research, it improved significantly my understanding towards the relationship Albanians have with the bunkers and how has that developed over time. It is also reaching and speculating for its socio-political motivations, and discloses what is now known in Albania, the fragility and political sensitivity of the bunkers.

2.2 An Albanian adventure

The first destination in Albania was its capital Tirana. My field trip lasted 11 days and I was able to visit and investigate a significant number of bunkers. With its ups and downs I started my “bunker hunt” adventure in Tirana, the Albanian capital.

The first visit upon my arrival in Tirana, was the urban bunkers which were quite close to the central parts of the city. I did not need to search a lot for their locations, everyone knows where they are, somehow, they are converted by themselves into landmarks of the city.

“Bunkart”

The first one is the urban bunker just in between the governmental buildings. The entrance to the underground (tunnel) anti-nuclear bunker of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Albania. This bunker was built during 1981-1986. Its code name is (alb. “Objekti Shtylla” eng. “Object Pillar”). Objekti Shtylla was built by a department called Construction Enterprise within the Ministry of Construction. This bunker consists of 24 rooms, connected by tunnels and reaching Ministry building. Part of the tunnel bunker is an apartment for the Minister of Internal Affairs and a large hall dedicated to intercommunications. This tunnel bunker also as all the other ones built, was never used for its intended purpose³⁹.

The bunker now is a museum and part of the BunkArt museum series. During its renovation and reconstruction of some parts, it sparked controversy, and as a result Albanians passionately protested renovating and glorifying the bunker, their passion is against the over glorification and constant intends of remembering the tough times Albanians went through under Hoxha’s regime. Despite protests, the works continued, and the museum was opened in 2015.

The next visit also was part of the BunkArt museum series. The second tunnel bunker is located in the outskirts of Tirana, which was supposed to be the tunnel/bunker of the communist regime specifically the anti-nuclear bunker of Enver Hoxha. The bunker consists of 5 excavated floors, with 106 rooms and one assembly hall. In case of war or a possible attack, this was the bunker where all the regime would be transferred to live and conduct the war from³⁹. It is one the biggest bunkers built in Albania.

The visit continues to different locations where the bunkers are more or less intact, with the help of the friendliest Albanian I ever met, Elton Caushi, we aim on finding the pill boxes type bunkers, which dot the whole Albanian landscape and which are on my main interest.

³⁹ "The former anti-nuclear bunker of the Ministry of Internal Affairs," accessed 07 September 2021, <https://bunkart.al/2/faqe/the-former-antinuclear-bunker-of-the-ministry-of-internal-affairs>.

Tale

Our first stop is Tale, southwest of Albania, 40 min drive from Tirana.

In Tale we visited four medium size bunkers facing the Adriatic Sea and Strait of Otranto, causally waiting for possible Italian invaders. These bunkers are in an excellent shape, just behind them, there is a watch tower as well, quite an ignorant situation though, a watchtower which attracts attention and bunkers which try to hide and sneak. While being there it is hard to shift attention elsewhere, being around them takes you in emotionally, and they persist a very vigorous sense of presence. Ignoring the surrounding was the first thing I did without realizing it, when Elton told me to look on my back, just a bit further away, then I noticed, three other massive bunkers almost blending fully with the landscape. They were used for storing heavy artillery, and sheltering soldiers, also built by the communist regime. It is almost as they are part of a theatrical act, where they are still pretending to be the structures they were initially intended.

The roughness of the materials and their authenticity creates a vivid atmosphere on the site. Bunkers that theoretically are not really bunkers because they were never used as such, therefore it seems that they just play the role of the bunkers, they act as such by standing there somehow strategically waiting for something of a threat, and as you are around them, you become part of this enigmatic scenery.

While being present and trying to get involved emotionally as well with the current setting, one is experiencing mixed feelings, so much has not changed since they were built, they bare almost the same tough meaning as they used to, however now, with the help of freedom of expression we can view them differently, maybe even treat them differently in order to ease the meaning or shift it.

The interior of them it is surprisingly quite preserved, of course they didn't experience war so why shouldn't they be. One of the few damages would be the ones caused by harsh weather and strong winds, other than that, the interior is ready to perform in any way. All the four bunkers are identical and sitting on a rectangular concrete ground. So, the ground and the objects have the same materiality. An unexplainable enigmatic blend of the ground with the bunkers and the landscape they are in.

Patok

The second place we visited is the Lagoon of Patok. Part of the Lezhe municipality the Patok Lagoon is located in the Adriatic Sea and the Mediterranean Sea in the central coast of Albania, it is easily accessible and is just 50 km distance from the capital Tirana⁴⁰.

While driving there it is easy to get lost in the beauty of the lagoon, its dynamic and complex geological-geographical and ecological diversities. We visited four bunkers, three pillow box bunkers and one above the ground tunnel style bunker, the last one seemed that it wasn't fully completed.

With the setting being astonishing, the rainy grey and windy weather just added to the dramatic experience of the site. We decided first to visit the bunker which we first saw, not far from where we stopped, it was the pillow box bunker, very close to the water, unfortunately we couldn't approach for a close investigation due to the flooding of area. We were told by the owner of a hotel and restaurant close by, that there was no water in this area during the communist times, the lagoon emerged naturally by geo morphological and natural changes that were occurring in the Albanian landscape, and it is predicted that it the area is very sensitive and very likely to get flooded in the future.

The houses and hotel rooms in the lagoon are in the water stretching with a deck which enables circulation thorough the houses, it is truly a picturesque environment. A strangely perfect and cohesive composition of a multitude of natural elements brought together to create an awning experience of the landscape. The other three bunkers are reachable at this time just with a boat due to heavy rain.

