

MASTER THESIS

Himara: an analysis of the social development in the light of the architectural transformations

Establishing the process of assembling and archiving
as an architectural approach

Giannenta Milio B.Sc.





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AFFIDAVIT

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Acknowledgements

*“... Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.
Without her you wouldn't have set out.
She has nothing left to give you now.*

*And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
you'll have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.”*

C.P. Cavafy: Collected Poems (Princeton University Press, 1975)

This project was inspired by the life and work of my grandfather, Simo Milo, who taught me the importance of providing to the community and working towards the common good. His love and dedication to Himara are timeless values, in which I find purpose and an example to follow in all times.

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Retracing Architecture

In this project, I aim to extrapolate how an approach to architecture can possibly influence the way society works. Seeing the state of oblivion to which my hometown is subject now and taking a private archive of the time of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania as a departure point, I bring the concept of assembling and archiving as an essential approach and practice. The community in question has lived on based on non-written laws for centuries. "Under the rule of the Ottoman Sultans, Himara lived as a self-governing province, free, in which the law enforcement of the occupiers did not apply, but was governed by its Eldership based on their unwritten laws and the judgment of the people themselves."¹

According to Rene Puaux, the ancient patriarchal institution of the eldership was enough to bring order and serenity. He states: "They govern themselves on the primitive system of the demogeronties (the People's Senate), the eight "village elders" administering justice and regulating the affairs of the commune. The affairs of the district are dealt with in a joint session of the demogeronties at the village of Himara. This patriarchal machinery is quite sufficient to ensure stability and keep order."²

The privileges accredited from the Ottoman Empire enabled this specific form of governance which was retained in most of its power until the establishment of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in Albania. In 1945, a drastic governmental change occurred with the election of the Albanian Labor Party. This inevitably brought a radical political, economic, and societal change. The law of the Albanian Labor Party was applied in Himara in 1945. The process of the collectivisation of the property started as a result of the agrarian reform. It is important here to underline that this governmental change shaped and transformed the social life and also the architecture in Himara. In this particular moment in history, the process of alternative archiving and documenting takes on an eminent character and has an additional meaning and perspective seen from today's precarious condition. The process of archiving and documenting was seen as crucial for the maintenance and subsistence of the People's Socialist Republic that was being established. As the collectivization of the property was being applied, the leaders of the cooperative started to meticulously archive all the property that was being nationalised, documenting the (former) owners. This made possible the fair distribution of the pensions at that time. The importance that we see nowadays lies in the access we have to important information in order to dissolve the state of confusion and amnesia that the society is struggling with.

"By means of nationalization, the big and medium capitalist property in the city was liquidated and replaced by socialist public property. The form of state capitalism was not used. The nationalization was carried out in a profoundly revolutionary way, based on expropriation without compensation. The private property of the small-scale producers of the towns was changed into a socialist property by means of the voluntary uniting of these producers in cooperatives of artisans which, in the long run, merged into state enterprises. The private property of small-scale producers in the countryside was changed into cooperative state property by means of the collectivization of agriculture. The collectivization was begun and completed without the prior nationalization of the land owned by the small producers and which, according to the law, they could not sell and buy, and without waiting for the prior industrialization of the country, but parallel with the rise and development of the new socialist industry. In the process of the collectivization of agriculture and the development of industry, the material-technical base of large-scale socialist production was created in the countryside, too, while the nationalization of the land was carried out de jure in the new Constitution of 1976."³

¹ Memorandum of Spiro Milo, sent to Wilhelm II, King of Germany, 3rd of September 1913, Spiro Milo Archive in Greek historical and ethnological company

² Rene Puaux, *The sorrows of Epirus*, (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1918), 45

Starting from a private archive and after analyzing how social relations and development have influenced and altered architecture, I come to the conclusion that a new archiving process has to be performed and become ongoing. It is of great value to trace and understand the effect that the social relations and the societal changes have on architecture, in order to understand further and improve the process of making architecture.

“We understand something by locating it in a multi-determined temporal continuum. Existence is no more than the precarious attainment of relevance in an intensely mobile flux of past, present, and future.”⁴

The creation of a shared library and archive will be an essential part of this thesis that will gather and assess the relevance of different socio-economic factors that influence the process of making architecture. The meaning of such an archive is also to create a multi-factorial temporal continuum, that gives the reader the relevance of factor(s) into the flux of past, present, and future. The social relations in which architecture has been developed in different periods in time is merely one part of the broad scope of these influential factors. The property concern is seen here as a crucial factor. We have to consider the fact that the archive in hand was created based on the property relations and also the fact that now the contemporary state archives are impaired and hardly accessible.

Another drastic political and societal change happened in 1990 with the fall of the dictatorship and the establishment of the Republic of Albania. Since then, the country and especially the region of Himara are undergoing a transition phase that is inevitably mirrored in the architectural practice.

“Albania’s Stalinist economic system, however, disintegrated so completely in the early 1990s that the people had little choice but to take cover as the government enacted sweeping free-market reforms. Article 1 of an August 1991 law on economic activity ripped the heart out of the Stalinist economic system, providing for the protection of private property and foreign investments and legalizing private employment of workers, privatization of state property, and the extension and acceptance of credit. Government officials set to work drafting a new civil code, a revised commercial code, new enterprise laws, and new banking, tax, labour, antitrust, and social security legislation. Widespread anarchy, an almost complete production shutdown, a paucity of capital, and a lack of managers trained to deal with the vagaries of a market economy slowed the reform process.”⁵

The factors that are driving the architectural practice now are the rapid touristic development and financial profit. For the first time, the region of Himara has a seasonal lifestyle. Life in the region is no longer sustainable during the whole year but only throughout the tourist season. This phenomenon can be seen critically under the scope of the qualitative architectural practice but maybe also as another phase in history that might as well stay documented for the generations to come. In the current situation, the property issue is not being clarified, documents are being falsified, and the archives are hardly accessible. Understandably, this is a significant bottleneck in the architectural and building process. It is therefore of great importance for me to (re)-establish an archival and documenting process within the ambit of a shared library. The purpose of the library is to create, collect, and maintain the knowledge and information that will serve the community.

⁴Maria Popova, @brainpicker, January 17, 2019, <https://www.brainpickings.org/2019/01/16/susan-sonntag-cioran-history/>

⁵Albania : a country study (Washington: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress ; edited by Raymond E. Zickel and Walter R. Iwaskiw, Second Edition, First Printing, 1994), 118

Geographic position and Geopolitics

Himara is situated along the Ionian coast, in the south-west of Albania. It is surrounded by mountains on three sides and has access to the Ionian Sea towards the south. The historical development was influenced by the geographic position close to the main trading ways of the time. The Mediterranean climate allows great agricultural development and subsequently a developed economy. At the same time, the mountainous relief influenced the temperament of the inhabitants and led to fortified types of settlements.



Fig.1: Map of Himara Integrated Sustainable Development of the Southern Coastal Region, GIZ Albania, 2018,8

The ancient city of Himara was situated on top of the hill where the old village of Himara is located today. The hill was fortified for the first time in the 13th century BC. The wall of the city was built in the 5th century BC with polygonal cyclopean stones and, in a second period, with quadratic stones.

Himara was mentioned in ancient texts as a region in the North of Epirus, stretching across the Ionian seaside and bordered by the Akrokeuraunian Mountains. The homonymous town was built over and additively to the ancient town with the ruins still being preserved.

The village of Himara is accessible from the National road. However, in order to reach the old town and the ruins, one has to follow some small narrow pathways going up the hill. On the very top of the hill reigns the first and oldest settlement, dating to 2700 years ago. The settlement developed radially in relation to the old walls as it was growing in wider circles. The creek, which is a natural protection of the fortification, streams along the mountains and adds to the beautiful scenery that has inspired many local and foreign artists over the centuries. One of the speculations over where the name of the settlement comes from is the word cheimarros – Greek for stream or creek.

“The correct writing of Himara, as derived from the deity of the storms, winter and the lightning Chimera, it is written with an iota (i) and one r, not with two (Heimarra), since it does not come from the place between two torrents. In its place was the ancient city of Chimera. The reference of the mainland Himara is found for the first time in Syracuse, by the poet Theodoridas.

A Tomb epigram of Greek Anthology (7, 529) states:

The old man, the man in heaven and Hades brings him.

So Sosander’s son, Dorotheos, is thrown in the fire.

Because, asking for liberty in Fthia day, he was shipwrecked between the Sikus and the Himara.”

M. Dendia explains how Sikum is the current Semenik of Dalmatia. Himara is not known. (Apulia and Himara, Athens, 1927, 38).

Extract from Kostas Hadjiantoniou’s book “Himara. The bare castle of Northern Epirus “

Himara in History

The information that the archaeologists gathered in the caves in Spile, the town centre in Himara, tell us that the latter has served as a nomad dwelling in the time when built settlements were not yet created.

Spile, the name of the modern-day town centre is actually the Greek word for cave. Between the year 1930 and 1939 Luigi Cardini, an Italian prehistorian to the Italian Archaeological Mission in Albania was exploring on-site in Himara with impressive results. Together with the remains of ceramics that were found in the caves, the explorations of Cardini show that Himara was inhabited since the middle and beginning of the Late Minoan period, 16th and 15th century BC.

“With the development of production, the tribal community in Himara starts abandoning the nomad way of life behind and leaves the caves to start settling in residential areas that were protected from the enemies and the pirates..”⁶

In the region of Himara, in proximity to the old castle, there is Grammata Bay (the Bay of Letters in Greek). In the rocks of the Bay, there are ancient inscriptions to be found, that have been studied at different times from the historians. One of these inscriptions discovered in Grammata Bay is dedicated to the Dioscuroi (Δίος + Κούροι), Polydeuces and Kastor were the twin children of Zeus and Leda and brothers of Helen of Troy. The Dioscuroi, who according to the myth grew up in Sparta, in the royal household of Tyndareus, was particularly important to the Spartans. They associated the Dioscuroi with the Spartan tradition of dual kingship, which was a traditional governmental trait in Himara as well. According to the myth, they had once found refuge in a sea cave near Grammata Bay and were since then worshipped in a small temple. With the recession of the Mycenaean civilisation, Epirus was the target area of the Dorian invasions (1100-1000 BCE). The region’s native inhabitants were forced to move towards the south by the Dorians. From this displacement of the population, three main tribes came to light in Epirus: the Thesprot of southwestern Epirus, the Molossian of central Epirus, and finally the Chaones of northwestern Epirus – who are the ancestors of the natives in Himara. They lived in settlements of small villages, in contrast to the majority of the other Greek tribes, who lived in or around city-states. With the fall of the Aeacid monarchy, in 232, the Epirote alliance was transformed from a coalition of tribes into a federal state – the Epirote League, with a parliament (synedrion). The league led an agitated course during the conflicts between Rome and Macedonia and in 170 BCE, and during the Third Macedonian War (171–168), the league split apart. The Molossians were on the side of Macedonia while the Chaones and Thesprot were siding with Rome. Molossia was taken over by Rome in 167, and 150,000 of its inhabitants were enslaved.

Central Epirus could recover only in the Byzantine period, and the coastal areas were able to prosper as part of a Roman province. As the Roman Empire was divided in 395 CE, Epirus was the western province of the Eastern Empire and an independent Kingdom was maintained until 1318 when the Albanian Principalities overran the area, and later in 1430, it was annexed by the Ottoman Empire. In order to compromise with the inhabitants by giving them a set of privileges in the form of a series of regulations that were allowing the inhabitants to carry guns and exchange their goods, they also got a chance to trade with foreign countries, and others. The full documentation of these rights and regulations is hardly accessible as the original papers were stored in the archives of the former Empire. These regulations were called “Venome” and were signed for the first time from the Sultan Bajaziti II of the Ottoman Empire in 1492. The rights granted to the region of Himara from the Ottoman Empire ensured the autonomy of the region from the Turkish rule. The “Venome” was a set of rights granted as an agreement between the Rulers of the Empire and the Senate of Himara, regulating economic and governmental organization, as well as, the circulation of people.

⁶Prof. Dr. Priamo Bollano, Himara me venomet e saj, nje histori per liri a vdekje [Himara with her Venome, a history of freedom or death], (Tirana: TSGT, 2009), 19

Central Epirus could recover only in the Byzantine period, and the coastal areas were able to prosper as part of a Roman province. As the Roman Empire was divided in 395 CE, Epirus was the western province of the Eastern Empire and an independent Kingdom was maintained until 1318 when the Albanian Principalities overrun the area and later in 1430 it was annexed by the Ottoman Empire. Under the Ottoman rule, Himara was attributed some privileges from the Sultan, in the form of a series of regulations that were allowing the inhabitants to carry guns, trade with foreign countries, and others. These regulations were called “Venome” and were signed for the first time from the Sultan Bajaziti II of the Ottoman Empire in 1492. The rights granted to the region of Himara from the Ottoman Empire ensured the autonomy of the region from the Turkish rule. The “Venome” was a set of rights granted as an agreement between the Rulers of the Empire and the Senate of Himara, regulating economic and governmental organization, as well as, the circulation of people.

It is important to mention that the “Venome,” even though they were unwritten laws, they were regulating the administrative, proprietary, social, and economic life of the whole community. This agreement enabled an advanced trade and social life since those included the right to circulate freely in all the harbours of the Empire under their own flag. This was a factor that helped the community of Himara to advance their economy. The freedom of electing own leaders was also a crucial element of the development of the region. For the affairs that concerned the whole province, the Elders would gather in the main village of Himara and this patriarchal institution was able to ensure order and tranquillity. According to Rene Puaux, the work of these authorities included administrative, judicial, fiscal, executive and some secondary tasks to cover the various social functions and needs of local communities. In some areas, these tasks were rather limited in civil law cases, while others would be extended to cases of criminal law, with or without the local Ottoman authorities.

In 1912, Albania declared its independence from the Turkish Empire and in 1914, Spyros Spyromilios, the general of the army and main leader of Himara declared the autonomy of the region. The excitement was depicted in the poem of Kosti Palamas “Heimara - The Wolves”. The socio-political situation during those years was very unstable.

With the protocol of Corfu, Himara lost its independence and was included in the newly formed Albanian state, while in 1914, Wilhelm von Wied was appointed as the King of Albania. His regency lasted only 6 months, ending with the beginning of the First World War. His legislative influence was therefore rather limited and is not especially relevant for the research in Himara. In 1925, Ahmet Zogu was elected as the first President of Albania. He was a big influence in the Albanian state until the Second World War. Ahmet Zogu acquired legislative power already in 1922 when he was elected Prime Minister.

“In 1923, the government of Ahmet Zogu with its legislative organs tried to suppress all the privileges of Himara, including the addition of the taxes on the houses, enforcing the registration of the houses and livestock. The regime tried to violently enforce its will but the population was resisting until the state withdrew.”⁷

⁷ Prof. Dr. Priamo Bollano, Himara me venomet e saj, nje histori per liri a vdekje [Himara with her Venome, a history of freedom or death], (Tirana: TSGT, 2009), 106

The population of Himara was determined to preserve its privileges and autonomy at any cost. For centuries, the relief in taxation, freedom in trade and the governmental form of the eldership was being sustainable and bringing many benefits to the region - both economic and cultural.

Another crucial element of my analysis is the property ownership model applied in the region. There were types of property in Himara that were regulated by the Eldership and were functioning well for centuries even under the unwritten laws. Since the age of the Chaones, when the community was based on a tribal form of organization, there existed three forms of property ownership that were being preserved with extraordinary sacrifice in Himara:

The private property of the families

The property of the Church and Monasteries

The common property of the community

The circumstances changed drastically after the Second World War. In 1945, Enver Hoxha established the Socialist Albanian Republic, which was later renamed to the People's Socialist Republic of Albania and governed autocratically for 40 years. In 1945, the Government introduced the agrarian reform, which had collectivisation and nationalisation as the main agenda, and by 1953 the amount of private property in Albania was reduced to the minimum. The collectivization of the land and livestock, while still ongoing in the countryside, was mostly concluded by 1957.

The processes of archiving and registration accompanied the establishment and performance of the cooperatives, which were created on the basis of the demographics. The registration of each house and each family that was living in Himara was extremely rigorous. Each entry registered the land, livestock and trees that were becoming part of the collectivisation. This registration was crucial for the compensation of the members of the cooperatives, their pensions, health insurance and for other eventual social welfare intents.

Due to the resistance that the local population in Himara showed to the regime and especially due to the fact that it was the only town in Albania which did not vote in the elections in which the Labor Party of Hoxha was going to be the only candidate, the region was penalized. The leaders of the town started a secret movement before the elections in 1945 to inform the population about the plans of the Labor Party and made sure that they would not take part in the elections. The reaction of the newly elected government was fierce. Severe penalties followed, including death penalties and deportation in labour camps and prisons. The Greek school was closed and the use of the Greek language was officially forbidden in Himara for the first time. The dictatorship came to an end in 1991 when the Albanian Republic was formed following a rough transition phase that is still ongoing.

Methodology and approach

The interest for my research rises from the lack of documentation and access to information. Being a local and spending a considerable amount of time in the region, I always found it interesting to analyze and track the social, architectural, and urban developments of the site. It is a region with an important cultural heritage that is, unfortunately, being neglected. Especially in the last 30 years, Himara has been the interface between regulation and deregulation, between Greece and Albania, between two languages, two religions, and two cultural backgrounds. It is a place that has a lot to offer to its inhabitants and also to its visitors. However, the state of oblivion of the last thirty years is following forty-five years of autocracy. The society developed against this rich but also strenuous historical background. The restricted access to data is impeding the development of the region in terms of property, economy and tourism. This I not only aim to address as a fact but also to develop it further as a wide concept that affects the way in which society works. The social structure and social awareness are dependent on the shared knowledge and access to the data and documents that arbitrate the social, political and economic life. In the last 30 years, most of the architectural decisions were taken considering mainly the economic needs. Adding up to this, the lack of regulatory instances and the lack of knowledge, has left us with a non-uniform and less qualitative urban grid. Furthermore, informal construction has been constantly overwriting the authentic architectural identity.

Can we analyze and find out the social structure under which architecture has been developed and how it has been applied? Can now a new approach to architecture influence the social structure and bring some clarity? Is there a common line we find through different time periods, relations or behaviours that are consistent and influencing the development of architecture.



Fig.2: Old castle of Himara

This process is important for evaluating the existing urban grid, as well as, the process of making architecture and its development. Nevertheless, evaluating the factors that influenced and shaped this development is of great importance in understanding and improving the process of making architecture. The influence that architecture has on the sustainability of the community must not be neglected, especially given the fact that the main income of the inhabitants stems from the tourist industry.

The aim of this project is an intervention in social relations, with the purpose of building the basis for a qualitative architecture. Physical interventions in the form of a built structure are not purposeful in this case as it is the awareness on the way architecture is made in Himara now and how the architectural process developed under the pressure of socio-economic conditions. Due to the lack of knowledge, the lack of financial means, the contestation of the titles of property, informality, and corruption, the process of making architecture is currently impaired. Moreover, the lack of an integrated urban study and planning along with the mainly outdated and depleted infrastructure where the urban intensification is based, are hindering the actuality of a qualitative architectural process.

As already stated, this was historically a tribal community based on the familiar relations that were organized around a flat hierarchy and governed by the elected Elders. The community developed a settlement that was mirroring its social structure.

If we are to analyze the social structure/network of this tribal community that is organized around kinship as one of its fundamental elements, the analysis of the houses that the families were building is a place to start. The house is considered as an element which provides information on the areas dedicated to living, the shared outdoor areas as well as the communication with the rest of the community. Moreover, the space dedicated to other activities of the family will become evident. This will, in its turn, shed light on the activities and the dynamics of the social structure and how it was sustained.

Residential Buildings and the adjustment of the Private Property

The dominating building functions and typologies since the emergence of the settlement up to nowadays, are the residential, religious, and administration buildings and the last years an increasing number of hotels.

The main building typologies in the ancient castle are houses and religious buildings. Given the fact that the society in question had a tribal character, one can easily derive that housing held and still holds a key role in the development of the built environment. On the other hand, the house is seen as the core of the family life and apart from having a specific function in the urban grid, its purpose is seen in accommodating the needs of the family. As a result, by analyzing the typology and development of the residential building and private space, I will be able to argue for the existence of the intermediate stage between vernacular architecture and internationalisation in Himara.

A pattern of intuitive architecture can be found in the castle and further on in the rest of the town. The inhabitants rely on their heritage, especially when it comes to architecture and agriculture. Turning this into active knowledge instead of just an intuitive process, is in my opinion, a very important step towards approaching the fundamentals of architecture and furthermore mediating these to the public.

A common line of development becomes evident throughout the centuries with the preservation of most characteristics. The point in history when we find the most characteristics consolidated and more evident would be the period of the Ottoman Empire, which was a big part of Himara's history.

Since the object of the study is very broad and timely, I will focus on the relationship between housing and private property as the kernel of societal development in the region. The use of the land has changed drastically throughout history because of the changes in the governance. Hence, the way how the private property and the private space are being shaped has also changed with the changes in governance and the social structure as a result. Specifically, the way the houses have been built and the way the private property is shaped is seen here in correlation with the utility value.

The impact on the built environment is easily readable. Analogously with the use of language where each word holds a specific function in verbal communication, also in the built environment, each building has a specific function – *utilitas*. Concerned here only with one of the essential components of architecture as defined by Vitruvius, each building and in this specific case, each house is an element that facilitates reading the built environment.

The emergence and primary character of the settlement

Since in the castle there is not a single house having a prominent character and also no mansion or palace, the standard house is the core element of the urban grid and the social life. The churches can be considered as reference points in the settlement since religion had a very active role in regulating society. The churches and monasteries have a prominent position in the urban grid as well. Unfortunately, the structure and function of the religious buildings in Himara did not remain constant. In different times in history, the churches had to adapt their function and take on the function of schools. Moreover, during the long years of the dictatorship of the proletariat, all religious activities were banned and churches and monasteries were destroyed or turned into storage spaces. Nevertheless, in order to read and analyze the urban grid, residential buildings have the most relevance. A very fruitful discussion with Prof. Dr. Priamo Bollano, an economist from Himara that has been continuously studying and publishing on the socio-economic development of the region, was crucial in the analysis of the development of the property relations in Himara. According to Bollano, since ancient times, especially in the Neolithic period and from the Byzantine period onward, the economic life in Himara had a social form of organization. The socio-economic life was based on private property and was passed on to the next generations. There were three main forms of property, that were mostly preserved until the adoption of the agrarian reform in 1945 and were divided into categories based on their function and utility value as described below:

The private property of the families - that constituted the largest part of the property and was divided into the following cadastral entities:

Agricultural land – that was used by the families to cultivate wheat in an alternate way: barley, oats, rye etc. in combination with lentils. Depending on their location and extension, the agricultural land was also used to cultivate vegetables and herbs for the family.

Olive groves – that consisted of orchards of centuries-old olive trees.

Vineyards – that included the land planted with grapes.

Citrus orchards – which consisted mainly of land with good access to water. The climate in Himara is especially favourable for the cultivation of citrus trees such as oranges, lemons, tangerines etc.

Pasture (Meadow) – which consisted of the land with low fertility that would not serve for the cultivation of agricultural crops and were instead used for grazing livestock.

Forests and shrubs – that was the land around and in the proximity of the terraced vineyards. These lands were used by the families for the cultivation of oak trees, to secure timber for the winter and for other needs of the family. This land was also used for grazing livestock.

The private property of the families was a central element of the property relations in Himara, given the fact that the social life was organized around the life of the families. The sustainability and livability of family life was the main purpose of the organization of the society. The soil tillage occupation was a central element of the life of the families and of the social structure as a result. The work on the private property of the families was carried out from the members of the respective families. This was a responsibility mainly of the women given its seasonal character. During peaceful times, the men were engaged with the livestock, fishing, and sailing. It was not uncommon for the men of the families to migrate seasonally in order to secure a higher income and better living conditions for the family. Another element of the social relations that is closely related to property relations is the seasonal agricultural work that required additional manpower for a rather short period of time. Activities such as planting, harvesting, threshing grain, vineyard cultivation, grape harvesting and other types of fieldwork were performed on the basis of collaboration between families.

The work was either organized based on kinship or by hiring labourers on a daily-pay basis. These labourers were coming from the neighbouring towns or even from the north of Albania. These relations serve also as an element in analyzing social relations based on property relations. The private property and the work invested in it, along with its utility value were undoubtedly a central element in the organization of socio-economic life. Nevertheless, it is also an important factor that has influenced the architecture and also the urban development in the settlement. The development of the typologies of the houses was aligned with the elements mentioned above in terms of storing the agricultural products, livestock and water supply. The house and courtyard had to provide appropriate conditions for all the activities that were related to the maintenance of the family life.

The property of the Church - that comprised almost all the cadastral entities mentioned above in the private property of the families. In terms of proportions, the property of the Church came after the private property of the families. This form of property was procured from the donations of the families, especially the ones who after the passing of the head of the family did not have any inheritor. The Church was acquiring more land with the income that was gained from the land that it already had in use. There was a special commission administering this property. This commission would also decide on renting land to families in Himara. The rent would comprise a yearly tax, and 30 to 50 percent of the yearly production that was obtained from the land. Hence, the Church was a landowner and trader of agricultural products. There was however a point of intersection with the private property of the families. According to an ancient tradition, in case a family would rent a plot without any plantation and subsequently cultivate olives, vines or other types of fruit trees, at the end of the renting period, the Church would take back only 50 percent of the land. The remaining 50 percent would become the property of the family as compensation for the work and capital invested in the cultivations that it undertook.

The common community property on the basis of the village – this type of property consisted mostly of the meadows, forests and wilderness that were located far away from the inhabited area, the private property of the families and that of the Church. This type of property was under the administration of the elders of the villages. A part of this type of property was used free of charge from all the families, whereas the grassland and the extraction of timber were provided to the families against payment. The profit that emerged from this type of property, as administered from the elders, was allocated to works that would benefit the whole community such as paving streets and pathways, trenching water wells, establishing and operating schools etc.

Taking into account that the economy in Himara was rather underdeveloped because of the terrain and the continuous wars, the community and therefore the families could not differentiate themselves significantly from an economic point of view. Therefore, in Himara there was no property in the form of:

The property of the State - that was property under the possession and administration of the state, which was started in the times of the Ottoman Empire.

The property of the Timar – which was the land given to the feudal in exchange to the services they were providing to the Ottoman Empire.

Hacienda (Ciflig) property – that was a type of property over the land that developed during the Ottoman feudal-military regime.

The primary housing typologies

An important characteristic of urbanism in the old town is the compactness of the constructions. The choice of the building materials had its influence on the typology of the buildings and the structure. Stone and wood are the prevailing building materials given the availability and transport possibilities. The availability of the material in the settlement and its proximity was the main factor that was taken into consideration. Moreover, the possibility of transporting materials from neighbouring towns or an island had to be assessed. There is evidence of the transportation of considerable amounts of materials that were arriving in the small harbours in the broader region. The proximity of the old castle to the national road, which was also one of the main trade ways of the time, seems to contribute to the full range of transportations that were performed.

Already after a short walk in the old castle, this characteristic becomes evident. The factors that influenced this development were the need for mutual protection and the necessity to spare fertile land, which was vital for the sustainability of life in the settlement.

“According to the Ottoman cadastral registry from 1432, the Himara coastal areas were dense with settlements, many of which have disappeared due to wars, epidemics and changing political fortunes. These settlements varied in size from a meagre ten to twelve dwellings in Kamati, to Himara village, which at its peak had 134 homes. According to another historic register, the villages of Dukati, Palas, Vuno, Himara, Pilur, Kudhes, Qeparo, Borsh, Kokni, and Lukova, have all existed since the thirteenth century, if not earlier. A major factor in the difficulty of identifying the histories of these villages is how often they were burned.”⁸

⁸ GIZ Albania, Mountain Biking Trails (Tirana: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), 2016), 6

By analyzing the typology of the ruins of the houses in the oldest section of the castle, we can easily deduce that the families were rather self-sufficient and that the social structure is characterized by a flat hierarchy. The private space was shaped to facilitate all the functions of the family life and sustainably fulfil their needs. The need for water, which is a vital necessity for the family, was covered by the water wells in the courtyard, while the food demand was managed with the livestock and storage of provisions in the dome on the ground floor of the houses or in the underground.

As already mentioned, the community was organized in a flat hierarchy. Nevertheless, according to the dimensions of the houses and their surrounding property, the existence of wealthier families becomes evident. This is, of course, a logic that persists in the contemporary urban grid and society, more prominently than ever.



Fig.3: Typologies of buildings in the oldest sections of the castle.

Sketch made by the author

“...the houses, tend to be rather simplistic in their ground plan and feature only a few rooms. Often rooms on the ground floor were used to store livestock or grain, whereas the rooms in the upper story were used as living spaces. The houses’ exteriors are constructed from large stones and lime mortar. Decoration tends to be limited, but distinguishing features can often be seen around the doors, windows, and cornices.”⁹

The systematic categorization of the residential buildings can be based on different criteria. There are different studies and projects that have been performed in the region in different times and by different entities. The aims however can differ. The study of Emin Riza in 1980 is shedding light to the origins of the settlement and aims the unification of Himara with the neighboring regions in the south. Other studies and projects from GIZ Albania since 2016 are assessing the characteristics of the buildings and structures in order to create a basis for renovation and restoration.

A general categorization of the types of houses is based on the defensive character of the structures. The first typology comprises the fortified houses with a defensive character. According to this typology, the houses with a fortified character and therefore defence purpose are classified in: towers, and houses with a tower. The word tower is part of the local etymology and this typology of houses can be found in the neighbouring villages as well.

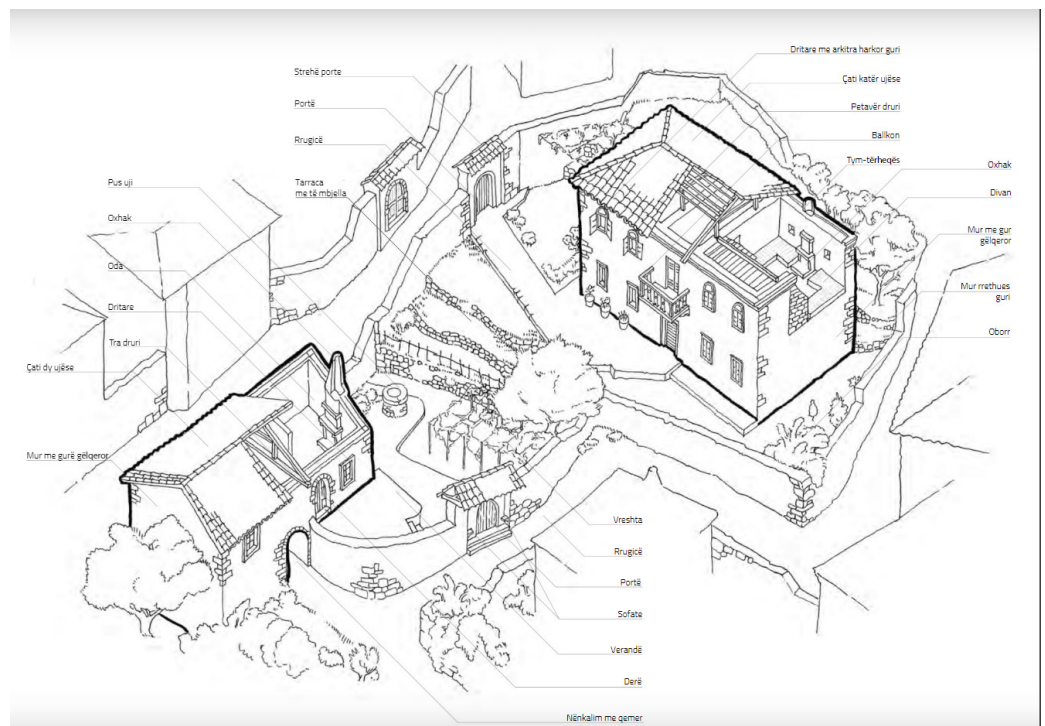


Fig.4: Housing typology in the old castle.

⁹ Albania : a country study (Washington: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress ; edited by Raymond E. Zickel and Walter R. Iwaskiw, Second Edition, First Printing, 1994), 19

The houses that did not have a defensive character are categorized in:

- Ground floor houses with a perpendicular mezzanine
- Houses with an upper floor
- Combined types ¹⁰

However, if we were to categorize the houses according to their structural typology and time of construction, we would obtain a different type of classification. Since the emergence of the settlement, there was a significant connection and exchange with the region of Sparta in Greece – Laconia. The military character of both societies and the common interests during ancient times and during the rule of the Ottoman Empire enabled this strong connection.

Analyzing the houses based on the original structure and time of emergence would lead to a classification that is not far from the Laconic type. Analyzing the floor plan and core structure of the Laconic building can help to further analyze and classify the houses in Himara.

The architecture of the buildings in Laconia has influences from the Laconic traditions and neoclassicism. Neoclassicism here should not be compared to the western European building typology. The difficult living conditions and the constant wars did not give the opportunity to build rich and prosperous towns. The buildings were very modest, built mainly with earthy materials and lacking decoration.

The Laconic buildings are rectangular, containing one large living space. They have several large windows and a wide door, while the floor is wooden or tiled. The roof is pitched and the underground has a dome.

These buildings have no distinct fortified character given the fact that at the time when they were built, there was no risk coming from the Ottoman conquerors and the disputes within the region had settled.

The Prototype: A building with a square or almost square floor plan and a domed cellar. The cellar was used to store the food supply and for hosting the livestock. The structure was sheltered with a pitched roof.

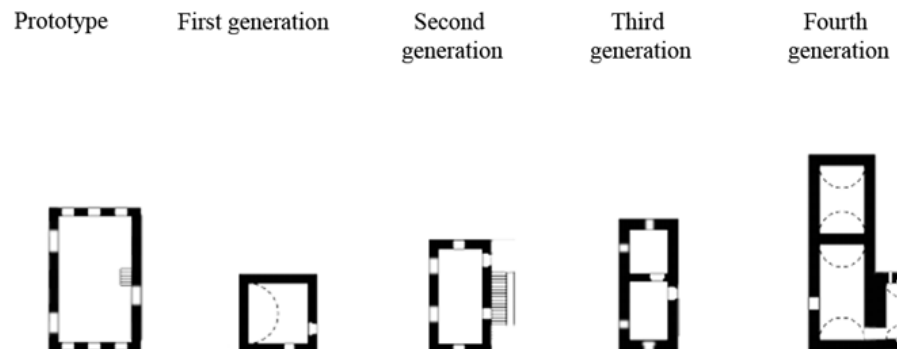
First generation: It is an evolution of the prototype, an elongated, rectangular building. The entrance to the cellar and upper floor is located on the long side of the house. The axis of the building is oriented east-west and the entrance is located on the meridian side.

Second generation: The rectangular building evolved acquiring a light partition in the floor plan, which creates two small spaces. The partition was usually a wooden wall that did not reach the ceiling.

Third generation: Another space is added to the simple rectangular building. A smaller additional space is added to the length of the building.

Fourth generation: The building of the fourth generation has additional spaces in both sides of the original rectangle building.

¹⁰ Emin Riza, Arkitektura e banesës popullore në zonën e “bregut të detit” (Labëri) [The architecture of the popular housing in the coastal area]



It is important to have an integral analysis of the development of the housing in the settlement, in order to rightfully demonstrate the continuity of life in Himara. Thus, the interrelation between the progression of social relations and architecture can be read in the built environment. The Laconic typologies mentioned above serve the interpretation of the development of the residential buildings in Himara. Architecture can be seen as a language or symbolic system where each building is a word or symbol, that holds a specific function in communication. Therefore, the same way as knowing the etymology of the words enables communication, analyzing the origin of the buildings enables the correct reading of the built environment and the associations it evokes.

“Primary functions are the practical functions, the real purpose, the use and the material dimension. Eco calls these functions architectural denotation. It is, however, the secondary functions or the so-called architectural connotations that are more interesting in our present context: this means the communicative dimension, the idea of the building, the meanings which its symbols express or the associations it evokes. Buildings are henceforth bearers of messages and express complex imaginations of a society. Architecture is a system of signs where the material reflects not only its use but also where signs, texts and meanings are written in its material cover and where symbols convey socially relevant information, such as the national images of a country.”¹¹

This type of classification is essential to demonstrate what drove the development of housing in the region. As we see, the structures developed from a core living space to slightly more complex spaces. The spaces and structures were organized and developed in an intuitive way. The building had to provide shelter for the family and also cover its basic needs. The domed cellar was essential to store food and agricultural products. Moreover, it was the space where the family kept the livestock, which was also essential for the livelihood of the family.

The development of the society, growth of the families, and the accumulations of goods created the need for more space. The typologies of the buildings expanded according to the increasing need for living space and for storage. It is obvious that socio-economic development is shaping the architecture of the housing and further on the urban grid as a whole.

¹¹ Peter Herrle, Erik Wegerhoff, *Architecture and Identity* (Berlin: LIT, 2008),

The built environment of the tribal community

The settlement is a hybrid of the landscape and the human willpower. Each house in the built environment is influenced and benefits from the neighbouring buildings. Not to be neglected are also the interventions in the neighbouring buildings which can on their side add value to the urban grid. Therefore, the housing developed to influence the built environment and community as a result.

The neighbourhoods in the old castle of Himara were organized based on kinship. The family relations were dictating not only social relations but also urban development. The information that we have regarding the location of the houses and private property of the original families in the old castle, help us assess the development of the neighbourhoods and therefore the urban grid.

Since the documentation is scarce, the writings and diaries of the travellers of the time provide important information. W. M. Leake - a military man, topographer, diplomat and Fellow of the Royal Society was one of the distinct personalities that travelled through Himara. The facts that we get from Leake are considered trustworthy as they comply also with the local rhapsodies. According to the data that we have today, in the old castle there were 5 extended families along with their kinship:

Cakenate, one of the oldest clans in the old castle - The elder and head of the clan was named Zahogiorgi. They were located on the western side of the centre of the castle, facing the sea.

Lixhenate, located on the northern side of the center of the castle - The leader of the family was Dhimo Alekski, a predecessor of the Dhimaleksi family that resides nowadays in the centre of the town.

Kukurta, located on the eastern side of the centre of the castle - The Kukurta brotherhood declined notably as a result of the continuous Ottoman expeditions. The Varfi family is the part of this clan that lives on as one of the oldest families in Himara.

Gogonate, located in the south-western side of the castle where they also had their property - The clan that moved to the castle from the neighbouring region of Progonat, located behind the Akrokeraunian Mountains.

Masate, located on the south-eastern side of the castle and later outside the walls of the castle - The leader of the clan was Gianni Tragiani. The location of the clan denotes the development and expansion of the castle. This clan was also weakened due to the Ottoman expeditions as a result of the migration of the families to Italy and Greece. Nevertheless, foreign families coming from other regions would be incorporated in the clan and were provided with a small property.¹²

¹² Prof. Dr. Priamo Bollano, Himara me venomet e saj, nje histori per liri a vdekje [Himara with her venome, a history of freedom or death], (Tirana: TSGT, 2009)

The development of the families together with their location and property enables us to analyze the establishment and the character of the development in the castle. The assessment of the main factors that were driving the development and expansion of the castle allows us to start creating a scheme of how social relations shaped the urban grid and architecture.

The development of the residential buildings is therefore observed through the family relations and the arrangement of the property in the community. The economic and social factors are influencing the family relations greatly. The family had to be sustained regardless of the arduous conditions.

The property relations, on the other hand, were closely related to governance and urbanism. The Elders were responsible for regulating the property and all the other jurisdictional affairs and conflicts. The property ownership was regulated and conflicts were solved in a peaceful way through the intervention of the Elders.

The difficult living conditions combined with the low level of education did not allow the development of cultural facilities and other forms of entertainment. Therefore, apart from the churches and monasteries, there are no cultural buildings to be found in the castle, such as for example theatres, which were an important part of the social life and of the architecture of that period.

The built environment in Himara makes its defensive/military character very evident by the lack of decoration in its buildings, the simplicity of the lifestyle, and the lack of cultural facilities.

A good example to illustrate the main housing typology is a building complex in the oldest section of the castle that has been documented in various studies. The first study was carried out during the socialist regime and the latest one was documented in student work in 2007. The research material and documentation lie at the core of this project to show the importance that the processes of assembling and archiving have for heritage and future research.