I was very excited to be at this site, therefore I really was eager to go to the bunkers on these mini-islands and lucky for me, we saw three fishermen unloading lots of crabs that it seemed they have just caught.

And with my slightly broken Albanian accent went close to them and asked: *Greeting gentlemen, seems you had a productive day especially with the crabs today?* To be honest I wasn't really expecting a reaction, they were soaking wet and seemed very busy unloading the crabs.

One of the fishermen turned his head and looked at me, probably figuring out in his head where this accent is coming from... then he replied: *We've had better days!*

⁴⁰ "The Natural Wonder and Seafood Haven near the Capital," accessed 07 September 21, <https://www.intoalbania.com/attraction/patoku-lagoon/>.

I couldn't disagree with that, probably they had better days, at least drier ones! Without waiting more, I asked him if he could give us a lift to the very small island where the two bunkers are. We spend some time talking about it and if they had time and the fuel for the boat, and decided that we would go, but just in 30 minutes.

We waited in a nearby restaurant and we were offered Turkish coffee with home brewed grape rakia, by the owner Franquesko, and of course you just don't say no to that combination.

After swapping bunker and communist era stories our fisherman came and took us to his very small boat. Honestly, I was having doubts about this trip once I saw the boat. The incredibly harsh and rainy weather combined with that small boat, just didn't make me the happiest. But you only live once, right? I wanted to see the bunkers, so we did it.

We got in the boat, however, there was no place to sit, so we had to stand holding each other during the way. Once the boat started, I somehow picked up my camera and started filming, all the way until the bunkers. Once we arrived at the location, in a very difficult way, we got out of the boat, we realized that there were only bunkers and nothing else on this small islands.

Islands which their only existing purpose was to hold on these bunkers. Obviously, the bunkers were abandoned and flooded.

Even though the area seemed almost forgotten, it had an intriguing atmosphere, where the colour tone of water of the lagoon meets coherently the small islands and stretches out until the texture of the bunkers. In these types of sites, the bunkers seem to be identifying and characterizing the place, they just seem that they have been there way before this lagoon was even naturally created, the aboriginal pieces of the landscape.

As the site and the islands were in a very close proximity to each other, this makes them easily accessible. If flooded by small boats, if not by just walking, during summer maybe by swimming.

The condition of the bunkers in this site almost as any other site was quite good. Except the flooding and shallow water being inside one of the bunkers everything else seemed more or less, intact. This allows for various interpretation for a multitude of uses and interventions aiming to keep preserving the bunkers as they would be part of a culture heritage.

The three-medium pill-boxes bunkers were looking at the Adriatic Sea for possible enemies and invaders that never came, and that will never come. These bunkers represent more than just military objects, one could argue that they have no resemblance to military objects anymore, and perhaps they never did. They are defined as a unique symbol of Albanian totalitarianism, self-isolation and perhaps from a personal point of view it is also an individual self-isolation.

On our way back, after the third compliment about the crabs, the fisherman got the secret message, we all love crabs! Then he put them in an aquarium and gave us around 20 crabs. That's a bit too much we said but he insisted. So off we go to the next location, with an aquarium of crabs.

Qerret

Further on, the third location that we visited is Qerret a village situated in the central plains of Albania's Western Lowlands region. It is part of Tirana County. There we visited two medium sized pillow box bunkers. The bunkers are situated in the coast of Qerret, right on the beach, looking towards the endless sea. These bunkers are preserved and reused. However currently just one of the bunkers is open and running as a restaurant, while the other one is abandoned. They are in a quite close proximity to each other. The abandoned bunker used to be a pizzeria restaurant, painted in green and white, somehow looks impressive with an intriguing aesthetics, in constant dialog with the splashing waves of the Adriatic Sea.

The other bunker is a restaurant, it has been modified so much that it does not look like a bunker at all, however the name of it is, Restaurant Bunker. Concrete and steel structures have been attached to it and wrap it, so one could walk around and on the top of the bunker and enjoy the view of the Adriatic Sea.

We continue the journey to our next and final site, a village 18 km away from Tirana, approx. 40 min drive. In this village there is a family who lives among bunkers. There are nine bunkers in their garden, which we were able to see, and as the senior of the family said, there are also five tunnel bunkers just about five-minute hike from there. We were able to see six pillow box bunkers and one half-buried WWII Italian bunker or as Albanians call them "Mussolini bunkers".

A very unique case of many bunkers built in one family's garden. After the collapse of communism, they were left with around 15 bunkers in their garden. It is quite challenging to decide what to do with them, especially when you are imposed certain ideologies all this time, that the bunkers are there to protect you and to keep you safe.

The family decided to keep them and reuse them for farming purposes and hosting different traditional events. They were quite intact and preserved, Rato and his family took really good care of them. While talking to the owner Rato and being offered the second glass of rakia, he told us that his daughter's wedding has been held in one of the bunkers just in their garden. To be frank, it is understandable, when they occupy so much space in your land, you might as well use them for anything!

When Rato understood that I am from Kosovo, he became sentimental and quite emotional which I could not understand why in the moment. He then told me that during the Kosovo War in the 90's when Serbian forces launched a displacement campaign many of the Kosovar refugees came to Albania and that he has hosted many Kosovar families in the bunkers. He said that they wanted to stay in the bunkers, somehow made them feel safer. After swapping war stories and having the second glass of rakia, at that moment I realized that the bunkers mean something to us Kosovars as well, and even more so to me, perhaps indirectly.