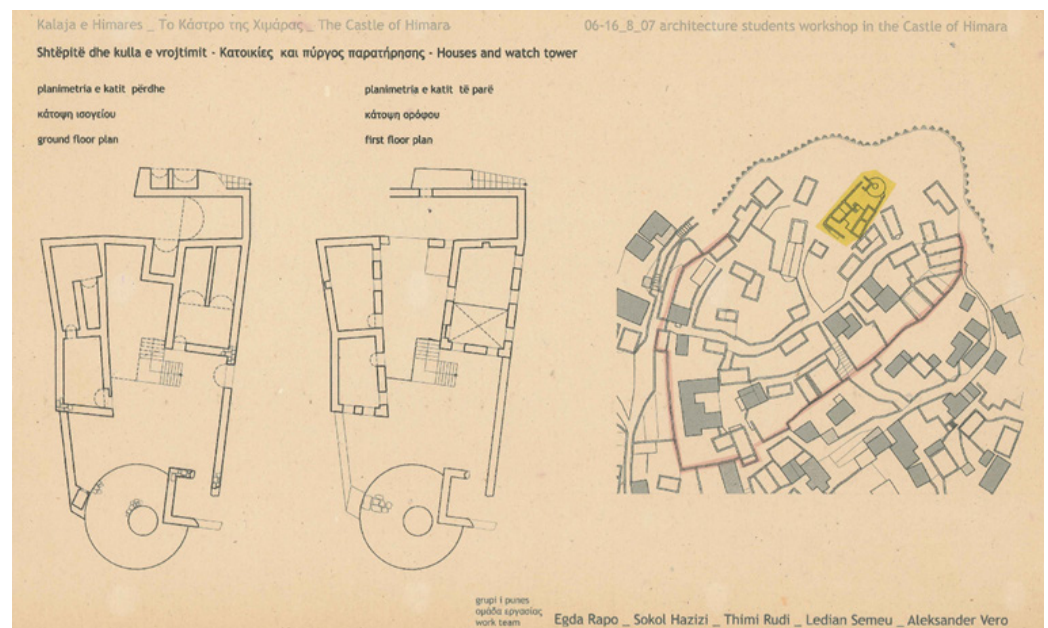


Fig.5: Plans of the building complex
06-16_8_07 architecture students workshop in the Castle of Himara

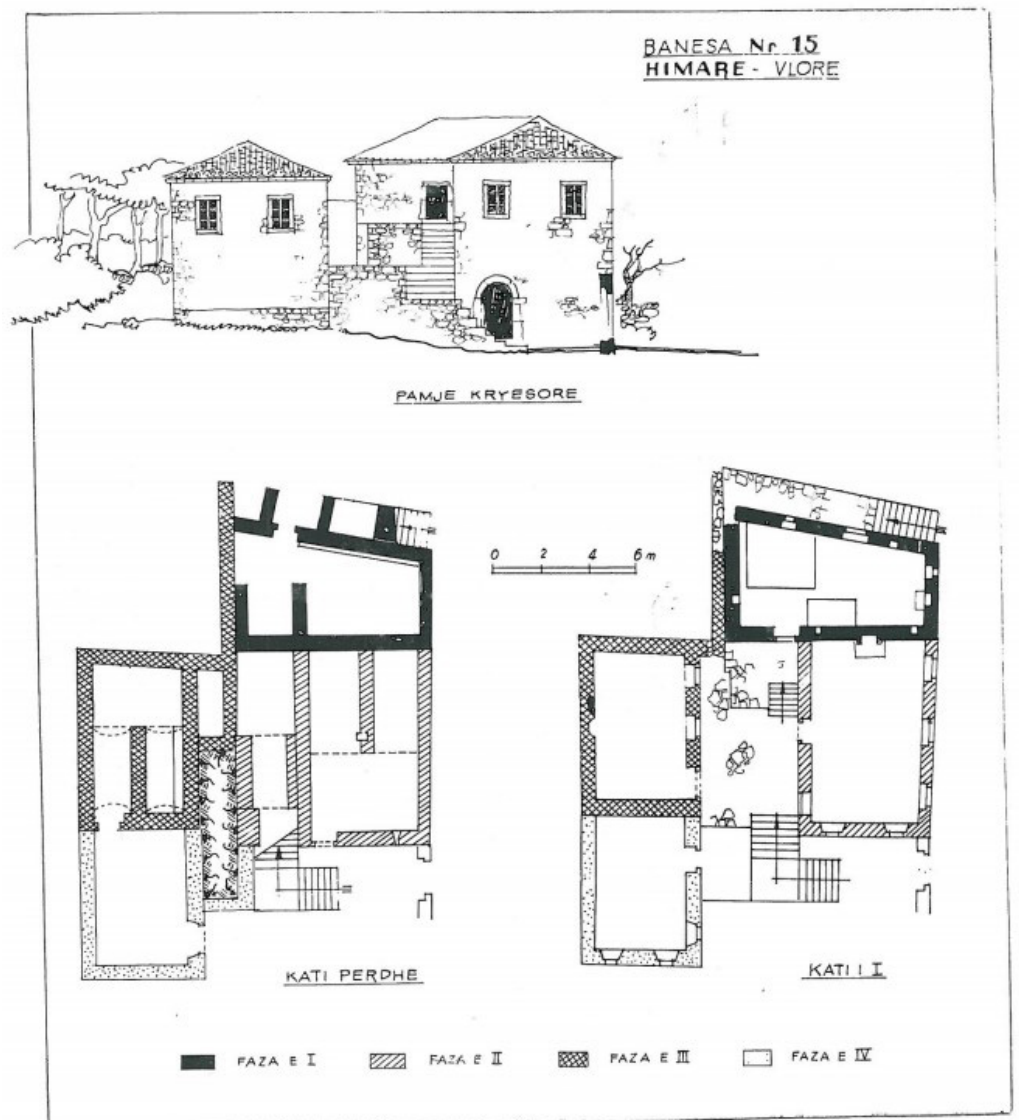


Fig.6: Plans of the building complex
Emin Riza, Arkitektura e baneses popullore ne zonen e "bregut te detit" (Laberi)
[The architecture of the popular housing in the coastal area]

This building complex is located in the highest point of the castle, within the surrounding walls. It holds a prominent position with a view on the Ionian Sea and is located in close proximity to the Church of Episkopi.

There are four main structures that compose this building complex. Each building had a domed ground floor where the stone structure is visible, and an upper floor, which served as living space for the family. The ground floor was the space where the family was keeping the livestock and where the food and other supplies were stored. The facades and the upper floor have a coating that might be a later addition to the building considering the fact that this building complex is part of the oldest section of the settlement. The framing of the windows also denotes the similarity with the Laconic typologies that had a simplified neoclassical note.

There is one main entrance to the first house and to the building complex. The other three houses can be entered through the common courtyard. It is possible to observe that there was a direct connection with the neighbours. The flat hierarchy is readable in this building complex. The building structures are simplistic even though they are located in a very prominent location and all the houses have almost the same structure, quality of the spaces, and access to the shared courtyard. There is no single structure holding a dominant position in the building complex.

In the shared courtyard there was an auxiliary space with a hearth. Moreover, the sanitary facilities were located outside of the house, in the garden. The water supply was secured through water wills in the garden and by harvesting rainwater in what the locals call – stera.



Fig.7: Entrance of the building complex



Fig.8: Phase III of the building complex.
Photo by the author

Fig.9: Morphological differences in the building depending on the use
Photo by the author

Fig.10: Entrance of the building complex, staircase to the first building
Photo by the author





The main building material is stone. We could speculate that the first house that was built is the one that has a direct connection to the main entrance. The second one chronologically was the one that was built next to the first house and further on the houses III and IV that are parallel to the first ones. All four buildings have approximately the same height. The access to the garden is not interrupted in order to provide equal conditions for each one of the four houses.

The height of the surrounding wall reaches below the upper floor. Consequently, the view of the houses towards the outside is not obstructed. The border between the private and public space is not rigid. The communication with the neighbours is highly valued, therefore, the walls of the courtyards are not high, regardless of the fortified nature of the settlement. Moreover, the houses are visible from the street, which enables the communication not only with the neighbours but also with the ones who were occasionally passing by.

From this composition, we derive the existence of a social structure that is based on shared community life.

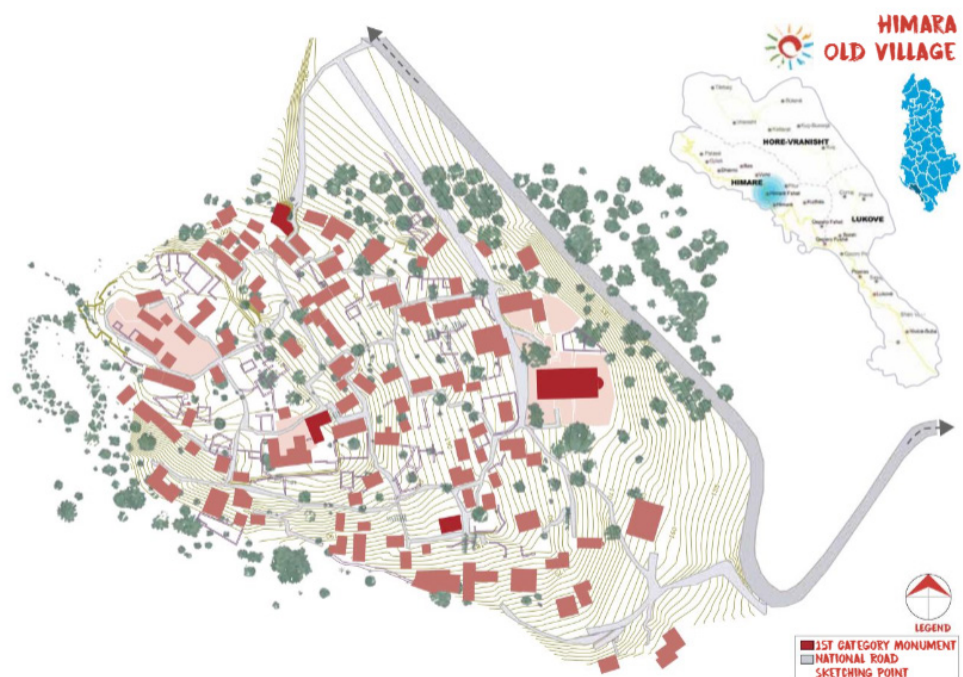


Fig.11: Typologies in the old castle of Himara
Albanian Riviera village scapes presented through watercolor, GIZ Albania

The abolition of the private property from the communist regime

How the drastic change in the property relations shaped architecture according to the new social relations.

After the Second World War, Albania was facing the war aftermath - destruction and confusion. The Labor Party triumphed in the elections of 1945 as the newly established government that would bring prosperity to the land. Nevertheless, the elections were not transparent.

The year 1945 marks a radical change in the social structure throughout Albania, but the impact on Himara was stronger. There was a major conflict immediately after the election of the Labor Party because of a secret movement of the Himariots that mobilized the local population not to take part in the elections. Himara was indeed the only town where the inhabitants did not vote for the Labor Party.

The reason was that the leaders of the village had already gotten the information that the Labor Party was going to be the only party taking part in the elections of 1945. The elections were seen as non-democratic and their voice was heard. Nevertheless, the dictatorship was established and the consequences for Himara were severe. The ones who were held responsible for mobilizing the community against the Labor Party were sentenced to death or sent in labour camps. The main conflict with the community in Himara was the use of the Greek language and the Greek school. As a penalty after the conflict regarding the elections, the Greek school in Himara was closed and the use of the Greek language was banned. This was only one of the major changes that were imposed on the social structure.

The regime of Hoxha aimed to bring a cultural and ideological revolution that had an impact on social relations.

“Traditional kinship links in Albania, centred on the patriarchal family, were shattered by the postwar repression of clan leaders, collectivization of agriculture, industrialization, migration from the countryside to urban areas, and suppression of religion. The postwar regime brought a radical change in the status of Albania’s women. Considered second-class citizens in traditional Albanian society, women performed most of the work at home and in the fields. Before World War II, about 90 percent of Albania’s women were illiterate, and in many areas, they were regarded as chattels under ancient tribal laws and customs. During the Cultural and Ideological Revolution, the party encouraged women to take jobs outside the home in an effort to compensate for labour shortages and to overcome their conservatism. Hoxha himself proclaimed that anyone who trampled on the party’s edict on women’s rights should be “hurled into the fire” (see Social Structure under Communist Rule, ch. 2).”¹³

This is an important development in social relations. In previous periods when only men were considered as decision-makers, the role of the women was limited to taking care of the household and to agricultural work. The tribal society which was ruled by a senate of men had a strong patriarchal character that was limiting the rights of the women for centuries. Elevating the role of the women as an equal contributor to the society was beneficial not only for the economy but for the abatement of patriarchalism as well.

Nevertheless, the structure of the family remained the same and so did the importance of the family in social relations. The kinship links were indeed central, especially given the fact that Himara relied on the tribal form community for centuries. The strong social relations were very important for the livability of the families given the difficult times that the region was facing.

¹³ Albania : a country study (Washington: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress ; edited by Raymond E. Zickel and Walter R. Iwaskiw, Second Edition, First Printing,

The focus on agriculture and the agrarian reform that was developed to abolish private property in the whole country were important developments in the socio-economic field. After the Second World War, the country was left in arduous conditions, which the Labor Party decided to solve by focusing on agriculture and industry. The population was called to work for rebuilding the country.

The new regime shifted the value system towards the local agriculture and industry. The Labor Party started with annulling the foreign and especially the western capital in the country. A good example can be the cancellation of the obligations of the peasants to the Bank of Napoli and the repeal of the land lease that was left unpaid.¹⁴

With the agrarian reform that started in 1945 and was concluded in 1960, the collectivization of the agricultural land was achieved in the whole country. With the adoption of the agrarian reform in August 1945 and May 1946 all the land, vineyards, olive groves, gardens, buildings, and the agricultural inventory belonging to people who did not work the land themselves, were expropriated.

Thus, by means of the agrarian reform and the law on the land, the peasants obtained ownership over the land. As the land and buildings were collectivized, everything was meticulously documented and archived.

The government set up cadastral plans for the first time in Himara since it was anteriorly ruled by unwritten laws and the property was regulated by the elders. Moreover, in the case of Himara, Simo Milo – the leader of the cooperative, was meticulously documenting all the buildings, land and olive groves, vineyards, etc. that were being collectivized. In his private archive, everything was documented and signed by the owner and the commission of the cooperative. This exact documentation was carried out in order to prevent the unjust appropriations of agricultural lands and the construction of houses on agricultural land – that finally happened after 1990 when many non-owners occupied and built on land that was not rightfully theirs.

It is important to mention that during the dictatorship of the proletariat, life in Himara was sustainable for the whole year. The collectivization of agriculture provided work and yield for the population. Traces of the extensive work on the land, the irrigation system, and the terraces are still evident today, no matter the stage of abandonment that the region is going through.

Before WWII, the urban grid in Albania consisted mainly of simple single-family houses. The growth of the population brought the need for urban intensification. The data provided from the report of the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress in Washington is rather accurate:

“Official sources indicated that, between 1945 and 1985, nearly 165,000 apartments were built by the state and more than 232,000 houses were constructed by individuals with state assistance. Nevertheless, living quarters became increasingly overcrowded because of rapid population growth. Families of four or more persons often lived in a single room. Newlyweds seeking a private home faced waiting periods of up to ten years. War and natural catastrophes added to the burden. During World War II, some 35,000 dwellings had been destroyed. About 10,000 homes were damaged or destroyed by earthquakes in 1967 and 1969, and a powerful earthquake in 1979 demolished about 18,000 buildings and left 100,000 people homeless. Rural houses were small, sparsely furnished, and simply constructed of natural rock or stone. Most had one or two rooms, and a hearth or sometimes a stove for heating and cooking. Urban houses and apartments usually were small; many lacked central heating. Kitchens and toilet facilities in apartments had to be shared by three or four families.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Simo Milo, *Private Archive*, Tirane

¹⁵ *Albania : a country study* (Washington: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress ; edited by Raymond E. Zickel and Walter R. Iwaskiw, Second Edition, First Printing, 1994), 96

The situation was not very different in Himara. The growth of the population brought an increased need for housing. Building new facilities was one of the main concerns of the government. In the picture below we will see a very distinctive form of a building typology emerging. The apartment building is a symbol of the period of the socialist state in Albania. For anyone who is familiar with the regime of Hoxha, the four or five-story buildings with the visible structure and lack of plaster denote the function of the building and the time when it was built.

What we see resembles the typical socialist building. Even though the last years it was plastered due to maintenance and esthetic purposes, these buildings denote the socio-economic condition of Himara during the socialist regime. The mark that the new socio-economic reform brought to the town and community is indelible. The families were growing, therefore the need for new residential buildings was pressing. In the tradition of the tribal community and the patriarchal family, one home was sheltering at least two generations.



Fig.12: Apartment building
in the town center, Spile
Photo by the author

However, it was not possible for large families to live under one shelter. Therefore, according to the patriarchal tradition, the older male sibling would stay in the house of the parents. The unmarried daughters were also living in the father's house and they had the responsibility of taking care of the house and the older generation.

The council of the elders (demogerondes), which was the main governing body and also an important traditional element of the social relations was dismissed in 1945 and had no longer any legislative power. However, the council of the elders was brought back to the service of the community in 1959 after being approved by the leaders of the cooperative. They were invited to almost all the meetings of the cooperative leadership as an esteemed consulting entity.¹⁶ They would not only advise and assist on practical issues but also on social problems. The deep knowledge of the tradition and the trust that the elders held from the side of the community was highly valued from the regime. This was a case where the Labor Party was not micromanaging the community. By having a certain freedom to make decisions that would add value to the community, the local leaders of the cooperative achieved to raise the living standard after WWII.



¹⁶ Simo Milo, Private Archive, Tirana

Fig.13: Apartment building in the town center, Spile
Photo by the author

The implications on property relations after 1945

The agrarian reform marks the first revolution in socio-economic relations. Nevertheless, the situation in Himara was rather different from the rest of the country. There were very few big landowners whose land was confiscated and given to the cooperative. The big landowners were the part of the population that was greatly impacted by the radical socio-economic changes that the new regime was implementing. The peasantry, on the other hand, was the part of the population that felt cherished since the Labor Party shifted the value system to agricultural work and maintenance and made them also landowners.

As they were initially created, the cooperatives were private entities of collected agricultural land. The cooperative in Himara was created in 1956 and was regarded as a group of economic entities that were voluntarily united. In fact, they represented a special form of the centralized state economy. The decision-making within the cooperative was carried out through the right of the members of the cooperative. Theoretically, this was a bottom-up culture where the decisions were made at the assembly of the cooperative. Nevertheless, for every decision, the greater good and the prosperity of the Labor Party had to be taken taking into consideration

The situation deteriorated in 1981 when the peasants were deprived of the so-called cooperatives garden as the minimal individual economy that was left. In the case of Himara, this included up to 5 olive trees and a limited amount of livestock. This new law regulation turned the peasant into a work that had to acquire all the products from the cooperative instead of producing them. From 1980 onwards, the Labor Party led by the dictator Hoxha, showed the utmost disregard towards the will of the population that brought conditions of extreme poverty.

The population worked tirelessly to create the infrastructure for a sustainable future. The political decisions that followed are not part of this study and affected more the economy, the dominant attitude, and morale of the population rather than the architecture and urban grid. The latter was rather defined by the early framework and the rigid social structure that was created.

From 1945, like the expropriation of the land was occurring and the collectivisation of the agricultural land was spreading in the whole country, in Himara everything was being recorded and signed. The land and the houses, along with the trees that were added to the cooperative, were archived and signed by the committee. The part of the archive of Simo Milo that is being referenced in this project has entries from 1968. This process was kept for purposes of social benefits. The pensions and percentage of benefits, income, and goods were calculated proportionally to what was added to the cooperative.

“The regime’s policy of complete agricultural collectivization deprived peasants of their landholdings, except for tiny personal plots, and required them to work on collective farms. Despite government attempts to equalize the wages of peasants and workers, peasant income remained approximately at subsistence level. One or two members of a peasant family would often engage in rural nonagricultural occupations, such as mining or forestry that offered superior wages and benefits.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Albania : a country study (Washington: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress ; edited by Raymond E. Zickel and Walter R. Iwaskiw, Second Edition, First Printing, 1994), 80

The arrangements with the religious entities

Another big change in the social structure that influenced remarkably the life of the families was the abolition of religion. All religious rituals were declared illegal and the churches and monasteries were destroyed or used as storage spaces, which brought irreparable damage to the buildings. Since the community in Himara was always very religious, these radical changes had a cost to the social life and consciousness of the people. Churches and monasteries were no longer a lively part of the urban grid since their function was impaired and they were no longer populated. More than ever, the focus was lying on the residential buildings.

For the proper organization of the work, the leaders of the cooperative had to make arrangements with the church regarding the properties it was left with by the agrarian reform in order to fulfil its needs. The land of the church was taken under the administration of the agricultural cooperative on an annual rental arrangement against a certain amount of oil.

The churches and monasteries in the territory of the region of Himara are numerous and before the liberation, they owned approximately a quarter of the land in Himara. These properties were distributed throughout the village as the churches and monasteries were also spread across the urban grid. For the administration of the properties, the church was privately contracting a labour force from the agricultural cooperative. The latter, along with the many liturgies and other ceremonies during the year, were preventing the participation of the population in the cooperative's work.

In 1967 the regime of Enver Hoxha banned any form of religion in Albania and converted the property of the religious entities into public property.

Restitution of capitalism: The newly established Albanian republic and the exception of the social relations

In 1990, a revolution started in Albania with the aim to overthrow the communist regime and create a pluralist system in the country. After being governed for many decades by an autocratic leader and seeing its rights becoming continuously limited, the population overthrew the Labor Party. This was a radical change for which the population was utterly unprepared.

The factors that contributed to the collapse of the communist economic system are not always clear to the younger generations. However, it is important to acknowledge what led to this radical socio-economic change, to be able to assess the progress of society and to be able to make better decisions in the future.

“Albania’s communist economic system, with its strict central controls, egalitarian incentive system, and bias toward heavy industry, collapsed in the early 1990s, idling almost all of the country’s production lines. In early 1992, the government was piecing together a new, market-based economic mechanism. The People’s Assembly passed many new laws on privatization of state property and protection of free enterprise, private property, and foreign investments, and lawyers drafted new civil and commercial codes, banking and tax laws, and labour, antitrust, and social security regulations. The structure of Albania’s productive capacity was clearly going to change radically as the government broke up collective farms and privatized state lands and enterprises and as managers adjusted to free-market conditions.”¹⁸

Towards the end of the 1980s, the popular discontent in Albania was growing while the regime was delaying economic reform. In 1991 the economy was paralyzed as a result of a supply shortage in most areas, therefore Albania called out for humanitarian aid from the West after many decades of self-isolation. The autarky of the communist regime, the self-isolation and the total collapse in the early 1990s, made it especially difficult for Albania to introduce free-market reforms after the communist economic system collapsed.

As Zickel and Iwaskiw indicated in their study in 1992, a drastic change in a governmental and socio-economic level happened, starting with the establishment of new pluralist governmental instances and private enterprises.

“Enterprise directors did not have power over investment, employment, production, or any other decision-making areas but were responsible for maintaining initial capital stock. Competition among enterprises did not exist. In October 1990, however, as the economic system’s breakdown became fully apparent, the government enacted a new enterprise law giving workers management, but not ownership, of the enterprises that employed them. In August 1991, the law on economic activity enabled persons seeking to open businesses to register at the court of the district in which they wished to operate.”¹⁹

Being confronted with the collapse of the economy, the leaders of the revolt and who were seeing themselves as the new leaders of the country, favoured what is called the “shock therapy” (Gramoz Pashko, 1991) in economics as the strategy to move from a super-centralized economy to a free market economy. The “shock therapy” was seen as a strategy to enable the economy to start from “0” - as this was a year “0” for Albania, but the consequence was an economic, social, and communal fatality.

¹⁸ Albania : a country study (Washington: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress ; edited by Raymond E. Zickel and Walter R. Iwaskiw, Second Edition, First Printing, 1994), 103

¹⁹ Albania : a country study (Washington: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress ; edited by Raymond E. Zickel and Walter R. Iwaskiw, Second Edition, First Printing, 1994), 121

The new regime envisioned this way that the economy would pass immediately under private administration so that the state would immediately withdraw all property rights. It was beyond question that the immediate privatization of some services was vital and extremely delicate in a collapsed country where centralization had been so strong that the whole socio-economic system had been based on employment in the public sector, in factories, plants, mines, and farms.

The bankruptcy phase in Albania following the collapse of the communist economy was followed not by privatization but by destruction. The destruction of the industry-led consequently to the destruction of agriculture, in a country where 75% of the population worked and lived in the villages.

The situation was extremely unstable, economically devastating, and led to massive migration. Albanians firstly fled to work in Greece and Italy while the Albanian market was invaded by foreign products. The agricultural land was abandoned in Albania and the factories were destroyed. The “shock therapy” provoked an economic and social “shock”. The life and social relations that the Albanians had lived on for decades did not exist anymore, but the population was not prepared for the new relations and processes that had to be put into effect.

The situation in Albania in the early 1990s gave way to the economy of usury, which instead of enabling ventures and creating a job market, led to a disastrous pyramid scheme. The scheme appropriated mostly immigration money and savings that were vital to the families. The development and collapse of the pyramid scheme in 1997 proved fatal for both the economy and the state. The implications of this new collapse on the society were enormous as the trust in the government was lost and an example of corruption was set to be applied in the decades to come.

The contemporary socio-economic developments

The economy of the state cannot still orient itself towards production; therefore it continues to rely on trade and services. Tourism is increasingly becoming an asset to invest on and a big part of the services are related to this field, especially during the summer season. The capitalist economy was focused on foreign investments, tourism, and diplomatic relations after many decades. Therefore, new facilities had to be established to provide for the services in these fields.

The building industry is also an important part of the economy that became prominent since the early 2000s. Different factors influenced the developments in the building industry. Firstly, the growth of the population and the massive relocation in the main cities with the hope to find employment and a higher living standard for the family brought an increasing need for residential buildings and additional services. Furthermore, the development of tourism brought an unprecedented need for facilities to shelter the needs of the hospitality and gastronomy sectors. International business on the other hand also influenced the development of this sector, as native Albanians started to relocate their business from abroad back to their homeland.

Although almost half of the population in Albania resides in the villages, the agriculture activities and processes cannot be compared to the ones of 50 years ago. The agro-processing industry is rather primitive and it is doubtful if it can cover the needs of the whole market. The Albanian market is dominated by foreign products. The reason for this phenomenon is not necessarily the quality of the products but rather the preference and higher trust of the population on foreign products. This attitude was mainly caused by the long isolation in the time of the socialist state when the population was longing for connection with the “outer world”. This is deeply rooted in the social conscience and has not only affected the economy, but also the process of making architecture. Foreign products and ideas are highly regarded compared to the local ones and the tradition.

When analyzing the development of the architecture in this period, it is important to take into consideration the building industry and the economic factors. The state was for many decades focused on agriculture and the inland industry. As a result, along with the “shock therapy” which caused a restart of the state and the economy anew, there was a need to refocus the emerging building industry.

In the case of Himara, there was a rapid urban expansion following the transition to the capitalist state. The building industry was primarily focused on the extension of existing residential buildings, building hotels and facilities related to the hospitality sector, and less on building new residential buildings.

The process of making architecture is rather intuitive and profit-oriented. After the collapse of the socialist economy, once the national borders of Albania reopened, the population started to migrate massively to Greece and other countries and continents. As most of the phenomena that occurred in the region, this was an unplanned massive action that drove the population away from the land and their houses. On the side of governance, the system was entirely unprepared to manage the change from a dictatorship to a pluralist and more liberal state. The government had to be restructured along with the legislation and regulations. The population which was living under difficult economic and social conditions in the rural areas saw this freedom of mobility as the opportunity they were waiting for during the long years of repression. Families started to migrate from rural areas to bigger cities or even abroad where they would be able to find a source of income and provide a better education for the coming generation.

Greece was the first destination for most of the families from Himara, as it was seen as a second motherland and there was no language or cultural barrier. A wave of investments started in Himara from the side of the locals who were moving back permanently after a few years of migration, or from others who were investing in seasonal businesses. At the beginning of the 1990s, the region became the main tourist destination in Albania. During the years of the dictatorship, there was only one hotel where the workers could spend their short summer vacation and the dictator's villa. Himara developed fast from a small town to a tourist hotspot. Hotels and facilities with rooms to let are being built extensively in Himara and the nearby villages of the Ionian coast. Nevertheless, the lack of planning and regulation caused a state of oblivion for almost 30 years. What was called a transition phase after the socialist regime, is being prolonged until today. Himara was converted from a region with agricultural character to summer retreat. Early enough it became evident that tourism was very profitable, even though it had a seasonal character. The region is overpopulated during the summer months; however, in winter few families reside in the village due to the lack of employment. Nevertheless, for many years, Himara attracted many local families back from migration and also Albanian families who moved there to secure a higher life quality. There was the need to develop all the services that a town needs and not only during the tourist season.

Nevertheless, this development was rather intuitive and not regulated. There was a lot of potential for development in Himara. In the case of Albania, the many needs that had to be covered, and the sufficiency of space were seen as a chance for fast profit, corruption, and informality. There are endless unresolved problems in the region regarding the private property of the locals and foreign investments. The processes are not transparent; there is a complete lack of transparency in the governmental processes and no integrated plan of development. Especially in the last 15 years, the locals are progressively being excluded from the decision-making. The application of this top-down management is neither democratic nor sustainable. Himara has always relied on tradition and has treasured the knowledge of the elders to ensure a prosperous future. The community has always been of central importance in social relations and all the decision-making processes. This has drastically changed in the last decades when the development is based on trends that were developed in other countries and arbitrary decisions of powerful stakeholders who have aspirations to exploit the potential of the region. The planning and the development of the infrastructure are carried out solely according to the interests of the big investors and the government. This is made obvious by the fact that the services and infrastructure are developed only along the coastline. The part of the town that is located towards the hills is neglected and the locals have struggled for many years with basic services such as running water, sewage, electricity, and asphalted roads. The lack of planning and regulation gave the inhabitants the possibility to resolve their problems in an informal way. Corruption and informality are the biggest struggles in the region. The lack of governmental support and framework urged the community to find solutions that were not always legitimate. Furthermore, the lack of trust in the government and the many irregular actions that many governments undertook compelled the community in Himara to exploit their properties and possibilities to the maximum. The main reason is the lack of transparency and many irregularities regarding the private property of the local community. After two decades, the government tried to attract investors by donating land and facilities for one Euro to foreign investors. The Albanian government has not yet solved the property problem after the collapse of the socialist economy and the cooperatives. After the disintegration of the cooperatives, the land was not restituted to the rightful owners and property deeds are in most cases inaccessible or invalid.

In the study of the Federal Research Division of the Library of the Congress, it is noted how the western economists were aware of the situation in Albania. The data, however, was not entirely trustworthy. The problem of inaccessibility and inaccuracy of the data and information is still evident no matter the democratization of the state.

“Despite Albania’s economic dysfunction and backwardness, Western economists predicted that the country stood a good chance of prospering if its government could restore order and take advantage of the country’s fertile lands, relatively rich mineral resources, favourable location, the potential for tourism, and generally literate workforce. Albania’s communist regime published few economic statistics, and Western scholars found that the sparse data made available were often neither accurate nor consistent. No statistical yearbook was issued for fourteen years after 1974, and data on performance of the oil industry were treated as a state secret after production began falling in the 1970s.”²⁰

The long-awaited democratization of the Albanian State started quite early to show signs of instability and transgression. In the first years this was justified as a transition phase with the hope that stability would be restored. However, in the last 20 years, this situation has evolved deforming all aspects of society.

Starting with governance as the origination base of the legislation that has been applied in the region, one cannot overlook the pattern of informality and corruption. The informality is easy to read in the built environment, as well as in the way that the legislation and regulations are being arbitrarily applied by the influential stakeholders. The urban grid is not uniform and lacks character. The traditional elements and characteristics are being neglected since fast profit is now being the priority over the architectural principles. Corruption is a widespread phenomenon that has made possible and further facilitated this state of informality. In the case of Himara, the situation is especially critical for two main reasons: the presence of the Greek minority and the high value of the land - given its access to the Ionian sea.

²⁰ Albania : a country study (Washington: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress ; edited by Raymond E. Zickel and Walter R. Iwaskiw, Second Edition, First Printing, 1994), 105

The implications on the development of the urban grid - the residential buildings



Fig.14: Spile, Himara town center.
Photo credits: Costa Grillo

In the last 15 years, property conflicts and corruption led the community to build structures that are simple and low-cost. These processes have caused severe damage to the urban grid. The locals of Himara are well known for their spirit of protest but so far little has been done in regards to the adoption of proper legislation and regulation.

For two decades the urban expansion was not based on any planning process. Only a few regulations were followed and the high level of informality prompted the community to start exploiting the properties that they owned to the maximum. Given the seasonal character of tourism and the economic activity in the region, the profit had to be fast and the community was focused on making good use of all the resources that Himara has to offer. The irregularity of the urban grid is obvious.



Fig.15: Sketch made by the author

The developments of the property rights and the impact on the architectural process

The restitution of the private property and the democratisation of the state were highly awaited. The Law 7501 on Land, which was passed in 1991, was firstly considered to be a fair redistribution of the land. Dr. Natassa Griogorevic explains the legal basis of the decollectivisation of the property in her dissertation.

“The contestations in Himarë/Himara area increased when the post-communist decollectivisation of property was made possible by Law 7501 on Land that passed in the Albanian parliament on 19 July 1991 (see Appendix). The law stated that the land, which was once taken from private owners by the communist government and managed by the agricultural production cooperatives, should be divided equally among the members of cooperative. This meant that each member of cooperative should get a portion of the land, with the size depending on the whole size of the land that used to belong to a particular agricultural production cooperative unit. The ownership, which existed before communism, was nullified. This kind of division was considered to be the fairest one by the new democratic government of the right Democratic Party of Albania”²¹

Titles of property from previous generations are now missing or hardly accessible. What can be found are titles of property and documents that are often falsified and not recognized by the official instances. The restricted access to the documents and data is also related to these irregularities. It’s important here to mention that during the decades when the land was part of the collective farms, the families grew. There are inevitable conflicts about who is to inherit the land since the law that was ratified in 1991 was not rightfully addressing the inheritance right.

A case of irregularities regarding the compensation of the land was broadcasted by Al Jazeera as the contestations regarding the property ownership in Himara are becoming increasingly exigent. The case of Hermioni Brigos is a good example of the practices that are being exercised by the different governments in the last 20 years, showing the problematic of the property relations in Himara.

“Brigos owns beachfront property in the Bay of Himara, Albania’s most valued resort area, but the government refuses to recognize her title to it. It has marked all the beachfront property in this valley as state-owned and plans to hand it over to developers.

“Yeah, I have the title deeds, this land was bought in 1933. My father offered a different piece of land in exchange for it. And because his land was smaller, he also paid 89 gold pieces. The papers are all signed now. The authorities tell me I’m not the owner. I’ve submitted the papers to court. They’re just holding onto them. These people are crooks.” – Hermione Brigo

Hermione Brigo is one of hundreds of ethnic Greeks who stand to lose 137 hectares of beachfront property stretching down the southern Albanian coast. The government claims the land last November in the cabinet decision that wasn’t ratified by the parliament or signed by the president.”²²

This is merely one of the many cases that became public in the last year. Property ownership is a key factor that is deeply influencing the social relations, the economy, and the urban grid. This is a problem that has taken the dimensions of a phenomenon since it is generated from the government and affects all the links in the chain of the social structure.

²¹ Natassa Griogorevic, “Contested spaces and negotiated identities in

²² Hermioni Brigos. “Albania project to boost tourism ‘violating land rights’”, Interview by John Psaropoulos, Al Jazeera, March 21, 2019, video, 03:15, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2GC-9D9phEMw&vl=sq>

The country currently does not have a functioning judiciary system and also lacks a balance of power. The government claims that the economy and tourism are flourishing and that they are taking all necessary measures to attract foreign investors. With their new laws, amendments, and processes, the government claims that it is creating a safe and attractive opportunity for foreign investors.

Another factor influencing property relations is the massive move of the population. Since the land did not have a linear continuity regarding the ownership, in times where the region is seen as an opportunity for fruitful investment, there are relentless discussions going on between the locals and the government.

The Greek minority Omonoia party wishes to challenge the cabinet decision in court, but it can't, because Albania's court system is crippled by a major shakedown that has seen most Supreme Court and Constitutional Court justices dismissed for corruption. This hiatus in the judiciary could last for years, but development is carrying on.

The government is expropriating Greek property at a rate which it has ordained of two and a half dollars per square meter money, which the Greeks aren't even bothering to claim. Deutschebank has valued that same property at between 60 and \$120 per square meter, putting the total value of land under expropriation at between \$800 million and one and a half-billion dollars.

The government is able to offer such a low rate because it has given developers negotiating leverage.

*“What we have is a government that is plotting on a daily and nightly basis to take away private and public property and then give it to a handful of oligarchs. Which are effectively predatory cronies of the government who are taking these properties and developing them in shady deals.”
– Lulzim Basha*

The government says it is trying to generate growth for the economy.

“Our main challenge remains the development of tourism. We have undertaken a big reform for the property title, which can guarantee the investors, the foreign investors, that the land they would like to invest their funds is completely in line with the law.” – Taulant Balla ²³

The judiciary system is impaired. The legislation does not respect the inheritance rights and many times it is left to the will of the individuals to decide who the rightful owner of the land is. The corruption and the lack of trust in the government have created an utterly unstable situation. The government's lack of vision in the early 1990s and the inability of the government to regulate the legal framework according to the new upcoming system left a lot of space for free interpretation. Quite soon the touristic value of the region became evident. Firstly the locals and consequently the government and businessmen became aware of the potential of the tourism industry in Himara and the high financial profit. The investments are rising in the region along with its popularity. Nevertheless, the return on investment is not assured for the whole year.

²³ Hermioni Brigos. “Albania project to boost tourism ‘violating land rights’”, Interview by John Psaropoulos, Al Jazeera, March 21, 2019, video, 03:15, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2GC9D9phEM-w&vl=sq>

As also stated by the European Parliament:

“In the last few days, the Albanian Government has made an unacceptable and provocative decision that infringes the rights of the Greek ethnic minority in Albania. Specifically, the Government has decided to seize all of the real estate owned by Greeks in the area of Himara on the pretext of exploiting it for tourism.

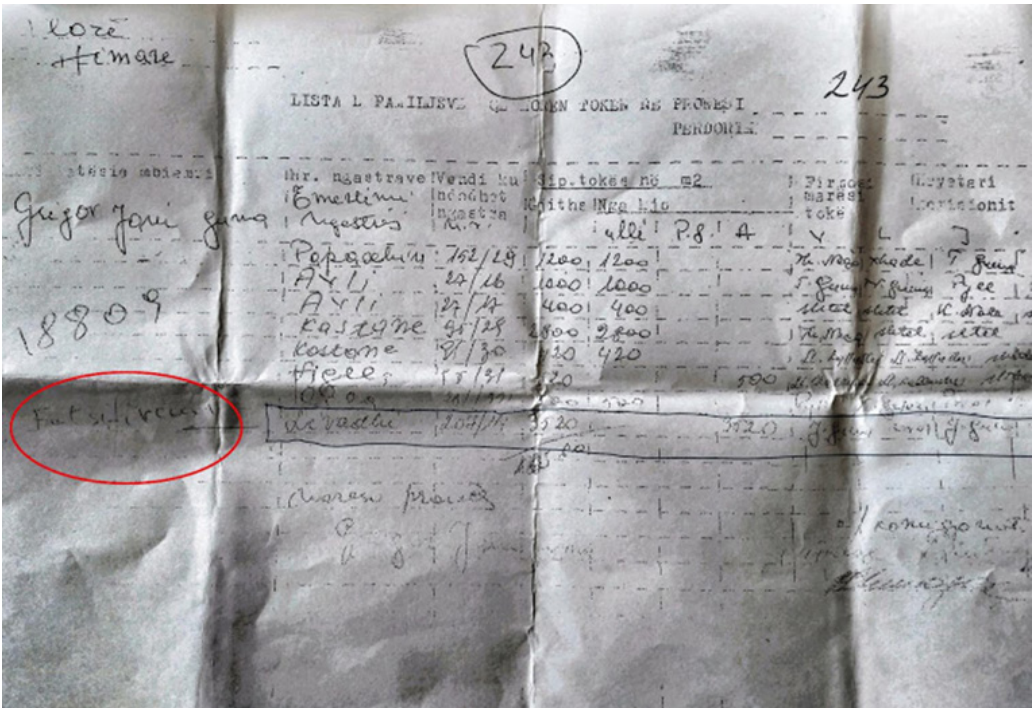
This is the continuation of a targeted strategy by Edi Rama’s Albanian Government which has tried as of late to expropriate large areas of land belonging to the Greek minority in various parts of Albania, forcing them to abandon their ancestral homes.

This arbitrary decision has provoked justified resentment among the Greek ethnic minority of Albania which views the government’s actions as a targeted seizure of their property and a flagrant violation of their rights.”²⁴

In case the government goes through with its plan, the citizens will not be able to register their properties once the decision is published in the Official Gazette. The majority of property owners are still in a trial in the Albanian court to locate, register, and have their property legally recognized.

The document below is showing a falsification, as in many other cases - giving the property to someone it does not belong to. In Livadhi Bay, according to the locals, the collective memory and the property deeds that were accessible to the public, 70% of the land is property of the church - even if it is not officially recognised. In the document below one can see the property title, where the land is listed after the ward it belongs to. Next to the last entry, that adds a property in the beachfront of Livadhi to this title of the property, the word falsification is visible. A hotel was built in the aforementioned property in Livadhi Bay.

The object of my study is not to bring out names or specific cases, whereas to bring the evidence of how the legislation is being abused and how difficult it is now to intervene in this urban grid. The instability and corruption of the last 30 years do not allow the private sector and the locals to make fundamental investments in their land.



²⁴ “ Protection of the property rights of the Greek ethnic minority in Albania”, last modified April 25, 2019, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-8-2019-001633_EN.html

Fig.16: Falsification of property deeds

The development of the documentation of property after 1990

The local community has turned to the European instances to file complaints and raise awareness on the infringement of their right on property. In september 2016, a delegation from Himara to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting raised the concern about the violation of the property rights in the light of tourist development.