The landscape and the setting of this location is quite different from the other ones we visited. These bunkers are classified as highland bunkers. So, they are supposed to be strategically located based on the necessity of the area.

The diversity of the landscape and the different levels, are a very promising quality of the site which enables the possibility to include and work with the level changes in relation to the bunkers in this site. One other positive feature of the site is that the bunkers are more or less hidden, around bushes and ferns, also just behind the row of bunkers there is a small forest which if you feel adventures you could walk it through and reach the tunnel bunkers. The small forest here acts as binding point or an area between the tunnels and the pillow box bunkers.

The possibilities of the site are countless, which offers different types of interventions strategies. The different levels, the element of surprise and the ability to architecturally enhance the hidden gems around the site, would provide a better connection between the different style bunkers and would be a way to start analysing and conceptualizing the site.

While my bunker adventure with Elton was coming to an end, I had to specifically plan the regions and locations I am going to visit, therefore I had one last meeting with Elton to discuss the "Bunker belt" which I had established beforehand and if those regions are worth a visit. During the meeting we added two more regions that would be particularly an interest for me and with minor changes to my initial plan, I continued my trip by myself.

Back to Tirana

The next location is the dense urban setting of Tirana. I started walking around Tirana and its ex-communist districts specifically the district called “Blloku” an area where only the ruling class of the country was allowed to enter during the communist times. Naturally, now it is accessible to everyone. The few pillow box bunkers which are left in Tirana are located in the Blloku district, specifically in the “memorial to communism” park just by the Parliament building. In this park I was able to find four pill box bunkers.

Disrespected by the local actors, the bunkers are left abandoned however used to their exteriors, performing as some sort of canvas for graffiti art pieces. This is one of the most common interactions that people have with the bunkers in all types of landscape settings. All four bunkers are in a close proximity to each other and all four of them are canvas frames of graffiti art. The layers of art are intertwined, all of them seem to be expressing different sort of messages, messages about love, friendship, sex, corrupted politicians, bright futures, ruined futures, troubled pasts, etc.

The ways that these urban bunkers are viewed from different groups of Albanians is quite specific and vigorous. Different groups of Albanians see them as constant reminders of a troubled past, while others see them as just objects of no interest, as things that weren’t supposed to be there, but are and one must find ways of co-existing with them.

Some entrepreneurs with particular interest on the business of tourism as Elton, see them as romanticized attractions for western tourists, they think that if these bunkers are made on the backs of the Albanians then, they should be able to get any service out of them.

Therefore, many local artists, architects and urban planners would like to reuse them and convert them in spaces dedicated to tourists with particular interest on the bunkers. Converting them to spaces which reflect the bunker fantasy and bunkerization project as such.

While taking notes, sketching and taking videos of the urban bunkers I had the chance to go inside of one of them. Barely fitting there I took my time to stay still and observe from the openings for gun placements. I stood there observing for almost thirty minutes. The level which I was observing was quite low meaning I was on eye level with the ground, yet still having a clear view of the entire outside.

It is rather difficult to find exact words to describe how I felt being there and observing, it almost felt illegal to be there, it seemed I’m posing threat to someone by just being there,

no one could see me, but I could see everyone, every movement, every conversation I could hear, I had a clear view on all what was happening, it felt uncomfortable and illegal!

And I rushed out, took my time to relax and was now observing towards the same view but standing on the ground, yet somehow now I didn't feel uncomfortable. One there realizes the vigorous power of an object like that, an object which the reputation it has, enables or triggers feelings of wrong-doing by just inhabiting it for some minutes. There one also realizes the intention of the government at that time, how everything becomes clear by just cautiously observing from that window, and cannot stop but carry the pressure of all that meaning and reputation of that object. The clearest view of the oppressor and aggressor towards the oppressed, its people!

How does one give new life to an object like that, how can that happen? I wondered. While my architect self has more than five answers ready to that question, my personally attached self who just experienced the inside of this object is doubting all of those answers.

After getting the necessary information from the urban bunkers and their surroundings I decided it is time to leave and continue to the next destination, that being Cape of Rodon.

Cape of Rodon

Cape of Rodon is a rocky cape on the Adriatic sea, it is situated on the north of the city of Durres. It is the one of the most picturesque settings I have ever visited. The untouched wild landscape reveals itself a captivating way, triggering all senses, alarming the human body of the surrounding exceptional pristine bucolic landscapes.

Frankly, while driving in the narrow roads of Cape of Rodon surrounded by the verdant flourishing panoramas, I suddenly have realized that I forgot about my main purpose of going there, I forgot about the bunkers!

When I reached the end of the long narrow road which took me through the whole cape, I came to a checkpoint, a very small cabin and a barrier next to it, apparently, I had to pay to get in that area. I approached the barrier, and a man came, I paid, then asked the man if he could direct me to the bunkers that I am looking for, I told him I am a student and would like to visit them.

After I asked that, suddenly a very strange situation arose, his face expression just changed, he looked worried and a bit hesitant and he said:

What institution you are part of? And why are you interested in the bunkers?

I repeated myself and said, I am a student of architecture and would like to analyse and take pictures of the bunkers, nothing more.

Maybe my accent didn't convince him that I am not a spy gathering secret information from the Albanian naval military and their bunkers near the coastlines! Even if I was a spy, those bunkers are no secret, they are abandoned ruins part of the landscape which no one now uses them for military purposes.

At that particular moment, one notices and understands, the traces of paranoia that Enver Hoxha imposed to his people, still remain fresh today, especially to the senior generations!

He didn't give me any instructions; told me he doesn't know anything and opened the barrier for me to pass. Frankly, with the suspicions he had, I was happy he let me in.