“As for the properties, with the pretext of the tourist development of this coastal area, Edi Rama’s government is plotting in the last 3 years a “velvet” ethnic cleansing of the Greeks and our expulsion from our ancestral homes. The first stage of the plan is to characterize the whole area of Himara as a tourist, to be taken away from its natural owners, to give them - even with forged property titles to government-friendly “businesspeople” and in the final stage, to install population from other parts of Albania in order to make the Greek Minority disappear from Himara! The highlight of terrorism to all those that want to defend their land or even their own houses from the so-called “tourist development”, was the violent attack that the rightful owners suffered inside the City Council of Himara on June the 30th 2016 by the henchmen of the so-called “investors”.”²⁵

A report was published in 2018 [Albania: Status Review of the Immovable Property Registration Office (IPRO) (Now Superseded by the State Cadaster Agency (ASHK), Services and Data Quality] as a product of the Integrated Land Management Program funded by the World Bank. An important step and recommendation is the creation of a new cadaster. In the first part, the Albanian public agency responsible for the national cadastre and land register is described. Furthermore, some of the key blockages and problems involved are presented. In the second part of the report, the poor quality of the data is described by outlining the inadequate services provided to the public, the lack of transparency and security of the data. I will substantiate my analysis with the visual material and analysis of the status review of the IPRO in order to bring evidence that the correct documentation has always been a problem that does not seem to be addressed with integrity from the side of the government. Moreover, many stakeholders were involved in regulating the property issue in Albania after the restoration of capitalism, aggravating the conflict of interest and state of confusion regarding property ownership. Economical support and expertise were provided; nevertheless, the registration of the properties, the maintenance, and the accessibility are still deficient.

Date	Project/Program	Notes
1990-2000s:	<p>First Registration funded by EU and USAID, mostly in rural areas</p> <p><i>'Pasurite'</i> software developed for alpha-numeric data, Autocad used for graphic data</p> <p>World Bank-financed Agricultural Services Project financed re-construction, refurbishment and equipping of central IPRO and Tirana offices</p>	2,500+ mostly rural zones registered including with digital, but maintenance has been in paper only; in some rural zones only agricultural land was registered but not the forest/pastures
2007-2014	<p>World Bank-financed LAMP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - IT system ALBSREP developed: ISO standard compliant Land Administration Domain Model (LADM), fully centralized, web-based system - First Registration in 125 priority cadastral zones - Archives for 11 main cities scanned 	LAMP data and systems are maintained in digital format, connected through AKSHI

²⁵ National Association “Northern Epirus 1914”, ”OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting”, September 26, 2016, 1-2

Fig.17: Status of cadastre and land registration in Albania, Albania: Status Review of the Immovable Property Registration Office (IPRO),2018

2007-2010	EU -financed project (implemented by OSCE) included First Registration of southern coastline	EU funded First Registration was not completed: IPRO rejected the data because not compliant with the legal/regulatory framework or quality control procedures LADI South Coast Report ³ confirmed government findings for not accepting the data but offered suggestions for use of the mapping field work for data update and improvement process.
2015-2018	World Bank Environmental Services Project supported some forest /pasture registration	Used 'pasurite' software for registration
2016-2019	IPRO data digitization and improvement program: - Law 33 changed for IPRO self-financing - In house massive data digitization improvement program for both <i>kartelas</i> and maps using old programs rather than following ALBSREP data model - Sporadic <i>Kartelas</i> opened using ALBSREP - 50+ e-services enabled through AKSHI and link to ASIG geoportal - Notary module developed - ADISA front office registration adopted for Tirana office	Reference: LADI legal, technical and IT system reports. ⁴ No massive digital data successfully updated/transferred to ALBSREP as of May 2019 (problems include data migration and validation from old software to ALBSREP); Sporadic opening of <i>Kartelas</i> in ALSREP done in some offices Unclear what changes made to ALBSREP after 2014 and whether the changes are properly documented or not- a technical quality audit is needed to verify and update the status

Fig.18: Status of cadastre and land registration in Albania, Albania: Status Review of the Immovable Property Registration Office (IPRO),2018

³ Land Administration Data Improvement Technical Assistance (LADI TA) Phase II Report: South Coast data (2016), financed under the EC - World Bank Partnership Program for Europe and Central Asia, CRIS Contract No. 2014/350-393.

⁴ LADI TA prepared 3 reports to support IPRO data improvement: Legal Review in Albanian language (2015), Technical Review of Selected Cases (2016) and Technology for Data Improvement (2016) under the EC - World Bank Partnership Program for Europe and Central Asia, CRIS Contract No. 2014/350-393.

Since 1991, the land allocation/ privatization processes have carried out several laws and amendments intending to regulate the restitution of the property to the rightful owners. Nevertheless, little has been done; the government is taking arbitrary decisions and not taking into consideration the requests of the local community.

The processes of registration and privatization of the land have been blocked and redirected since years. The leadership is being changed continuously due to political interests and corruption. Moreover, the communication between the different governmental instances is impeded as it conflicts with the interest of different stakeholders. The first EU-financed project (implemented by OSCE) from 2007 to 2010, which included the first registration of the southern coastline was not completed. The IPRO data digitization and improvement program, from 2016 until 2019, was also unsuccessful.

There is evidence that the projects are not being carried out substantially, while irregularities in the use and restitution of the land on the southern coast are ongoing. There are numerous cases of locals who are not able to obtain the titles of ownership over their land or are not given a building permit while big investors are building hotels and resorts along the coast. The conflict of interest between the different stakeholders is very evident. Even though the initiatives of the locals asking for proper legislation and a fair judiciary system are numerous; there are still no results.

2013-2018	Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) project: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regulation for data update developed; - completed data update and improvement along large infrastructure corridor in 6 districts (parts of 138 cadastral zones)⁵; 	Verification is needed whether TAP data is uploaded and maintained in ALBSREP or not (<i>note: ALBSREP would need to have been modified to allow for data transfer and maintenance in blocks rather than by the whole cadastral zone</i>) TAP hired its own staff to work in IPRO district offices to maintain the data
2016-2019	World Bank Integrated Land Management and Geospatial Infrastructure (ILMGI) Technical Assistance: Developed ILM Road Map with key reforms for government priorities including land market, tourism, agriculture, FDI	Integrated land management and geospatial infrastructure program Key bottleneck is IPRO data
2018-2019	Government initiates reforms based on ILMP roadmap Institutional reform: Law 111/2019 “On Cadastre” creates State Cadastre Authority Pending Law on Completion of Transitory Land Privatization Provisions	Cadastre Law consolidates land related institutions based in ILMP Road map recommendations; new agency combines IPRO, ALUIZNI, AITPP Draft Completion law attempts to finalize post-1991 land allocation/privatization processes contained in 14 various laws issued between 1991-2018. Except Legal framework and institutional structure for restitution/compensation of land to former owners remains separate due to agreement with EU and Strasbourg court

Fig.19: Status of cadastre and land registration in Albania, Albania: Status Review of the Immovable Property Registration Office (IPRO),2018

Land and property rights reform is one of six priority areas set by the Government of Albania and is a key pillar in the WB's Country Partnership Framework for Albania⁶ (2015-2019). Land related reforms are essential for ensuring transparent and efficient management of Albania's land assets to promote both rural and urban investments, economic growth and sustainable development. Lack of access to land and an inefficient land market, have been identified as key obstacles for development and investment in the country. Improvements in this area can significantly support Albania's progress to EU accession.

There have been three main phases of interventions in the land registration and cadastral sector in Albania:

1) During 1990s - The Government of Albania (GoA) began a program of land privatization reform, followed by a program of land registration, and the establishment of the Immovable Property Registration System. Many different privatization activities of immovable properties were carried out through various programs and supporting legislation. The privatization programs include the following activities:

- Distribution of the ex-cooperative agricultural land to rural households, mostly in 1991 and 1992;
- Distribution of ex-state farm land also to households, approved in November 1992;
- Sale of business sites mostly in 1991-92 to individual owners;
- Sale of housing units in state constructed apartment buildings to adult residents begun in 1993;
- Restitution of mostly urban properties to their owners prior to state acquisition, or to their heirs, also begun in 1993;
- Privatization of enterprises;
- Transfer of artist studios to their artist occupants in ownership.

The laws that have regulated the property privatization processes have been amended continuously to try to address problems as they are identified. Sometimes these laws have been vague however and have still not addressed the problems sufficiently. This has led to further legal problems and allowed some abuse in the way the laws are interpreted. Due to mismanagement of the privatization process some owners have been engaged in long legal processes that continue to the present day. One example of this is where there is lack of clarity over the borders between villages and urban/rural areas. Various privatization commissions may have issued privatization acts for the same plots of land. Agencies, which have managed the privatization process, are constantly restructured and the employees have changed. Facts and decisions have not been properly recorded over time, allowing scope for errors or the opportunity for malpractice.

As a result of the implementation of these programs, about 3 million properties were privatized. But, neither of the existing institutions were able to support registration of the titles that were distributed to individuals from various privatization programs. There were comprehensive maps of properties however and there was a need to establish a new system of registration. With support funding provided by the USAID, European Union (EU), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the GoA initiated the process for registration of individual properties for the first time, focusing mainly in rural properties and privatized apartments across Albania. Privatization programs, especially those of agricultural land and apartments, moved rapidly, and as a result the land market gradually began to activate. Privatization was not always implemented technically or legally correctly, because non-expert people in the field of cadastre were

Fig.20: Status of cadastre and land registration in Albania. Albania: Status Review of the Immovable Property Registration Office (IPRO),2018

involved in the implementation process. It was thought that the first registration process would highlight and correct these problems.

With the adoption of law 7843, dated 13/09/1994 "On Registration of Immovable Property" (which entered into force 15 days after publication in the Official Gazette 1994, no. 10, page 443, publication date 26/08/1994), a new institution was established for the registration of immovable property in Albania. This institution was the Office of Immovable Property Registration (IPRO), based on law no. 7843, with its objective: registration of property titles and other rights to immovable property with legal documents that prove ownership over the immovable property, and the preparation, storage and management of data, the indicative maps of registration, and the documentation, which confirms the right of ownership and other real rights over the immovable properties.

First registration brought a new way of organizing cadastral information. The information on land parcels was summed up in a property sheet or register that was called the "Kartela" and their boundaries were shown on a Property Index Map. This information was displayed for 90 days in the registration area to give landowners the opportunity to raise any issues with the newly recorded property data. The involvement of the landowners was poor in practice however, mainly due to the lack of proper mechanisms for raising public awareness.

The process of first registration gradually began to involve elements of ICT solutions to manage the digital land registration and cadastral data, but for various reasons IPRO local offices maintained the new data only in paper form, without strictly applying the rules for maintaining and archiving the paper form of the property register and maps.

During this time (1990s):

The Law on the Land (No. 7501/1991) was passed, principally concerned with the privatization of ex-cooperative farmland. It was intended that land should be distributed to families that resided on the cooperatives. Land Commissions were set up in each village to oversee the distribution of ex-cooperatives' agricultural land to 383,600 individual rural households. The ownership certificates (AMTP or "tapis") issued to each family, indicated, amongst other things, the name of the household head, a list of parcels assigned to the household, their area, the main use of land in each parcel, and the "local" names of the bordering parcels. The local cadastre offices then archived the tapi. In assigning land ownership and use rights, however, the Land Law did not recognize the land ownership, size and boundaries as they existed prior to collectivization. This caused resentment on the part of pre-1945 owners and eventually led to a Law on the Restitution and Compensation of Properties of Ex-Owners (Law No. 7698/1993), and the creation of district Restitution Commissions to deal with claims. The law enabled ex-owners to have their ownership of land in some areas recognized, or they could be compensated with alternative parcels of land. {The Agency for the Treatment of Property (ATP) was established by the Albanian Government in 2016 to specifically deal with the issue of compensation and restitution, but this remains a contentious and incomplete topic.}

2) During the 2000's – There were two main land registration projects: The EU-funded Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) project and the World Bank funded Land Administration Management Project (LAMP). A prior World Bank funded project, the Agricultural Services Project, ran from 2001 to 2007 and this had a land component that funded the construction and equipping of the IPRO office, pilots for land consolidation and some technical assistance. LAMP ran from 2007 to 2014 and was designed to facilitate the development of an efficient land and property market through enhancing tenure security and improving land administration and management services. The main results of the LAMP project were:

- First Registration of 125 priority Cadastral Zones, mostly urban, out of approximately 3,057 total zones);
- Development of a web-based integrated ICT system for cadastre and property registration (ALBSREP);
- A scanned archive of paper property records.

Fig.21: Status of cadastre and land registration in Albania.

Albania: Status Review of the Immovable Property Registration Office (IPRO),2018

The analysis and status review funded by the World Bank is thorough and emphasizes the bottlenecks in the process of the registration and documentation of the land, as well as the unreliable condition of the property archives. Nevertheless, it is important to shed light into the degree of involvement of the landowners. The problem is twofold – on the one hand, the mechanism of raising awareness that does not serve the interests of certain stakeholders and on the other hand the limited accessibility of the public to the documents has created a state of indignation towards the government.

The small scale initiatives cannot thrive in the given situation. The landowners are constantly taking action with the hope to acquire titles of ownership over their land. Every initiative is based on a good informational background and all legal resources are being employed. However, there seems to be a blockage in the process of privatization of the land and its restitution to the rightful owners. Even in cases in which irregularities and falsifications have been detected, the original and rightful owners are not being recognized. The community of Himara is continuously demanding the abolition of the devastating 7501 Law “On Agricultural Land” of 1991, which allowed the illegal seizure of the land. Moreover, the community demands the restitution of all communal lands and those belonging to the Greek Orthodox Christian Church of Himara and of the property which was confiscated by the Armed Forces during the communist regime. Furthermore, the community demands the cancellation of all the plans of the Albanian government in the region, until a correct and trustworthy registration system of the private and community property is completed for the entire region. The immediate interruption of the construction of resorts and tourist villages in the region is necessary until the Albanian government presents the legal titles of property which these construction permits were issued.

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6. Key Blockages

At a national level, looking at the “big picture” of the land sector as a whole, a number of obstacles have been identified that are limiting the benefit that land could make to national development and the economy. Data quality is such a significant and recurring issue that it is covered as a separate topic in Part 2. The following issues are considered to be significant bottlenecks, preventing the efficient and effective working of the land sector in Albania:

6.1 Governance / Institutional / Organizational

- There is no National Land Policy framework to guide land institutions in their sub-sector policies and strategies;
- Inconsistent and overlapping legal and regulatory frameworks (partly resolved through the recent Cadaster Law);
- Very fragmented land institutions, sometimes working in parallel (partly resolved through the recent Cadaster Law) ;
- IPRO has not been effectively served by its Supervisory Board, although it is recognised that the Supervisory Board may also be restricted in its ability to effect change;
- Land transactions can lack transparency;
- Insufficient internal and inter-agency communication;
- Weak governance overseeing and coordinating land institutions;
- There is disagreement over the responsibility for the CORS system (ASIG/IPRO), with a danger that there will be two national systems working in parallel;
- A poorly functioning land market is inhibiting the move to modern economy.

Fig.22: Status of cadastre and land registration in Albania, Albania: Status Review of the Immovable Property Registration Office (IPRO),2018

(Brutal) Urban expansion in the region of Himara

The pressure of the increasing population on the urban grid The urban expansion in history

The population in Himara in 1551 was about 1212 people and in 1908 rose to about 6118. With the registration of the population in 1913, the population in Himara was 6032, including the administrative entity of the Kaza.

After WWII - in 1960 the population rose to 3556 and in 1970 to 4648 according to the private archive and register of Simo Milo.

“According to the data found on the homepage of the municipality of Himara on the population: According to the 2011 Census Himara has 7,818 inhabitants, while according to the Civil Registry this municipality has 27,049 inhabitants. With an area of 571.94 km², the population density according to the census is only 13.7 inhabitants / km² while according to the civil registry, the density is 47 inhabitants / km².”²⁶

As already mentioned in a previous chapter, the old settlement, during the time of the Ottoman Empire, was growing outside of the walls of the castle based on the growth of the families. This expansion of the castle was organized on the basis of the kinship and regulated by the council of the elders.

The religious buildings and public spaces were always an integral part of the urban grid. As the number of houses was growing, the families needed more churches for each neighbourhood. The public space was also regulated according to urban expansion. The squares and churches were also important elements of the urban network where the community would come together.

From what we can analyze today from the urban grid that we have inherited, we deduce the importance of an integral growth of all the elements of the urban network. Once the need for housing was growing and therefore the settlement was expanding, the public spaces and infrastructure had to grow accordingly with the same progression.

²⁶“The city of Himara,”
Official Information, <https://himara.gov.al/qyteti-i-himares-me-shume-info/>

It is important to mention that during the time when the Kosmas of Aitolus, who is known in the region as Saint Kosmas, was travelling through the region (1765-1779), an important change in the use of the land and buildings was carried out. The community was persuaded to build more schools and fewer churches, while many churches granted part of their space to be adapted for schooling purposes. Religion and education were working together for centuries during the Ottoman occupation. The first “hidden schools” were established in the underground cloisters of the monasteries.

The urban expansion should always take into consideration the needs of the community and the main functions that it has to fulfil. The settlement in Himara is rather simple, having as the main purpose to cover the needs of the families and to provide well-being. There were no buildings or spaces that had to serve a representative purpose.

The urban expansion has always had a natural rhythm and was able to be sustained by the underlying infrastructure which was inevitably being expanded and adapted to the new circumstances.

Even though the socio-economic circumstances changed drastically after WWII with the establishment of the People’s Socialist Republic of Albania, the main elements of urban planning were preserved. The socio-economic system was based on the contribution of the community to the whole; therefore, the local community was involved in the planning process. This was the first time when urban planning became institutionalized and the first time when the government and community had a vision for development. The regime of Hoxha was the first one to establish a planning process and to follow through.

The planning and the work done in the years of the dictatorship constitute the infrastructural basis for the “building boom” of the 90s. Even though the infrastructure was not maintained or rebuilt, it was an indispensable basis for the development after the collapse of the socialist system. Nevertheless, the urban planning protocols were not developed further, the sewage system was not expanded and neither were the rest of the basic services. As already analyzed, during the regime of Hoxha, the population was concentrated in the land and working with the goal of a prosperous future. There was no economic migration to other countries, while the inland migration was a possibility but not widespread. The urban expansion that followed the population growth was managed by the planning of the government which was of course in the framework of the socialist economy and is debatable up to nowadays. Nevertheless, planning and documentation were important processes that were not neglected. The rigorous planning made sure that urban expansion until 1990 was controlled and proportional. The need for additional services grows according to population growth.

The data regarding the development of the cooperative that are found in the archive, show how socio-economic development had an impact in the field of education, culture and health. No matter the scarce resources of the after war, the urban expansion did not only mean a growth in the number of residential buildings but also schools, hospitals, and cultural centres. As the economic activity was repressed, the public spaces were an important part of the social life –

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të kooperativës dhe anëtarëve, që çoi në zhvillimin e prodhimit dhe përsosjen e marrëdhënieve në prodhim, zhvillimin ekonomik dhe forcimin e sigurimit e stabilitetit ekonomik të kooperativës. Në këtë mënyrë si pas objektivit të caktuar u krijuan kushtet e kalimit të shpërblimit të punës jo vetëm me vendosjen e pagës së garantuar por, edhe të kalimit në shpërblimin e punës me pagë në të holla për notmë pune njësoj si në K.T.L dhe N.B. të dhe kjo duke u mbështetur kryesisht në forcat e veta nëpërmjet fondeve rezervë të kooperativës pa qënë nevoja të marrjes kredi me afat të shkurtër jo vetëm për përballimin e përkohshëm të shpërblimit sistematik të punës por edhe për mbulimin e përkohshëm të shpenzimeve të tjera të prodhimit.

Për ndihmën nga shteti një moment i rëndësishëm për kooperativën është vlera e madhe e kredis me afat të shkurtër për vendosjen e shpërblimit të punës gjatë vitit me bordero mujore që u përmend më sipër dhe që kjo ishte një masë me shumë rëndësi për organizimin e punës dhe të prodhimit dhe drejtimin shkencor të ekonomisë. Pa ndihmën e shtetit me anën e kredis me afat të shkurtër nuk mund të kalohet në shpërblimin e punës gjatë vitit me bordero mujore.

ZHVILLIMI EKONOMIK.

Si rezultat i punës së bërë kooperativa bujqësore ka hecur me hapa të shpejta. Rritja e pronës, e prodhimit dhe zhvillimi i kooperativës paraqitet si më poshtë:

Nr.	T r e g u e s a t	Nj. Matje	1960	1965	1970
1	Popullsia	frymë	3034	3556	4648
2	Familje Kooperativiste.....	familje	477	578	590
3	Sipërfaqe e punueshme	ha	522	562	773
	Nga kjo: a) tokë arë.....	"	75	55	49
	b) ullishte	"	274	285	500
	c) vreshtë.....	"	146	140	128
	ç) pemë frutore....	"	27	82	96
	Nga pemëtaria gjithsejt:				
	1.-Ullinj gjithsej.....	rrënjë	134509	156659	166786
	nga këto në prodhim.....	"	128000	132653	138951
	2.-Agrume gjithsej.....	"	120422	147435	147708
	nga këto në prodhim.....	"	4300	6682	16109

%

Fig.23: Data on the development of the population and agriculture from 1960 to 1970

Private archive of Simo Milo

In the photos, we see an extract from the private archive of Simo Milo, who was the leader of the cooperative in Himara. By leading the development of the cooperative he was therefore responsible for its socio-economic development. His practice and vision are documented in his private archive and provide information on the stages of the evolution of the community during the socialist regime. In the table above, it is documented how the population grew in the years 1960, 1965, and 1970. Moreover, the area of agricultural land and the number of trees cultivated are also documented. The urban expansion and the growth of the community were driven by the contribution to society, communization, and standardization.

The urban expansion occurred mainly towards the land since the development of society was directly related to the development of agriculture. The town centre in Himara took on the appearance of other cities in Albania when the apartment buildings were built. The expansion towards the land and the development of the other neighbourhoods was happening parallel to the expansion of the infrastructure.

“In the early 1990s, Albania remained predominantly rural, with about 65 percent of the population living in villages or the countryside. Urban dwellers, whose proportion of the national population had increased from one-fifth to almost one-third between 1950 and 1970, accounted for about 34 percent in the 1980s (see fig. 5; fig. 6). Rural-to-urban migration was contained as a result of the regime’s aggressive programs, initiated during the Third Five-Year Plan (1961-65), to restrict urban growth, build up agriculture, and accelerate rural development. (The campaign to improve rural living conditions is best exemplified by the expansion of the electric-power network to every village in the country by the winter of 1970.) The average village grew from about 400 residents in 1955 to nearly 700 in 1980.”²⁷

Until the first half of the 1960s, the economy and governance were not radically centralized. The population had an influence on the growth of the community and therefore the urban grid. As already mentioned, the council of the elders was re-established and was continuously guiding the development of the cooperative and the community. Even though the regime was not democratic, the opinion and needs of the community were taken into consideration regarding some of the significant concerns of the community.

In the tables below, we see the documentation of the number of facilities such as school buildings, maternity hospitals, and general hospital buildings. Furthermore, cultural education was highly regarded and cultural facilities such as the library, cultural hearths, and a cinema were built. With the growth of the population and society, the healthcare system had to grow accordingly, providing more sustainable services and coverage. A hospital was built and had a capacity of 18 beds in 1960, which grew to 24 beds in 1970. Other facilities such as kindergartens, pharmacies, radiography centres, ambulances, and maternity hospitals were also built.

From 1960 through 1970, the electrification of the whole region was achieved, the sewage system was developed, and the telephone connection was made available in different neighbourhoods in Himara.

Regardless of the propaganda of the Labor Party about the prosperity of the communist system and considering the extreme conditions the population in Albania was facing, it can be considered a planned development that was functioning. It managed to create a basis for further development and shows the importance that data documentation holds for the present and the generations to come.

²⁷ Albania : a country study (Washington: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress ; edited by Raymond E. Zickel and Walter R. Iwaskiw, Second Edition, First Printing, 1994), 74

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sore dhe blegtorale që siguruan riprodhimin e zgjëruar socialist. Kjo solli plotësimin më mirë të nevojave të përgjithëshme shtetërore dhe nevojat e konsumit të vetë fshatit. Vendosija e raporteve të drejta midis fondit të akumulimit dhe fondit të konsumit siguroi prodhimin e zgjëruar socialist dhe përmirësimin e jetesës të kooperativistëve.

Si në të tërë vëndin shndërimi socialist edhe në kooperativën bujqësore të bashkuar Himarë u arrit jo vetëm me zhvillimin e forcave prodhuese në bujqësi dhe rritjen e rendimentit në punë, por edhe me arritjen e përmirësimit rrënjësor të gjëndjes ekonomiko-shoqërore e kulturore dhe nivelin e jetesës të kooperativistëve.

Vendimet e Plenumit të Komitetit Qëndror të P.P.SH të Tetorit 1962 dhe të Dhjetorit 1963 e armatosën Partinë dhe të gjithë kooperativistët e kooperativës bujqësore të bashkuar të Himarës me një program luftarak të zhvillimit të bujqësisë për përmirësimin rrënjësor të gjëndjes ekonomiko-shoqërore e kulturore të kooperativistëve dhe ngushtimin e dallimeve thelbësore midis fshatit dhe qytetit gjatë periudhës së ndërtimit të plotë të shoqërisë socialiste. Me realizimin e këtij programi u arrit plotësimi i objektivave të parashikuara.

Duke bërë krahasimin me të kaluarën zhvillimi i kooperativës në fushën e arsimit, kulturës, shëndetësisë dhe masave të tjera sociale paraqitet si më poshtë:

Nr.		T r e g u e s a t	1938	1960	1970
I		<u>NË ARSIM.</u>			
	1	Shkolla fillore.....	3	4	4
	2	Mësues të shkollës fillore..	5	15	15
	3	Shkolla 8 vjeçare.....	-	1	2
	4	Mësues të shkollës 8 vjeçare	-	10	18
	5	Shkolla të mesme	-	1	1
	6	Mësues të shkollës së mesme	-	9	9
	7	Kopshte fëmish	-	4	4
	8				
II		<u>NË KULTURË.</u>			
	1	Pa llat kulture.....	-	-	1
	2	Vatra kulture	-	4	4
	3	Bibliotekë	-	-	1
	4	Kinema	-	1	1
III		<u>NË SHËNDETËSI.</u>			
	1	Spital	-	1	1
	2	Krevate në spital	-	18	24

Fig.24: Data on the development in the years 1938, 1960 and 1970

Private archive of Simo Milo

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Nr.	Nr.	Treguesat	1938	1960	1970
3	Maternitet	-	1	1
4	Klinik dentare	-	1	1
5	Qëndër radioskopi e grafi	-	-	1
6	Ambullanca	.....	-	1	4
7	Farmaci	.....	1	1	1
8	Infermeri	.....	-	1	4
9	Gerdhe fëmish	.....	-	4	5
IV	Objekte të tjera soc-kult				
1	Fura buke	.....	-	-	3
2	Ujësjiellës	.....	-	-	1
3	Elektrifikimi	.....	-	Po	Po
4	Lidhjet telefonike lagjet	.....	-	-	Po

Rezultatet e më sipërme si në fushën e prodhimit ashtu edhe të nivelit të jetesës pasqyrojnë kjo vijën e derjtë të Partisë sonë të dashur të shprehura në Vendimet historike të saj dhe mësimet e Shokut Enver Hoxha për ndërtimin e bazës ekonomiketë të socializmit dhe ndërtimin e plotë të shoqërisë socialiste, tregojnë për punën e madhe të Partisë në edukimin komunist, si për të gjithë punonjësit e vëndit tonë, edhe të kooperativistëve të kooperativës bujqësore të bashkuar Himarë për zbatimin me sukses të të gjithë detyrave dhe inisiativave revolucionare.

Si në të tërë vëndin edhe në kooperativën bujqësore të bashkuar Himarë për të siguruar zhvillimin e pa ndërprerë në rrugën e socializmit, kooperativistët në udhëheqjen e Partisë, krahas luftës kundër revizionizmit modern dhe imperializmit kanë bërë një luftë të ashpër e të vendosur sistematike kundër mbeturinave të së kaluarës në shoqërinë socialiste të cilat janë strofkë për lindjen dhe zhvillimin e revizionizmit dhe kapitalizmit.

Vendimet me rëndësi historike si ai për luftën kundër burokratizmit në vitin 1965, ai për rregullimin e përpjestimit të pagave të larta dhe pagave të mesme dhe të ulta dhe detyrat me letrën e hapur të 4 Marsit 1966 të Plenumit të Komitetit Qëndror të P.P.SH drejtuar komunistëve, punëtorëve, ushtarakëve dhe oficerëve ishin një armë e shëndoshë edhe në duart e komunistëve dhe kooperativistëve të kooperativës bujqësore të bashkuar të Himarës për një ecje më të shpejtë në të gjitha fushat.

%

Fig.25: Data on the development in the years 1938, 1960 and 1970

Private archive of Simo Milo

“The Building Boom” and betonization: The pressure of the increasing population on the urban grid

Regardless of the fact that the majority of the population moved abroad once the borders opened, seasonal tourism was flourishing in Himara. There were family businesses in town, a part of which were functioning during the whole year and some others only during the summer season. As a general frame, we see now countless hotels and “rooms to let” facilities. New additions to the tourist industry are the numerous organized camping sites and a few hostels. These are currently elements of the urban grid.

We have to read the urban environment along with its elements and interpret them according to their function, the need they fulfil, and the time when they were created. The camping sites and the hostels are later models that were introduced in order to fit the type of the young foreign tourist who is usually passing through the region and very rarely a regular visitor. Himara was a family destination and developed hotels and rooms or apartments to let but now with the rising popularity, it is acquiring some new elements with an ephemeral character as an addition to the urban grid.

In the bay of Livadhi, which is located in close proximity to the castle, this informality in the urban expansion is very well visible. In the last 30 years of the liberal state, we witnessed massive exploitation of the seashore. By reading the built environment, it becomes obvious that the absence of planning and development strategies led to a non-aesthetic and non-qualitative architecture. The short-sighted investment strategy and buildings lacking quality, have not yet led to an economic decline but have surely impacted the landscape and panorama negatively.



Fig.26: Livadhi Bay in year 2000

We notice the same transformation of the built environment also in the other parts of the town. A way to make the densification of the urban grid evident is by showing the continuity of this development from 1930 until nowadays. Albania is experiencing the supremacy of privatization for decades. The restitution of private property has been the most problematic concern for the local community, while there is barely any public provision. The infrastructure is old in its main part and severely flawed. During the peak of the summer season, the infrastructure is overburdened.

In 2015 the neighbourhoods that were far from the shore were inhabited only by locals. With the development of tourism and a modest prolongation of the tourist season, there is an increasing number of hotels and hospitality facilities being built, overburdening the outdated infrastructure. This is attributed to the lack of planning and integrated regulation that has opened the way for a deeply informal and non-architectural way of building.

The infrastructure that was inherited from the cooperative cannot sustain this intensity of this expansion. This urban expansion is not institutionalized or based on any masterplan. New facilities are being built and extensive areas are dedicated to resorts planned by big investors. The local community is losing control over the land of their ancestors and their region. The line of development that the government is following does not consider the will of the local community. The development of tourism is seen as the only source of income in the region. As a result, socio-economic development is shaped by the decisions that are taken based on the interests of the tourism industry. Therefore, urban expansion is currently driven by fast profit and is not regulated by any official instances.



Fig.27: Livadhi bay in 2017

The urban growth started to get out of control since there was no planning or legislation to serve as a backbone. The inability to manage the situation in the country left space for corruption and a lack of integrity. The sudden need for new facilities and infrastructure at the beginning of the 1990s together with the lack of specialized education and financial means induced the vernacular, non-uniform character of architecture in Himara. Moreover, the lack of planning and heritage preservation measures have caused severe damage to the town, especially to the old section. We could say that the way of building and making architecture, especially the last 30 years, has a mixed character and is rather intuitive.

Today the urban expansion is based on financial profit as the region of Himara is the number one tourist destination in Albania. The above-mentioned factors have led to an urban structure that has more rooms to let than permanent residents. Even though the social structure has always been family-centered, urban development is no longer family-centered. Even the traditional houses are being adapted to be rented to the tourists during the summer months. What is continuously being added to the urban network are hotels, hostels, and resorts - so facilities for temporary residence.

An increasing number of buildings remain empty after the summer season, resulting in over 8 months of desertedness not only for the buildings but for the town itself. The focus of the economy is set entirely on the seashore and the land is neglected. The practices of making use of the land, which would provide occupation and income for the community during the rest of the year, are no longer being applied. The seashore is seen and valued as the main attraction.

An interesting practice and observation are the existing houses close to the shore which are extensively taking on an ephemeral character to fulfil the function of the apartments to let. On the other hand, the houses that are located in the neighbourhoods further from the seashore have a rather traditional character and are more family-centred.

In the map drawn by Melina Gjoka, an architecture student with whom we are jointly researching the architectural developments in Himara, it is shown how the urban expansion and intensification happened gradually from the ancient settlement in the castle to the contemporary town centre next to the seashore in Spile.

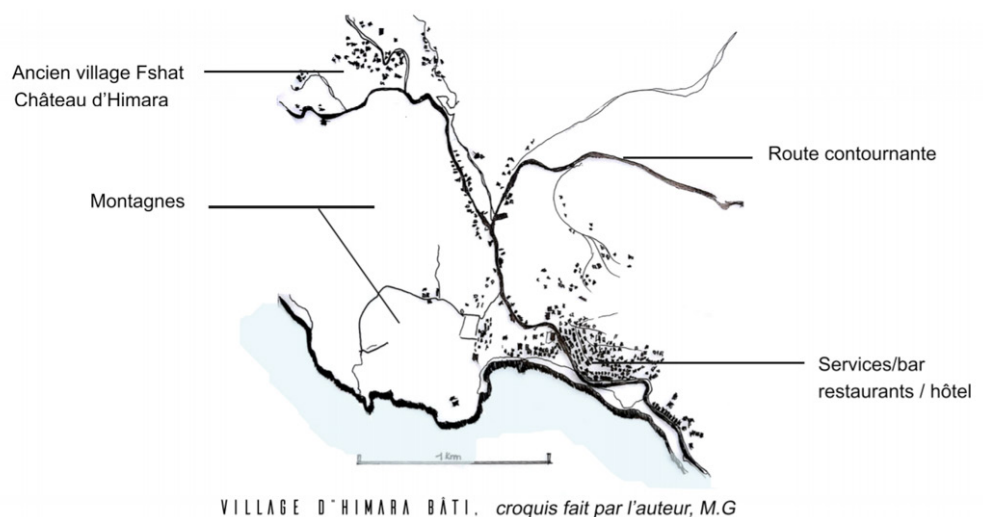


Fig.28: Map showing the urban expansion.
Author: Melina Gjoka, Architect from Himara, living in Paris

In 1930, the settlement was expanding towards the seashore. The two main factors that influenced the direction towards which the early urban expansion was unfolding were the proximity to the sea and the direct proximity to the national road. The character of the settlement remained rural and simplistic, retaining the traditional way of building. In that time Himara had only an agricultural character without any touristic attribute. The expansion of the settlement was not institutionalized and there was no vision for the development of the region. It was mainly the council of the elders acting as the regulating entity as there was not any official urban planning developed by the government.



Fig.29: Himara in 1930
Source: Fototeka Himara

In the 1950s, the built environment started to adopt the characteristics of a town. The growth of the population under the dictatorship was characterized by an increased level of productivity. The settlement was expanding along the seashore and towards the land, where new neighbourhoods were created. Himara had a dominant agricultural character. The facilities that could accommodate tourists were scarce as everything was regulated by the Labor Party and the economic situation of the country would not allow a high degree of tourist activity.

The apartment buildings are the new addition to the built environment that differentiates this period from the earlier times. Arguably, the Labor Party was the only governing authority in Albania that had a planned vision for the development of the country, which was implemented according to specific regulations and standards. The electrification of the country was achieved during the years of the dictatorship and the main roads, bridges, as well as the rest of the basic infrastructure, was also created by the community work during the dictatorship of the proletariat. Nevertheless, the good practices, the successes that were achieved by the population and the culture of active contribution to the society should be brought back to the community awareness. We would greatly benefit from many practices that were successful in the past decades which are carefully documented. The propaganda should be filtered out as for many people; everything that is related to the communist past must be rejected. The public needs to be educated to be disposed to preserve the good elements of such an extreme regime.



Fig.30: Himara in 1960
Source: Fototeka Himara

Already in the first decade after the restoration of capitalism, there was a noticeable boost in the building industry. The settlement was expanding along the seashore in the town centre. The toponym of the centre of the town is Spile and it derives from the mythical cave of the Cyclops in the Odyssey. The Italian archaeologist Luigi Cardini led the first excavations in 1939 in the cave in Spile, which was declared a cultural monument of the first category in 1973. The cave itself was endangered by the massive urban expansion when an apartment building started to be constructed and was obstructing the access and visibility of the cave. This case shows the disregard for the cultural heritage from the private and public stakeholders. Fortunately, an intervention caused the construction of the building to be stopped and now there is a poster stand giving information on the cave being a cultural monument with a high historical and archaeological value.

The preservation of historical buildings and cultural monuments is more important than ever if we consider the practices that are being applied in Albania and the very recent demolition of the National Theatre.²⁸ After more than two years of protests against the decision of the government, the National Theatre, which was standing for 81 years in the main boulevard of Tirana, was demolished.

The urban expansion that is happening in the whole country in the last years favours the big investors disregarding the will of the community and the public opinion. New profitable projects are being privileged over the traditional buildings and even over the national cultural monuments. This is a time when the processes of archiving and documenting are crucial, not only for assembling information but also to document the irregularities with the vision of preventing future damage.

The ongoing urban expansion is progressing towards the land without an official planning process and without taking into consideration the opinion and interests of the local community. This is a spineless development that provides enough flexibility for favouring the interests of the ones in power. The creation and sustention of a qualitative urban environment require the contribution of all the stakeholders. The interests of all parts must be considered and evaluated and a good knowledge of the tradition is required.

²⁸ Benet koleka, “Demolition of Albanian national theatre sparks angry protests,” May 17, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-albania-theatre/demolition-of-albanian-national-theatre-sparks-angry-protests-idUSKBN22T-0FV>



Fig.31: Himara in 2010
Source: Fototeka Himara

“Building Boom” and “Betonization” are unfortunately widely used terms in the Albanian media. There is no real architectural discourse in Albania and the opinion of the experts in the field is not being taken into consideration. The top-down culture has been a dominant attitude for decades. The vernacular character of the architecture created by the local community is easily readable in the urban environment. The lack of expert knowledge, the focus on fast and easy profit, and the short-sighted investment strategies are the factors that influenced this specific type of development. There is no uniformity in the urban grid and no building or architectural standards being applied.

The architectural practice that is being applied is not well-suited to the landscape, the needs of the community, and to the local tradition.

There is a prominent disparity between the facilities that are built by the local community and the ones that are built by the big investors in the tourist sector. The buildings of the local community are mostly modest, vernacular but in many cases respecting the landscape and traditional way of building. Diversely, the big hotels and resorts that are built by powerful stakeholders are in complete contrast with the landscape and the traditional character of the villages. Most of the resorts are occupying extensive areas of land in conflict with the local community regarding the ownership over the occupied land. Numerous inhabitants have been denied the right of ownership over the land of their ancestors while the land is being taken over by the government or influential businessmen.

It is important to notice that the above-mentioned urban expansion and “Building Boom” is based on the old infrastructure. Few additions have been made in the last 5 years when the road infrastructure and water supply are finally being expanded. It is understandable that the infrastructure cannot sustain the overpopulation during the peak of the tourist season. The road infrastructure, the sewage system, and the supply of water and electricity are being severely challenged every summer.



Fig.32: Himara in 2017
Source: Fototeka Himara

The pressure of development on the traditional settlement

The picture above is taken along the national road, approaching the town centre Spile. It is evident that this type of urban development is not only disrupting the landscape but also the street view. However, this is a mild intervention if compared to the way it is being built in the centre of the town or compared to some extreme examples of interventions within the walls of the old castle which will be shown further on.

It is arguable that old houses must be renovated and adapted to the contemporary needs and that also new residential buildings are needed since the families are growing. The densification process in cities and villages is unavoidable and in the case of Himara, it has reached an advanced stage. Reaching this advanced stage without prior planning, without expert knowledge, and with deficient regulating instances has caused severe damage to the town.

“The forces of the Urban Planning Police (IKTM) and of the Albanian Army, have demolished so far 25 buildings and structures at the villages of Drimades and Vouno, stating that this is a part of a development plan of the area of Himara materialized by the Albanian government. The demolition operations in those villages continue to this day and they are expected to be extended to the Old Town of Himara with the target being the demolition of buildings and businesses that have been built in those villages after 1991. The Community of Himara (Komuniteti Himariot) based in Tirana, denounces that this plan is named: “Development of the Albanian Alps and seaside areas of the Ionian Sea” and it is funded by the EU through the Development Bank (CEB) of the European Council that manages money from the European Union. The funding available for this plan by the EU and it is 28.700.000 Euro while the Albanian participation is limited only to the payment of the VAT that is roughly 6.000.000 Euro. OWNERSHIP GENOCIDE.”²⁹

As stated in the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, the local community continues to take a stand against the irregularities in the process of restitution of the property after the transition to a capitalist regime. Unfortunately, the requests of the community are not being considered and with the advancing of time and the generation change, important information is being lost. The lack of documentation is a frailty that has been passed on from generation to generation. A community based on non-written laws is not sustainable in modern society. Access to information and knowledge is of key importance in the development and sustainability of a society.