After I found a parking spot for my very small car, I decided to go for a hike in search for the tunnel bunkers which I have found them on the internet in Sweden. Except being known and popular for its majestic natural beauties and the clear sky-blue waters, Cape of Rodon is known as well for its history and legends.

Castle of Skanderbeg and church of St. Anthony are situated in the Cape of Rodon by the sea and both attract international attention. The castle of Skanderbeg is built between 1450-1452 in order to create an exit to the Adriatic Sea in case of an Ottoman invasion⁴¹. The church is also built during the same period in Romanesque and Gothic style, the panoramas surrounding it are exceptionally impressive.

While walking around their garden I noticed a series of pillbox bunkers by the beach, and further on, the Albanian flag was painted on all of them, so they were quite eye catching from a distance as well. While walking closer to them I arrived to the beach and noticed three large tunnels carved in the mountain which are on a close proximity to the beach.

Just near them there were workers working on building a beach bar, probably preparing it for the summer, seemed the perfect location for it. Then I asked one of the workers, what are those tunnels in the mountain just few meters away. He giggled and answered: *Those are Enver's tunnels, they used to have cannons here, he said!* Then he continued: *We are building a restaurant in one of the tunnels, go and check if you want!* After hearing that, I speed walked towards the tunnels. There were four of them, two being quite big with large open entrances, the other two were more modest in size. The one which was supposed to be reused as the restaurant of the beach bar it was cleaned and painted in white on the inside.

⁴¹ "Your Perfect Weekend-Escape Destination-Castle of Skanderbeg," IntoAlbania, accessed 08 Sep 2021, <https://www.intoalbania.com/attraction/cape-of-rodon/>.

Being very deep was something of a strange nature, seemed almost infinite, the white paint seemed to have somehow erased any traces left from the Communist era.

The other bigger tunnel was abandoned and had graffiti writings on the walls, messages, insults, slurs, portrait of people I didn't know and bullet holes, it just seemed like the other bunkers, a public canvas for art of different kinds. This tunnel was different than other ones, on the ground it had around thirty concrete blocks curved on the sides, probably serving for parking ships, or holding different kind of canons.

After spending some time around pillbox and tunnel bunkers it was time to continue my hike, and reach another set of bunkers which I had known in advance where approximately they were located.

Almost at the end of my hike, I reached a hill with one small pillbox bunker on the edge of the mountain, it was so close to the edge that it seemed it is even a bit cantilevered. When I carefully approached to it and went up the hill, what I saw it left me in awe!

I just stood and observed the panoramic view of the infinite Adriatic Sea meeting the sky in the most poetic way imaginable. By just looking to the sides, I was able to see how the cape stretches and curves while meeting the waters, its white sandy beaches and wild nature blended with rocky landscape captures one's deepest emotions. At that moment I felt a bit upset and guilty that I am enjoying this by myself and not with someone I love and care, therefore I wanted to facetime my partner to share these emotions with her. (She didn't pick up though...!)

Unfortunately, I couldn't get in the pillbox bunker, its entrance was taken over by the landscape. So, I observed it from the outside, did some sketches and wrote some texts about it, tried to make some sense of the relation of it with the setting.

Then I stood up and turned on my back and saw what I came there for, the five large tunnel bunkers carved in mountains. All of them abandoned! At that moment I realized I was surrounded with bunkers, trying to intimidate everything around them, even the dazzling and captivating landscape. All the surrounding was vulnerable towards the bunkers, as if they are still waiting for a possible invasion, waiting for the imaginary enemy which might come from the Adriatic.

I couldn't help but walk towards the bunkers, this time I was not speed walking. While approaching them their size becomes even more intimidating. Their regularity in a linear placement contradicts the naturality of the landscape. They were mainly intact, except for being as the other ones, the common public canvas of graffiti art. It is especially intriguing

to see the different layers of graffiti art on these bunkers, and in this particular case the inside of the bunkers was filled with informative texts and guidelines written during the communist era explaining step by step how to use the weaponry, what to consider while shooting, how to calculate the velocity of upcoming cannon balls and what orders to follow in case of enemy attack, these were all written on the walls, with also illustrative explanatory drawings complementing the written texts. The writings and illustrations were in bright colors and capital letters, emphasizing their importance. Each bunker had different drawings and illustrations corresponding to the type of the weaponry. The distance between them is eighteen meters and approximately 28 meters deep. Facing a flattened common area provides additional flexibility in the ways we could rethink these tunnel bunkers. The frontal common space could be used in numerous ways in direct relation to the bunkers and the infinite blue waters. It is the space which brings the sea and the bunkers even closer.

Taking in consideration all the factors involved in this site, still I could not see a clear identity of it, the captivating panoramas together with war dedicated architectural objects just were not the most romantic partners, somehow contradictory, somehow not belonging together.

Spending almost the entire day in the Cape of Rodon, the skies started getting cloudier and darker, therefore it was time for me to continue my journey.

Vlorë

The next destination in the list was Vlorë, a city in the south of Albania, it is the third most populous city, located on the foothills of the Caraquenian Mountains at the Strait of Otranto along the Adriatic and Ionian Sea within the Mediterranean Sea.

The first location that I visited within this region was Apollonia specifically its ancient city and its archaeological park. It is the most fascinating blend of panoramic landscapes and the archaeological park which has been preserved in an exceptionally intact condition. The coherent appearance of monument and nature generates an atmosphere of relaxation and meditation. The ancient city of Apollonia of Illyria was found during the first half of the 6th century BC by Greek colonists from Corfu and Corinth led by Gylax which named the city initially by his name Gylakeia. Its name later changed to Apollonia based on the powerful divinity Apollo⁴².

⁴² "Apollonia - Where Roman Emperor Augustus studied philosophy ", accessed 08 Sep 2021, <https://albania.al/destinations/apollonia/>.

A similar effect to Cape of Rodon, Apollonia had when I first visited it, disregarding the idea of visiting the bunkers, surrounded by these historical buildings and ruins, one allows themselves being captivated by them.

At that time, there were just a few tourists, so while buying the ticket to enter I took my chance to ask the ticket person if she knows if I can reach the bunkers situated in the archaeological site.

Having a relatively negative experience in the previews location when I tried that, I felt quite sceptical this time, but she surprised me by showing a great interest on the topic I am interested, drew me a map of the bunkers that she knows are there, and advised me of other locations near Apollonia that I could visit, she wished me luck and gave me a discount on the ticket while saying: *If you came from Sweden just for these bunkers, the least what I can do is give you a discount!*

After thanking her multiple times, I continued going through the ancient ruins of Apollonia, taking a lot of photos and videos, I again found myself questioning the correlation of the ancient city with the landscape and the bunkers built during the 70s. Following her map, I found myself passing through Apollonia's Triumphal Arch, its Library, Theatre, Odeon, multiple Temples, its gates, baths, its gymnasium, the Archaic Agora and Villa excavations, then I reached the other ruins, not the Greek-Romano-Illyrian ruins but the ruins of Communist Albania!

Located on a hill in a very close proximity to the ancient city, overlooking an area which is thought to be by the archaeologists the ancient city's square.

And here they were, multiple bunkers which they seemed to have been tunnel bunkers, however now, the landscape instead of winning them over and covering them even more, it acted on the contrary, it revealed them. The ceiling of most of them was visible and I could walk on them. Two of the bunker's ceiling was removed, therefore they peered somewhat strange.

They were situated on a circular footprint and therefore created a courtyard where in the middle used to be three pillbox bunkers. It is of a strange nature that these bunkers are not only ignored by the Albanian people, but also, they are ignored by the government and institutions working with cultural heritage remains and archaeological ruins. One cannot stop but ask how is it possible that these communist ruins are not part of any sort of preservation project, why they are not included on the printed maps that this archaeological park provides for its visitors, why they are deciding that these bunkers are of no significant

importance. These are questions that I kept asking to myself and to local actors that I had the chance to interview.

The district of the ancient Apollonia where these bunkers are located is called Agorolla. These bunkers technically belong to the archaeological cultural heritage of Agorolla, they are part of that rural fabric, however they continue to be ignored, even though they stand in between the ruins of the ancient city.

They capture the attention of the visitors and most of the times, even though they are not included in the official visiting sites, people would often interact with them, wonder what they are, then guessing that these might be the famous bunkers of the communist Albania, it is of a strange nature of international visitors as well that these are not included in the official maps of the site. They are significant remains of their era, represent a certain history that has mental and physical traces still to this day. These should have been included as part of the protected ruins same as the ruins of the ancient city of Apollonia.

The five bunkers are all connected with one underground narrow tunnel which goes through all five bunkers, this was used for safer circulation and communication between the soldiers.

The way these fortifications are situated in a circular footprint concentrated and looking to the courtyard seems almost that a spiritual ritual is about to happen in the courtyard, which conceptually and theoretically could take shape of a performing art outdoor theatre space, being constantly overlooked by the ruins of the bunkers which could perhaps put to use complementing the courtyard.

I spent the entire day there, personally having a special interest on ancient history made the experience even more educational. And seeing it blend so naturally with the fortifications I was researching, seemed to be the perfect and most relaxing location to spend the day, writing, sketching, taking videos and reflecting on different layers of civilization, history, art, military, oppression and politics, enhanced the flexibility, possibilities and the potential of the site.

I would like for other visitors to have a similar experience as I did, or even more enhanced in experiencing all what the site has to offer, which is: nature, ancient ruins, and communist era fortifications. All these elements have a deep relation to the landscape and the territory they are occupying which I am to reflect greatly in my film.

Following the suggestions from the ticket agent I continued to the next bunkers which were located not far away, there I could find only two small pillbox bunkers connected by a corridor, overlooking the valley of Pojan, Fier.

Time was to continue my journey to the other locations but made an important stop after just leaving the Apollonia archaeological site.

In the corner of the road which connects to the national road I noticed a perfectly intact medium sized pillbox bunker, with a text graffiti on it saying “hi mom” and a very convenient entrance with a small side road to it. And obviously I had to stop and film.

Side of the road

These spontaneous stops during my adventure were very important and crucial of my overall journey. It was exactly how I imagined, that almost everywhere you turn, you might eventually see a bunker, then if you get closer and look better, you might find even more bunkers, usually in someone’s garden being practically used or just abandoned.

After getting out of the car I noticed there is another identical bunker approximately two hundred meters away. They both seemed they are used from someone for storage of agricultural goods. Later on, I understood that this particular bunker is quite popular, mainly because of its eye catching graffiti “hi mom” written by American tourists.

After taking my time and taking photos and videos of the “hi mom” bunker, I continued my journey to Seman Beach near the city of Fier. It started getting darker and clouds took over the skies, which naturally made the setting more climatic and striking. The drive on gravel roads through exquisite rivers, in between forests and lagoons made the trip to Seman extremely sentimental.

Spontaneous stops were a continuous part of this trip where almost every two hundred or three hundred meters I would stop to take pictures and videos of bunkers situated in various locations, in mini-islands, in the lagoon, on the land near the coast lines and in between the forest areas. The final point of this trip was the beach of Seman which unfortunately I couldn’t walk it through, the wind and the heavy rain made it difficult. However, being entirely by myself and having the chance to experience and observe the forces of nature surrounding me was a melodramatic experience of the context.