²⁹ National Association “Northern Epirus 1914”, “OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting”, September 26, 2016, 6, translated from “HIMARA.GR,” [The ownership genocide at Himara is funded by the EU!], May 12, 2016, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/b/267626.pdf>

Fig.33: Center of Himara - Spile



With the collectivization of the property from the Labor Party, followed by the informality and the state of oblivion that was caused by the transition to a liberal system, the local population was relying heavily on the collective memory in order to locate their land by locating the borders to their neighbours.

For a community like the one in Himara that treasures its history and tradition, the collective memory has always been important and passed on with pride to the next generations. The state of isolation that was enforced for almost five decades, emphasized the tribal character of the community. Family relations were especially strong, and strong social relations were created as a result. The families were preserving the cultural and religious traditions rigorously. As in most small communities, public opinion was very important and served to regulate certain behaviours within the community. In this way, the tradition was again having the role of the “unwritten law”.

An important element of the social structure is the social interaction. In Himara, the architecture and building typologies have been inevitably influenced by social interaction. This is evident in the way that communication with the neighbours is facilitated and the way that the border between the private and public space is shaped. The communication, visibility, and interaction with the neighbours were vital for the community. Now, these relations have been altered by the uncontrolled urban expansion. The state of deregulation has left an indelible mark in the urban environment. The time that we are living in is a historical period that like the previous ones will be considered as yet another phase that the community went through. Nevertheless, we ought to learn from our past failures and change the line of development that is being followed in the last decades. To overcome the current state of informality, there is an urgent need for restoring and further improving the documentation processes. The documentation of the phases of development will create a knowledge directory and hopefully prevent the bad decisions of the past from being repeated.

The current development strategy is short-sighted because a big part of the local investments are of poor quality and the large scale investments of the last decade do not fit the landscape or the rest of the urban environment. Moreover, the big hotels and resorts that are built by influential businessmen barely contribute to the local economy.

A very iconic example of a destructive development stands along the national road and it depicts the conflicts on the property, the lack of regulation, and the lack of architectural expertise. The disregard for tradition and heritage is a new trait that has been induced by the possibility of fast profit that was enabled by the capitalist system. The structure is testifying in a very strong visual way the division of the families after two generations.

The house in question is documented in the private archive of Simo Milo in its initial form. A very simple sketch shows the modest architectural style that is typical for the region. The area of the land and the number of trees were documented. The signatures of the owners and the leaders of the cooperative give authenticity and value to the document.



Fig.34: House of the family Kallushi
Photo taken by the author.

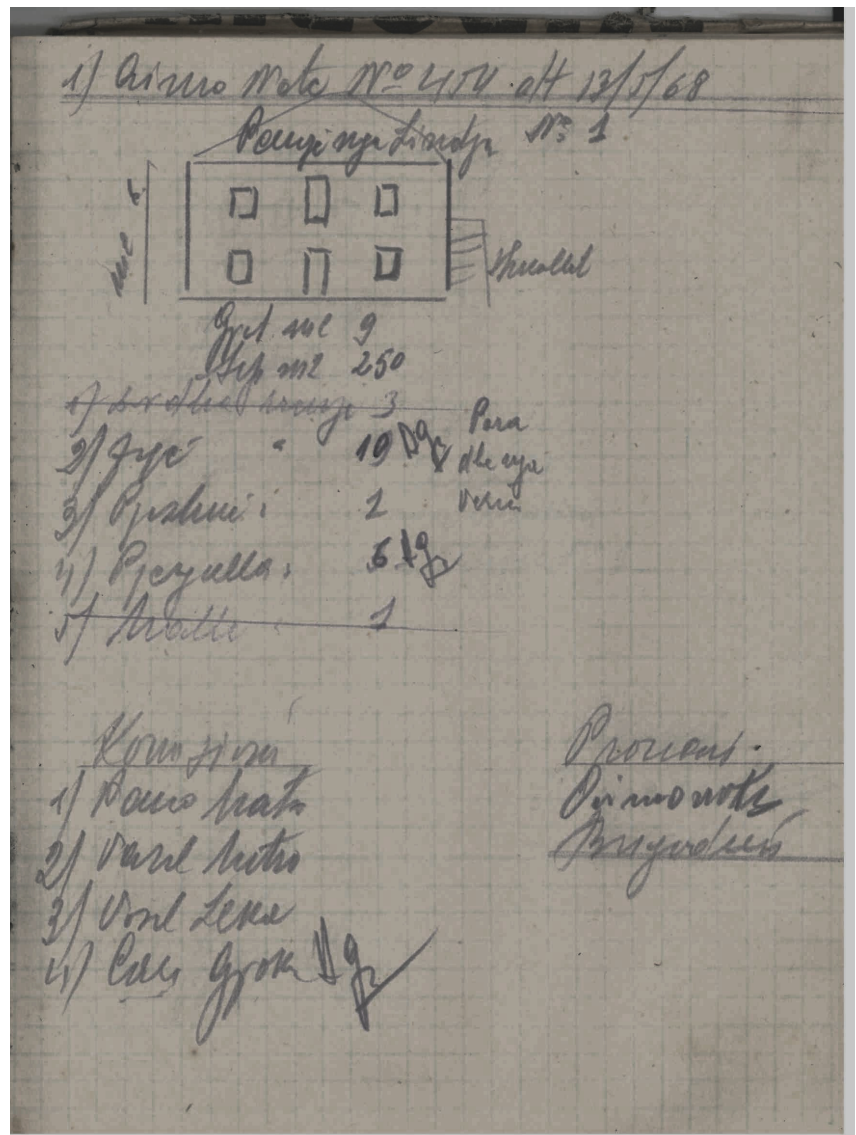


Fig.35: Plan of the house
Source: Private from the archive of Simo Milo

We could speculate that the structure depicts also the financial situation of each family of this kinship. The discrepancy between the architectural styles is obvious and stands as proof of the high level of informality. This structure could be considered as an abstract or miniature of the urban grid where we can see elements from the main historical periods. A part of the old traditional building is still present next to the socialist structure and the contemporary structure.

The lack of uniformity in the urban grid is not a conscious decision. The economic situation and the lack of architectural expertise have conditioned the creation of grotesque structures of this kind that are in total contrast with the status that the region has as one of the most visited tourist destinations in the country.

One of the elements that the different structures have in common is the infrastructure. The hanging cables are evidence that even the most recent urban expansion is based and being supplied in most part from the old infrastructure.

Nevertheless, urban expansion is an ongoing process. This urban expansion is not being regulated or based on any regional development planning. The only focus during the summer months is tourism. The development strategy of a region cannot be based only on one specific sector of the economy otherwise it will bring a major imbalance in the social structure, economy, and built environment. The life cycle in Himara is extremely alterable given the seasonal character of the economy. The investments and the development policies are focused on the coastal activities and the profit that comes from the summer season. The other sectors of the economy are gravely neglected. Agriculture is an integral part of life in the region. The population has always been inclined to agriculture as it used to be the main source of income for the previous generations. The shift of focus from the land towards the seafront, to this extent, is not sustainable. There is a big potential in other activities that are not related to the sea, such as culture and agriculture.

The potential income from cultural activities and cultural tourism is gravely underestimated. This can be attributed to the lack of education and awareness about the importance of cultural heritage. Himara is a region that has a lot to offer regarding culture, art, and gastronomy. While gastronomy is part of the tourist industry and is enjoyed by both Albanian and foreign tourists, it remains a very minimal part of the local culture. Some of the most appreciated artists in Albania are originally from the region of Himara but even in this case, there is little awareness. Their houses are not marked in the urban grid, there is no reference to their work and the artistic activity in the region is minimal.

There is no cultural centre in Himara and this is considered a downgrade from the period of the socialist regime where cultural facilities were built in order to promote art and culture. Not wanting to overlook the restrictions to which art and the artists themselves were submitted during the dictatorship, I aim to bring forward the existence of the cultural buildings only for the sake of the urban and architectural discourse.



Fig.36: House of Kallushi family
Foto by the author

The pressure of growth on patrimonial buildings

The urban development in Himara is often seen as risky and acquires a negative connotation. In many discussions with locals that are either living in Himara or others, who have moved to different cities and countries, there is a dominant thought that the urban development in Himara is detrimental. The local community has a tendency to romanticize the past as a time when values such as family and tradition were prevailing. Heritage and tradition are usually important in communities that are based on kinship.

The pride that is related to the heritage and history of Himara is another important element of social interaction. The himariots see themselves as an autochthone community who is living in a settlement that has had an uninterrupted life span since ancient times. The community certainly wants their legacy to live on and future generations to treasure and preserve their inheritance. For every family, it is important to educate the younger generation on the traditions of the community and cultivate the love for Himara, their land, and their properties.

A community with these characteristics would aim to preserve its architectural heritage as well but this is not a common practice. Due to the lack of knowledge, material, and in many cases also due to economic difficulties, there have been brutal interventions in traditional buildings. The absence of governmental entities and regulations that would guide and monitor the development of historical sites and traditional settlements has allowed senseless renovations and extensions to some traditional buildings. This has become a dominant attitude in the last decades and the small private initiatives of heritage preservation are not sufficient for maintaining the traditional character of the settlement.

The interventions in the traditional buildings are legitimate when they concern the maintenance of the building and its adaptation to the requirements of modern life, without influencing its architectural character. The addition of cement between the joints of masonry walls, the installation of new roofs, or the addition of balconies belongs to the above category of operations. However, in the case of Himara, the traditional character that many buildings have has not only been altered but in many cases, it has disappeared. There are numerous cases of old houses built mainly with stone and wood as the materials that have been used traditionally in the settlement for many centuries, whose exterior walls have now been plastered and the window frames have been replaced with metal or other unsuitable materials and colours. The desire of making the old houses viable and making them comfortable for the new generation to live drove many of the locals to make hasty decisions regarding the reconstruction of the houses of their ancestors. Highly bizarre is the image of some stone houses or even churches, to which reinforced concrete columns have been added to their exterior walls in order not to collapse. In some cases, the columns end in external foundations, which are also visible.

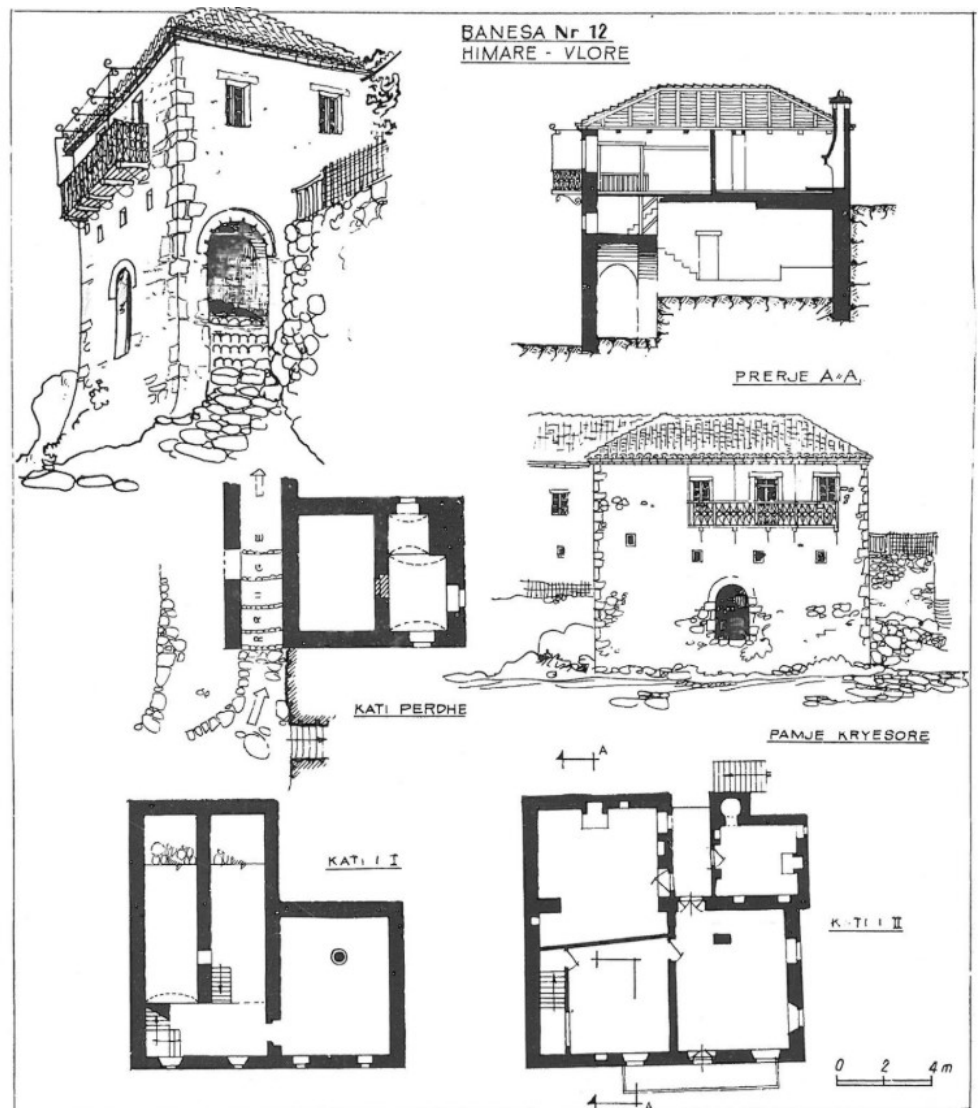


Fig.37: Plans of the patrimonial building
Emin Riza, Arkitektura e banesës popullore në zonën e “bregut të detit” (Labëri)
[The architecture of the popular housing in the coastal area]

In the case of a building that is located very close to the southern gate of the old castle, we witness a severe alteration of the original architectural character of the house. The balconies that have been added do not comply with the traditional architectural character and aesthetics. The purpose of this addition is meeting the needs of the family for comfort, providing additional semi-open spaces, and facilitating the view to the sea. The desire to fulfil their purposes is legitimate; however, the means that were chosen and the outcomes are arguable.

The use of modern materials and contemporary building methods is not incorrect in the way it is practised. The problem arises when the method that is being used is unsuitable. Coating the exterior wall of a traditional stone building will inevitably change its architectural character. The lack of knowledge and the absence of governmental instances that regulate the interventions in traditional settlements have led to a certain degree to the omission of the traditional way of building. The dominant approach in Himara is to praise modern and contemporary architecture. The images of the houses in the Greek islands of the Cyclades have inspired many locals to adapt their characteristics to the buildings in Himara, which is mostly unfit. This preference does not only stem from an aesthetical preference but from the success that the islands have in tourism also. Architectural decisions should not be taken arbitrarily based on these criteria.

The architecture of some newly built structures has respected the traditional character of the settlement, allowing the buildings to coexist harmoniously with the older ones. Modern materials and building methods have been used for their construction. However, these new buildings would probably be more suitable for the town centre (Spile) than for the old castle.

The newly built houses, the building extensions, and the renovations have not emerged from a systematic study of the physiognomy of the village or their integration in the environment. An important trait of the social interaction in capitalist times is the individualism and self-centeredness that resulted from the financial struggles. When the urban environment is not seen as a whole from the population, it is the duty of the government to regulate their intervention. The lack of vision and planning from the side of the government has enabled this form of urban development that would have been unacceptable for most of the other European countries.

The drawings of the house that is located in the old castle are extracted from a research on the traditional housing of the seashore that was made during the socialist regime. Apart from its importance in the documentation of the architectural heritage of the region, this paper gives some evidence on the effort that was put from the side of the Labor Party in creating a knowledge base and for archiving the heritage of the country. Nowadays, we are lacking practices of this kind and the consequences are severe. The memory that is lost becomes knowledge that goes lost.



Fig.38: Traditional building
in the castle.
Photo by the author



Fig.39: Detail of the interventions on the traditional architecture in the old castle
Photo by the author



Fig.40: Detail of the interventions on the traditional architecture in the old castle
Photo by the author

Vernacularity and Uniformity

The Socio-economic facts that are mentioned in the previous chapters are consequently being expressed in the urban environment. In this line of analysis, the socio-economic factors are being translated into architecture. It is thereafter the way in which we read the urban environment that enables us to further analyze and interpret how the social and architecture interrelate. In the previous chapters, it is shown how the socio-economic developments in different periods in the history of Himara have influenced the process of making architecture. The dominant behaviours in each period are imprinted in the collective memory and are often being referred to in today's decision-making. The contemporary society is fast-paced to a degree that it has never been before, especially in the tourist season. The community awareness cannot possibly process this amount of information and pace of development.

Another important fact that should be considered is that the community is biased towards the way that certain decisions from the side of the government are taken and towards the way that the development is affecting different groupings within the community. This will result in a biased collective memory in the future when it will be unclear to define what caused the type of development that we are experiencing now. In order for this to be avoided, new processes of assembling and archiving knowledge, documents, and information must be implemented.

One of the expressions of the socio-economic developments in the urban environment is vernacular architecture. With the brutal transition that is happening in the last decades in an increasingly globalized society, the local community is concerned about the loss of many traditional qualities of Himara. The way the local architectural heritage is being managed is a big concern for the natives of Himara considering the uncontrolled urban expansion.

Nevertheless, urbanisation and the transition from village to tourist hotspot in Himara are not to such an advanced degree as in other bigger cities in Albania. In big touristic cities like Durrës, Vlora, and Saranda where the population is higher, the process of "Betonization" is already very advanced. The scenery is irreversibly affected. Nevertheless, life in these cities is not seasonal. They became trade centres in the capitalist state and the preexisting infrastructure enabled a much faster urbanisation. There is a very obvious verticality of the buildings in the urban grid and extensive hotel and resort complexes. The vernacularism in these cities is lost and the traditional character of the cities is also fading away. Globalization, the development of tourism, and the fast profit from the tourist season mainly in the summer months drove the focus of the communities of these big cities away from the integrated regional development. The areas closer to the coast are the ones with the highest value and the highest level of exploitation. The regions further away from the coast present a lower degree of urbanisation and tend to preserve the vernacular architecture. By urbanisation, in the tourist sites in Albania, it is meant the urban sprawl and the sudden growth in the traffic of people and goods.

In the case of Himara, the smaller size of the town, the outdated infrastructure and the will of the community to preserve the traditional character of the village, has inhibited the urban sprawl up to some degree. Nevertheless, the high-rise apartment buildings are present in Himara also. The very low quality of the composition and construction make them stand out in the urban grid.

These buildings clearly fit neither the urban grid nor the character of the region. Despite the contestations of the local community and the irregularities regarding the property rights, there are many other buildings of this type being built in the last years.

The vernacular architecture was dominant in Himara mostly until the establishment of the capitalist state. In the first decade after the restoration of capitalism and private property, the urbanisation had a rather vernacular character.

The future of urbanisation in Himara is uncertain. The local community is not being considered in the decision-making and the public hearings and discussions always end up in fierce discussions. The government's line of development in the last decades has brought damage to the land and to the scenery in the region. The "touristification" and globalization that the government and strategic investors are foreseeing in Himara do not comply with the will of the population. The community in Himara is very attached to the tradition. The vernacular architecture in Himara reflects not only the long experience that the community has gathered in construction but also the use and the connection with the land. The local community has a tradition of building mainly with materials that can be found on-site or be transported from nearby locations. The materials used do not only have a role in the logistics of the building process but also in the aesthetics of the buildings.

The use of earthy materials and the use of traditional techniques make the newly constructed buildings fit more naturally in the urban grid. The buildings that were built during the socialist regime were the first ones to stand out in the urban environment. Subsequently, many other buildings and hotels of that typology were added and even on a bigger scale. The restoration of the capitalist system was intended to challenge the status quo. Private stakeholders who became influential already in the first years of the Republic of Albania invested in building complexes and hotels in the region of Himara. In many of these cases, the illegal expropriation of the land was reported but without any results.

The small local investments are in the shadow of the hefty ventures of the strategic investors and stakeholders close to the government. The local economy is struggling year by year and a new wave of massive migration causes stagnation of the social and economic life in Himara after the tourist season.



Fig.41: The promenade in the center of the town, in Spile

The photo above depicts a typical summer day in the centre of Himara, in Spile. A rearrangement of the waterfront has been carried out about four times in the last fifteen years. This has been the first layer in the urban grid that stretched like a belt around the coastline, within the town and the region where the main socio-economic activities were taking place. The first buildings and facilities that were related to the tourist industry were built in Spile. We could speculate that this relocation of the centre of Himara from the old castle to the waterfront was influenced by the direct proximity to the national road and to the sea. The relief was also facilitating the logistics of a town with growing needs along with the free space for further growth and densification that the castle was lacking. The strategic location of Spile was already recognized by the socialist state. The harbour on the western end of the coastline in Spile was a rather important part of the trading and transportation network in different periods.

In 2020 we can say that Spile has already undergone the peak of its development. A phenomenon that was evident in the last fifteen years of massive tourist development and urban densification is the devaluation of different zones in the urban grid. This fluctuation of the value of the land is related to the level of exploitation, the damage of the landscape and seascape, the grade of densification, and the proximity to the waterfront.