It was time to finish up for the day and go back to Vlorë, where I had to make a plan for the next day. By this point I had visited the majority of the locations I initially planned. I had two more regions in my list that I was interested on, however considering the limited

time left I could not go and visit them. I had to compromise and go to another location which was close to my Airbnb apartment and the city of Vlorë.

Orikum

I felt particularly excited and motivated about visiting Orikum (Orikos-Oricum) and witnessing the uniqueness and potential of the site. Orikum is situated on the southern bay of Vlora, where nearby lies the ancient city on the hill known as Pleokastër.

Once erroneously attributed to Scymnus, Orikos on the Illyrian coast was founded by a group of Euboeans, blown off their route on their return home from Troy⁴³.

The area used to be restricted only to the naval military, only in the beginning of 2003, the Albanian government decided to demilitarize part of the naval base at Orikum and turn the hill of Paleokastër and its immediate surroundings into an archaeological park⁴³. However still in order to reach the archaeological park you need to have a special permission and pass through the naval military checkpoint meaning that technically the archaeological site is within the Pasha Liman naval military base even though majority of the site is demilitarized.

Pasha Liman used to be the only USSR base in the Mediterranean in the 1950s⁴⁴. It was the hot spot of conflict between the Russians and the Albanians in 1961 when Albania pulled out of the Warsaw Pact. Many Albanians consider this conflict as the start of the downhill of the Communist regime Albania's economy and was the starting point of the self-isolationist state. Most ships currently are out of operation. Following the collapse of the Communist regime, the base was rebuilt by Turkey and under a bilateral agreement the Turkish Navy has the right to use it.

Naturally a site such as this is heavily fortified, especially by the communist regime. In the entire area there is a great number of bunkers which are not used by the military since they are not in conditions to full fill basic durability requirements as regular fortifications do. Enver's bunkers are abandoned even from the military, they have almost lost all of their bunker defensive meaning.

Once I arrived to the naval checkpoint, I was slowly walking towards the barrier and I was encountered by a tall intimidating soldier holding what it seemed to be a heavy firearm. He told me to not approach closer and asked me the reason of being here. I told him I would

⁴³ Vasil Bereti, Gionata Consagra, Jean-Paul Descœudres, Saïmir Shpuza, and Christian Zindel, "ORIKOS – ORICUM: FINAL REPORT ON THE ALBANO-SWISS EXCAVATIONS, 2007–2010.," no. *Mediterranean Archaeology* 26, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24653548>.

⁴⁴ Gordon H. McCormick, "The Soviet Presence in the Mediterranean.," 7388., no. *Rand* (1987.).

like to visit the archaeological site and would like to pass through. He told me I need to buy a ticket and directed me to a small cabin on the side of the road and he specifically told me that I cannot enter the site alone, I must go in with the ticket agent person. The archaeological site was 20-minute drive from the checkpoint meaning that I had to take the ticket agent in the car with me.

That last request worried me, considering that we are in an unusual pandemic situation I was not keen on taking an unknown person in my car. I asked the soldier if it is okay if the ticket agent comes with his car while I follow him with my car?

He said it is not possible and that someone should have a constant eye on me, on what I would be doing there, and he specifically said that here it is not my house's garden and I cannot just walk in here and do whatever I want, which came through as passive aggressive.

This seemed a rather strange request, considering that it is not an active military area and contradicted what was officially stated in the Orikum Archeological park's website. Perhaps my enthusiasm and my overly expressed interest on the bunkers was so obvious that he felt some sort of suspicion towards me! Perhaps I just looked like a spy, for the second time.

I asked the ticket agent if he feels okay and if he is showing any symptoms of the virus, he stated that he has been showing symptoms lately therefore we decided it is not the best idea for us to be in the same car. Therefore, I returned my ticket and waved at the soldiers and thanked them for their help and disappointed I left the site.

I was particularly interested on this site since I started learning more about its complexity in history, culture, reputation, and geo-ecology. A demilitarized semi naval base combined with archaeological ruins blended in with meticulous landscapes and blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea made the location mysterious yet inviting.

The last stop of the day and of the entire trip is the Vjosa River which is one of Europe's last and largest wild rivers, stretching more than 270km. It is untamed and free-flowing, characterized by spectacular canyons, braided river sections, oxbows, roaming stretches and islands covered with vegetation. Almost all of it is intact and free-flowing which creates a unique network of rivers, streams and stretches bursting with life⁴⁵.

It is almost unimaginable how a site like this would have a relation with fortifications and bunkers, but unfortunately or fortunately, it has! Along the majestic widely renowned river one can see traces of the communist era, yes indeed, one could see bunkers along the river.

⁴⁵ "The Vjosa/Aoos River, wild and free," accessed 02 Sep 2021 <https://www.iucn.org/regions/eastern-europe-and-central-asia/projects/vjosaaos-river-wild-and-free>.

The condition of them is unknown since nobody has paid attention to them. It was rather difficult to reach close to the river however I was able to do so only on one occasion where fortunately I stumbled upon some bunkers along the river.

Similar to other regions it is rather difficult to put together landscapes of this quality and bunkers on the same page. Theoretically and conceptually difficult but not technically, since they exist, and even so, they co-exist. The bunkers I stumbled upon were in a quite bad condition, I could barely see their famous cupolas, these bunkers were almost completely transformed into ruins, blended with the rocky ground. For any reason the most intact part of them were the connecting corridors, I could clearly see them and understand how they were placed and situated within the area. Seemed that this particular site was heavily fortified with bunkers in groups of three.

With the lack of information about the exact placement of bunkers and lack of any infrastructure along the Vjosa river I could not continue my adventure further one and that marked the end of my bunker hunt for the day and for the whole trip.

2.2.1 Conclusion of the Albanian adventure

I approached this study trip with the maximum flexibility possible, I decided in advance that I would allow myself stepping in different professions, challenging the conventional architectural research processes, and allowing myself to be whoever I wanted to be, stepping out of my comfort zone.

One common thought about the visited sites is that I would have spent a whole day in each of the locations if I had the time, these places had so much to offer despite the condition they currently are.

This reflection generates thoughts about the impact of the rural landscape in our everyday life. We often put almost our entire energy into the urban fabrics, conceptualizing density and aim on investing in our everyday city life. But we often forget about the importance and cruciality of the rural and its relation to our everyday dynamic city life.

The bunker adventure not only taught me a lot about military architecture and communist troubled history, but also brought me closer to nature, land, and landscape. Taught me how not to look only what's in front of me, but to leave things to interpretation. Allowing myself

to be spontaneous and open minded during the whole journey was the deriving point for deeper connection about the upcoming design processes and inspirations.

Considering that most of the bunker are abandoned and the lack of information about them, one common way Albanians approach this topic is to allow themselves to have a self-interpretation perspective on how they used to be built, what they were used for, why is the shape the way it is. It's a guessing game among Albanians perhaps in daily basis, everyone has an opinion about them. So, I'm allowing myself to be in that game as well, I am guessing and self-interpreting their nature, and their possible initial uses as well

The ten days journey was not only informative and descriptive, but also it was an eye-opening experience as well. Being aware and to some extent part of different cultures, their struggles, history, their troubled past, its psychological effects on the present times, particular ways of life, not only adds to the broadening of one's professional apprehension but connects them personally to the topic, brings one's real personality and human values of understanding each other's struggles and journeys, and most importantly reflecting on them personally.

Part III

3.1 Architectural/artistic methodology – The future and the film

As mentioned quite earlier in the process the strategy of implementation of possible interventions would more or less be similar or adaptive to the whole Albanian Landscape. Naturally, the interventions and proposals have the ability to adapt to their context, or more importantly the context shapes the intervention. The practical part of the thesis is influenced by the land art movement in USA. This part and strategy are integrated in the third part (the future) of the "Project Bunker" film.

Land art is a movement that creates site specific structures, art forms, installations and sculptures using the natural landscape. This form of art was outgrowth of Minimalism and Conceptualism. This movement is practiced and references art that blends and greatly relates to their environment and surrounding. It was also a mean of protesting against the commercialization of art in city centres, commercial art galleries and museums⁴⁶.

⁴⁶ "Earth Art Movement Overview and Analysis," The Art Story Contributors
Edited and published by The Art Story Contributors, 2015, accessed 07 Sep 2021, <https://www.theartstory.org/movement/earth-art/>.

While in the Albanian landscape the visited locations vary greatly, this enables opportunities to implement minor and minimal interventions, to a similar nature of land art projects.

One similar aspect of bunkers, the possible interventions and land art projects such as Walter di Marias (the lightning field) is their active and passive phases. Walter di Marias lightning field is situated in a remote deserted area, it is comprised of 400 polished stainless-steel poles installed in a rectangular grid⁴⁷. Its most active phase reaches when the lightning strikes and one experiences it, however it has its passive phase which is the time when the lightning does not strike, which is most of the time and therefore people are encouraged to spend as much time as possible in the field especially during sunset and sunrise, to experience the field on its somewhat passive phase.

The minimal architectural interventions on the Albanian Bunkers aim to have their active and passive phases. Their active phase being on the peak of their performance while being on direct interaction with the bunkers, while their passive phase would be their objective performance as objects trouv  , a passive preservation of the bunkers and its surrounding.

⁴⁷ "Walter De Maria, The Lightning Field," accessed 07 Sep 2021, <https://www.diaart.org/visit/visit-our-locations-sites/walter-de-maria-the-lightning-field/>.

3.2 Project Bunker

The main outcome of this thesis is the film “Project Bunker”

“Project bunker” film has three parts, each aiming to stimulate attention to aspects that matter, raise questions and perhaps answer some, it also intends to authentically express and transmit the experience I personally had during my time in Albania and to allow the audience enter my thought process.

Once I started filming in Albania, I couldn’t stop, it was clear to me that this is the most prominent way to artistically and architecturally reflect upon the complicated topic of the Albanian bunkers. It was crucial to show their relation to the landscape, the way these bunkers present and reveal themselves. Their instrumentality and atmospheric authenticity are clearly intended to be captured in video format in order to have the closest experience as to being there.

While acknowledging and considering the extensive number of bunkers in the Albanian landscape and their enigmatic ubiquitous nature, influenced and informed significantly the film making strategy.

Film making it appeared to be the most promising medium that would allow my initial intentions and strategies to take shape. It is able to capture in a wholistic and comprehensive way all aspects of this complicated topic. This strategy also is making certain that all bunkers are included in the project, creating a philosophical bunker infrastructure, meanwhile it is showcasing the uniqueness of the visited sites, bunkers and their relations with the population.

The parts of the film are established as following:

Part I – *The past*

This part of the film includes the historical context and provides a comprehensive outlook on the life in Albania during communist regime. By using authentic archived footage this part of the film is gradually providing the context upon which the other parts will follow. The usage of specific situations, moments and interactions between different hierarchies within the state, this part of the film intends to inform us about the dreadful, unrightful and xenophobic politics of the communist state.

Part II – *The present*

Part II or the present includes real footage taken in Albania during my field trip in March 2021. This part of the film aims to reflect upon the current situation in Albania and specifically aims to demonstrate the relation of bunkers with the landscape and the people. It showcases bunkers all over Albania in several locations, their ubiquity, degraded state, and their active state. This section includes multiple interviews with Elton Caushi, a Tirana based entrepreneur who works closely with the bunkers and runs a touristic agency, which aims on promoting Albania's contested communist heritage.

While filming the bunkers my intentions were to capture their current state in the most authentic way possible, this extends to the ways I zoom into the bunkers in order to have a closer look and feel of their rough concrete texture and ways I film multiple bunkers at once in constant dialogue with the nature and the landscape. The element of surprise is included in all the parts of the film particularly in this specific section, where the spontaneous finds of bunkers extend my previously planned intentions. The spontaneous finds are of various nature. Many bunkers on their interiors and exteriors are used as a public canvas by all generations. This is a phenomenon which has characterized one of the most direct relations of the Albanian people with the bunkers. Many of the bunkers still carry the writings and slogans which carry Communist propaganda and technical advices to the soldiers on how to use the military equipment's in case the imaginary enemy ever arrives. This particular aspect greatly influences Part III of the film and ways the imagined future is envisioned.

Part III – *The future*

Part III mainly includes animations which reflect my thoughts and design process throughout all the thesis. The animations are greatly influenced by real stories of people and events that took place in Albania. It is also a metaphor of the relation between the people and bunkers. This part is greatly influenced by Part II, especially by the slogans and writings found within the bunkers.

The stylistic properties of the animations are also influenced by the way bunkers are currently being treated. Their vivid colours, expressions and texts, intends to express the trajectory of the journey of an Albanian individual and a whole population.

Part III of the film has three sequences, each of them intends to express a particular point of time of an Albanian individual and a whole population and their experiences. The strategy behind the configuration of these animations is influenced by the writings on the

walls of the bunkers and it is lightly mimicking that particular aspect of bunker-people relation.

The three sequences of the animation express an architectural facet of the future of the bunkers and the bunkerization project as such. It hints and suggests new ways people would interact with the bunkers and the landscape. This thereafter will enable for an individual - self to reflect upon what one experiences. Therefore, here the ability to interact with the bunkers and the landscape transcends the significance of using and reusing the bunkers. This specific aspect is influenced by the land art movement in USA.

The transition between the three sequences is intentionally enhanced. It is crucial to follow the different character of the text and their meaning between the sequences. As mentioned earlier, the text represents the voice of Albanians, and communicates a narrative in itself. This parallel story develops from the first sequence where the audience would see, feel and understand the degraded, furious, hopeless, dreadful, sad, voice of the people. This sequence generates a better understanding of the mood of people during the rule of the dictator Enver Hoxha.

The second sequence continues with a gradual change of the character of the text and the mood of the people's voice. The gradual shift occurs in close relation to the narrative and it intends on expressing the way people feel during that point in time. The narrative continues from the furious and hopeless to a more promising and hopeful yet confused mood. This reflects the time while the communist regime was coming to an end. This period is characterized with various events in the Albanian political scene and generates a state of confusion between people. Many expressed their enthusiasm for a possible brighter future while others did not hide their scepticism and uncertainty of the events.

The last animated sequence follows the narrative while presenting a brighter future of the relation between people and bunkers, simultaneously it intends to display a voice of the people which have finally crossed the difficult barriers of this discourse and are able to reflect upon the bunkers in a reinvigorated way. Instead of constant reminders of a traumatic past, the bunkers will have the possibility to take new and optimistic meanings.

In order to experience the intended messages and journey it is advised to pay great attention to the text of each scene of the animations. They are designed to carry the story into a more personalized level.

Conclusion

In order to change the meaning of the bunkers to a more hopeful one, the minds of the people should change first. The future of the bunkerization project should be allowed a great flexibility. These bunkers were built on the back of the people, and people should decide what the future will unfold. However, architects, urbanists and designers should take the lead and a stand, that there must be a future of the bunkerization project, a future which does not reflect the trauma, but reflects a reinvigorated meaning of the bunkers.

It is of a crucial importance that any bunkerization project of the present, enables discourses which shape the future. The normalization of these topics between the general public in Albania is essential in order to achieve a future which includes the bunkers as cultural heritage with bright and hopeful meanings. The future of the bunkerization project could take various shapes and directions, only architecture will not provide the trajectory which is needed. Therefore, this is a collective project, where communities from multiple backgrounds are brought together to communicate, reflect and design their own future.

Albanian people have gone through many difficulties, especially during the communist regime, - it is time to transcend metaphysical obstacles and concentrate on the future, and that is rarely achieved by ignoring the past. Therefore, the future of the bunkers depends on the discourse of today.

This is an issue which surpasses the Albanian context, it is a global ongoing issue which requires great sensibility by all actors involved. There is no clear path or strategy of how each individual case should be treated, their differences, historic timeline and their contemporary development makes each case very unique. In order to partake in a fair and democratic future where humanitarian values such as equality and freedom of say are celebrated, a uniquely contextualized socially and environmentally sustainable strategy of the future must be put in place. Aiming for a global utopian future is not a rational and pragmatic path, therefore contextualizing the issues, revisiting history and breaking conventional barriers would enable and encourage various discourses within societies.

LINK TO THE TRAILER OF THE FILM:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pldfIIWiR64&t=100s>

Please Enjoy

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