The disappearance of vernacularism is a tendency that is evident already in the first layer of the urban grid. The first layer of the urban grid in the case of Himara is the one bordering with the seashore as a result of the “touristification” of the region. While first settlements in Spile were built along the shore and the national road, in the last decades the focus lies entirely on the coastline.

As it is obvious also from the photos, the urban intensification is happening along the coastline and in a much lower degree in the surrounding hills. There are older existing settlements in the hills and mountains around, where the urban densification is minimal. The tourist industry is starting to include these areas in tourist activities only in the last years.

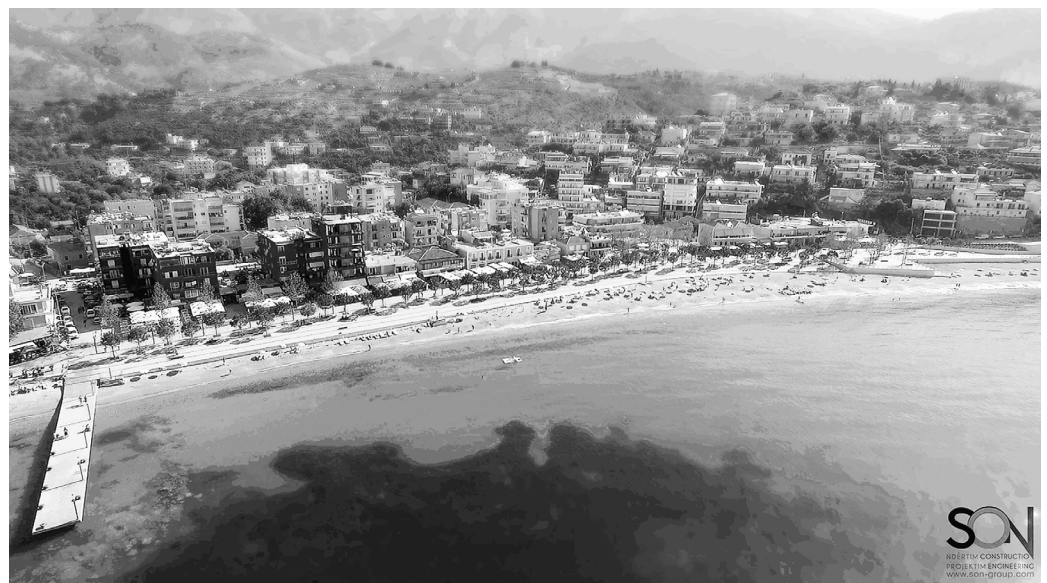


Fig.42: The promenade in the center of the town, in Spile



Fig.43: The zoning of the promenade in the center of the town, in Spile

The new promenade in the centre of Himara consists of several low raised steps made of concrete. The aim of the governing instances for the restructuring of the promenade was enabling better access to the beach. The previous promenade that is still remembered from at least 3 generations, there formed an elevated front towards the sea that was conceptualized based on the retaining walls of the cultivated terraces that were a common practice in the land.

The lack of knowledge and the lack of consideration towards the tradition resulted in faulty analysis and therefore a faulty implementation of the project.

The elevated front in the old promenade was protecting the pavement, street, and buildings from the high rise of the sea and the violent waves, especially during winter. Already in the first months after the presentation of the project, the promenade and town centre were flooded because of heavy rainfall which is a common phenomenon in Himara. The local community had warned the governmental entities and the architects regarding the flooding risk from the stream that is flowing to the sea, very close to the harbour and national road. Almost every winter the sea is causing damage to the shops in the first line since there is no barrier to retain the vigour of the waves in winter.

The analysis and evaluation of the project of the promenade is not the purpose of this chapter, but it is important to present the cases for bringing forward the importance of the collective knowledge and the opinion of the local community. The practices that have been applied in Himara for decades should be reclaimed. Tradition must not be seen as backwardness. For many years, the dominating architectural practices in Albania have been imported from abroad. Learning from the practices of more advanced countries is beneficial; nevertheless, some local practices cannot be easily substituted. Every region has its particularities and therefore foreign practices have to be adapted to the local setting.

Fig.44: Old promenade in Spile
<https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Himara>



Fig.45: Retaining walls of the cultivated terraces
 Photo by the author



In 2016, the government planned to demolish the 100-year-old buildings in the centre of the town in Spile. Letters were sent to the owners with the directive to empty their houses. These measures would be considered anything but democratic in any other European country. The local community did not accept to lose the houses of their ancestors and to erase the traditional image of the town. The historical and architectural heritage is mainly located in the old castle which is not part of the development plans of the government as it is located further away from the coast.

The constant contradictions and protests from the side of the local community achieved the revocation of the decision to demolish the old houses in the centre. In the public discourse phrases such as “colonization” of Himara from the Albanian businessmen are very frequent. The biggest demonstration organized by the residents was held in 2016 with the request of the restitution of the private property to the rightful owners. The abuse that is related to the urban sprawl and big investments stems from the inadequate laws on property and the faulty documentation on the cadaster. There have been many other cases of expropriation and demolitions in the broader region. In most of the cases, the result has been the exploitation of the land from stakeholders that are close to influential governmental figures.



Fig.46: Protest in Himara in 2016

The spatial consequences of these expropriations have been the densification of the urban grid, the overburden of the infrastructure, and the deterioration of the traditional character of the urban grid.

The vision of globalized tourism does not necessarily mean the loss of the uniqueness and traditional character of the settlements. On the contrary, as the local community claims, a growing number of foreign tourists express special interest in the local tradition. Authenticity is more important than a standardized solution. The will of the residents has to be taken into consideration when planning the development of the region. At the moment when the residents are denied the right to their property and inheritance, the following processes cannot be expected to be democratic or moral.

The meaning that is drawn from Herrle and Nebel, that a balance has to be found among cultural, historical, and economic values in architecture, is very important in the contemporary architectural practice in Himara. This balance is important to avoid losing the traditional and vernacular character of the architecture.

“Herrle and Nebel acknowledge that architectural design alone is not enough and that the challenges facing the region need to be conceived of and addressed in an integral fashion (Herrle and Nebel 2015b p. 5). This means that a balance among cultural, historical, and economic values needs to be found. Architecture cannot be fossilised but should be transformed into a living thing, either through use or interpretation. At the same time, it should not be commercialised to the point where it becomes merely a product and loses its valuable historical and cultural connections. The link between buildings and people should be strengthened. Communities should be involved in the interpretation of their heritage as well as in decisions related to its use.”³⁰

³⁰ TU Berlin, Sustainable Models of Heritage Conservation and Revitalization, ed. Emily Bereskin, Christian Haid, (Berlin: Technische Universität Berlin, GIZ - Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, 2018), 20-21

The forced Internationalization in the region of Himara

A new standardization practice

The time of the socialist regime was the only historical period that brought a certain degree of standardization in the process of making architecture in Albania and therefore in Himara also. There were building and engineering standards that had to be applied and evaluated by the respective governmental entities. These processes are not in place anymore in the capitalist state. There is an ambiguous building regulation and faulty or non-existing quality control.

The standardization of the socialist system is seen as a bad practice regarding the aesthetics of the buildings, the modest construction and composition and the inability to adapt the design to the landscape and character of the region.

The apartment buildings that stem from the time of the socialist state stand out negatively in the urban grid and are constantly being criticized. The freedom that came with the restoration of capitalism and the possibility of private initiatives was well received from the community. Nevertheless, the buildings that were constructed in the last 30 years equally lack aesthetic value. Buildings with exaggerated volumes were added to the urban grid, many times bringing irreversible damage to the landscape. The lack of building standards and the lack of site analysis has created a non-qualitative and irregular urban environment.

“The preservation of both these historical monuments and the vernacular character of the villages should be considered of utmost importance. The conservation of cultural heritage has significant benefits for social and economic growth across scales, from small communities to international communities. Architectural heritage can link communities together and provide individuals with a narrative sense of their connection to history and their visions for the future. It also has considerable economic benefits, in that it can spur further development and investment opportunities. The development of cultural tourism is a major aspect of the newly-developed tourism strategies, and consultants involved thus far on the project mention the mountain architecture specifically as a viable resource for local tourism-driven development, (Metahu 2015; AGE 2015).”³¹

³¹ TU Berlin, Sustainable Models of Heritage Conservation and Revitalization, ed. Emily Bereskin, Christian Haid, (Berlin: Technische Universität Berlin, GIZ - Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, 2018), 20

The will to follow the international developments and to apply international models endangers the vernacular character of the villages. The initiatives that have started the last few years promoting cultural tourism and mountain tourism are at a very early stage and have not yet managed to fully involve the local community in their actions and planning.

The traditional character and the vernacular architecture in Himara are being replaced by rather standardized architectural models. This is not an unknown practice in tourist destinations. In order to create facilities for the tourists, vernacular architecture is diminished for the benefit of an internationalized seascape.

The idealization of everything foreign is very common in Albania also when it comes to tourist trends.

Tradition is seen as old fashioned, outdated, and only in the last year, there are initiatives of heritage preservation emerging. Therefore since there are no real standards being set and applied, the type of standardization that occurs in the region, presents itself with the building materials, the shapes, and the functions of the buildings.

This is not necessarily the choice of the residents. The big investors and influential stakeholders have the power to make decisions on the development strategy. The bigger profit lies in large-scale tourist villages and resorts. This is an inevitable part of the urbanisation process in the tourist regions.

There is a degree of standardization in the resorts and in the so-called tourist villages. Extensive areas of land are occupied by repetitive building units. There is an evident alteration of the character from the traditional village to a globalized tourist destination. This development is happening without standards and planning, resulting in a chaotic and unaesthetic landscape which is an important factor for tourism. The urban grid in Himara remains more vernacular than standardized and has no uniformity.

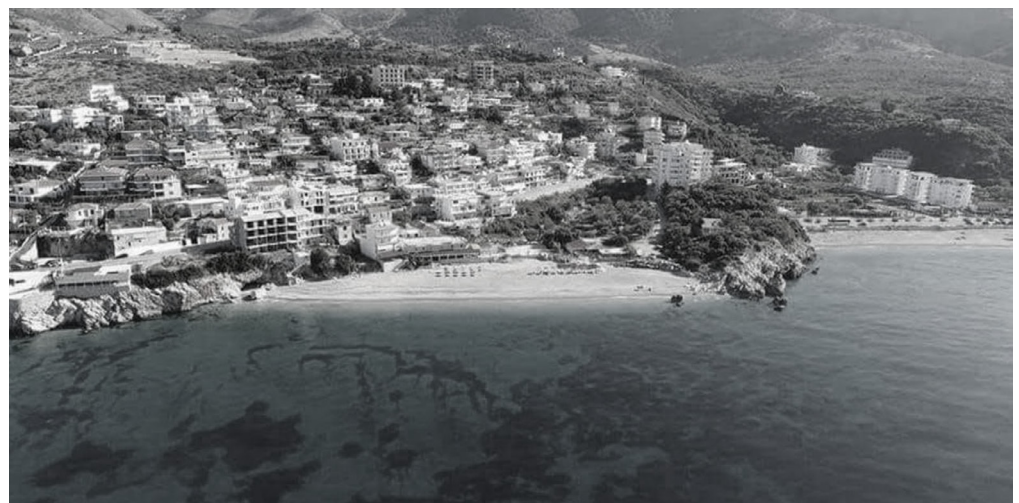


Fig.47: The urban intensification in the town center

The relationship of architecture with the landscape is immediate. Architecture is created into the landscape. Taking into consideration the Mediterranean climate in Himara and the constantly growing touristic activities in the region, the process of making architecture should be perceived in close relation with the landscape. In the last decades, the most important factor that is influencing the planning of projects of all sizes in Himara is the sea view. The landscape is in very few cases being integrated into the design process even though it has been an important part of the urban environment.

A new infamous practice that is being applied in the region is that of planning and building large resorts along the coast, in the most frequented beaches in the wider region of Himara. The contestations from the side of the local community have not brought any results. Regardless of the contestations over the ownership of the land, the construction of these resorts is not impeded and additional ones are being planned and presented to the wider public as a development that will raise the quality of the life and the value of the local tourism.

The case of the project below demonstrates the development pressure that is being exerted on the region in the name of the tourist development.

What used to be a peaceful landscape with untouched and crystal clear beaches is now being invaded by tourist resorts that are altering the landscape and the character of the region aiming the internationalization of the tourist industry.



Fig.48: A new resort being planned in Himara

According to Lefebvre, a society creates its own space. What does the space that we are creating say about our society? Lefebvre argues that this social production of urban space is fundamental to the reproduction of society, hence of capitalism itself. The social production of space is commanded by a hegemonic class as a tool to reproduce its dominance (see Gramsci).³²

The urban space that has been created from the capitalist state and the one that is being planned is undoubtedly showing the dominion of the state and the big investors. The capital is having excessive power over the land and decision-making.

In the example of the new resort that is being planned in a beach in the proximity of the old castle, we witness a total invasion of the land. In the picture above, the project that is being presented as low-impact and beneficial for the eco-tourism will cause an alteration of the natural environment and the urban space as it is perceived by the local community.

An article written by a local architect and resident of Himara, Egda Rapo, voices the disapprobation of the local community towards the development plans of the government.

“As much as the state makes plans for our land, we also make plans for (our) nature. The more we throw cubic concrete on any hidden slope you can think of, the more we bury our traditional architecture with rubble and rubbish, and with it all our identities. While we are fighting with each other and in the meantime we find no land that may not have belonged to anyone and we find no one (in the profile of these famous investors who have sprouted in the last decade in Drymades) to sell it to him to invest the money in studios in the plots that belong to us but we can't prove it, we have opened the door wide and we are looking to secure the window.”³³

The local community is feeling powerless and the frustration very often brings conflict especially during the summer months when the infrastructure becomes extremely overloaded.

The continuous requests of the resident for the adaptation and expansion of the infrastructure are ignored. The system is put to work only in the cases when the resorts need additional infrastructure. The neighbourhoods in the villages are dramatically neglected to the point where the circulation and energy and water supply of the residents are hindered.

The region is experiencing the paradox of the resorts that are advertised by the government and private entities showing optimal conditions and a globalized image, which are located next to a neighbourhood with small scale residential buildings and modest churches that have in many cases no paved road to be accessed.

³² Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991)

³³ “Νέα καταπάτηση στην Χιμάρα - Στα σκαριά ένα ακόμη παραθαλάσσιο resort” [A new encroachment in Himara - Another beach resort in the works], April 29, 2020, <https://www.himara.gr/epikairoτητα/topika-dromena/9649-sta-skaria-resort-paralia-himaras-na/9649-sta-skaria-resort-paralia-himaras>], Translation by the author

The problematic of the infrastructure and circulation

As already mentioned in the previous chapters, Albania was utterly unprepared to manage the big changes that came with the establishment of the capitalist system. The economic development that the government envisions is not viable and in the case of Himara, the exploitation of the resources is not sustainable. The line of development that has been followed in the last decades is not sustainable mainly because the infrastructure where this development is based is not being advanced and expanded at the same pace as the urban intensification.

The minimal additions and innovations that have been carried out in the last decade in the region are still not able to sustain the tourist activities in the summer peak. The investments of the government are mostly targeting the ventures of some influential stakeholders. The villages and especially the neighbourhoods that are located further away from the seashore and that might not have a view on the sea are noticeably neglected.

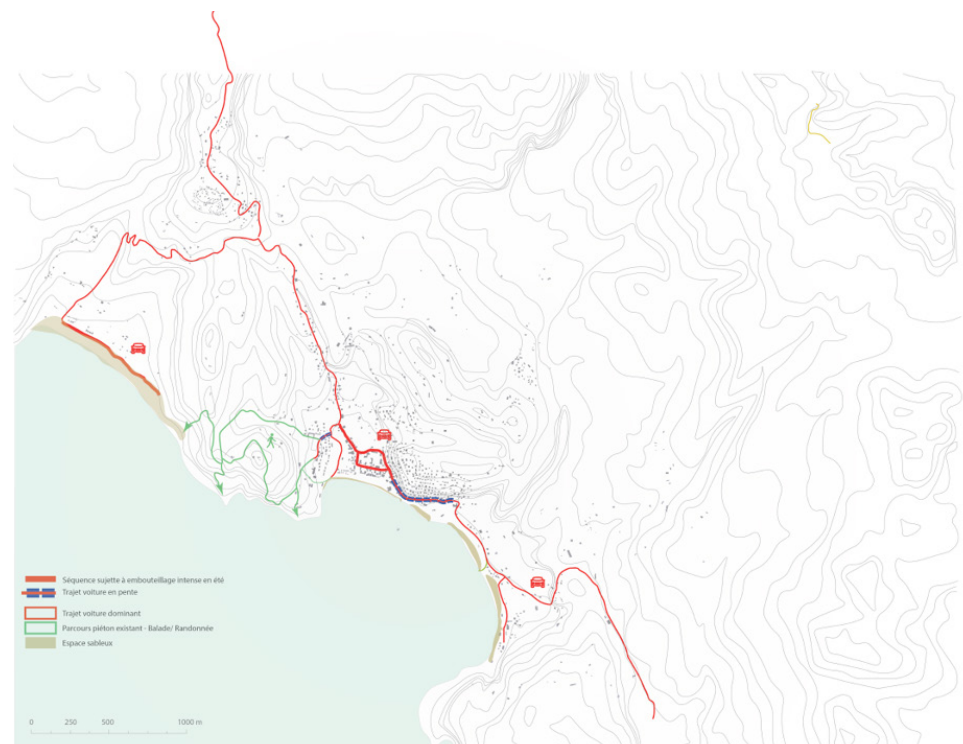


Fig.49: The development of the infrastructure
Source: Melina Gjoka, Architect from Himara living in Paris

Being a local I have experienced this “discrimination” of the neighbourhoods, where roads of the village that are branch roads crossing with the national road, are unpaved and make the circulation extremely difficult and time-consuming.

While even in the town centre the road surface is rather damaged, the traffic is constantly congested during the months of the peak in the tourist season. The situation has marginally improved but is still creating much discomfort even within small distances.

A central problem in the circulation within the town centre is the lack of planned parking spaces. During the communist regime, there were a minimal number of cars circulating. Owning vehicles was not usual for the average families as it is nowadays. We have to think that in the time of the socialist state, the urban grid was not dense. There was enough public space around the buildings to accommodate the very limited amount of cars at that time. The buildings that were planned in the time of the socialist state did not foresee the need for private parking spaces within the building.

With the establishment of the capitalist system and the restitution of the private property, the population was slowly but steadily acquiring motor vehicles. The practice of parking in public spaces around the building is still dominant also in bigger cities.

In the case of Himara, the lack of parking spaces and the overcrowded situation in summer led many locals to use their land for renting parking spaces. This way, having to pay a parking fee is a common practice in different empty lots in town that are turned into parking spaces.

Not only in Himara but generally in Albania, the buildings that were built even in the first decade after the establishment of the capitalist system did not have parking spaces included in their design. This was something that the builders, architects, and planners had to learn after experiencing the consequences.

The short-sightedness and the tendency to exploit all the resources to the maximum led the local community to neglect the inclusion of parking spaces even when they were planning Hotels. The profit that comes from additional rooms or from refraining from investing capital to create parking spaces when the landscape is not easy to shape led to the traffic congestion that we are experiencing nowadays.

The whole infrastructure is clearly overburdened during the summer months. The electrical and water supply are also problematic in some cases. The whole urban extension and intensification have as a backbone the infrastructure that was built from the socialist state. In the last years, the government has been investing in the innovation and expansion of the electrification system by adding power plants in town, which has alleviated the local community to some degree.

The winter months were also difficult in regards to the electric supply also because of the reason that the old and amortized infrastructure was being damaged easily when the weather was deteriorating.

There are new projects from foreign institutions in cooperation with governmental instances that after some extensive research in the region, are now working on the improvement and expansion of the water supply network.

Some positive developments of the last years are encouraging and will hopefully bring some balance in the social and urban aspects.

Another positive initiative that is taking the form of a movement and is also impacting the infrastructure and circulation is the one of the camping sites.

Different organized or also free camping sites are being established in the broader region welcoming tourists both from Albania and abroad.

These types of tourist facilities are having a rather mild impact on the infrastructure, if not bringing relief. We have to consider that the establishment of a camping site requires minimal intervention on the land and as a result will not cause the alteration of the landscape as in the case of building hotels.

It provides an experience that is closer to nature and landscape that will also hopefully redirect the attention from the seashore towards the land and hopefully towards other activities related to culture, sports, or the land itself.

The audience that the camping sites are targeting is bringing more community life to the summer season. The families or young adults that will choose these facilities for spending their vacation have the desire to enjoy nature and landscape and be closer to the community.

Moreover, the camping sites have parking spaces included and in many cases host visitors that tend to travel less in big distances.

The resources in the camping sites are also used more mindfully than in the Hotels and resorts. The electricity and water supply are securely provided but this does not act as a heavy additional burden on the infrastructure network. If we would compare to the hotels or resorts that make extensive use of air-conditioning and make use of many more electrical supplies that are provided to increase the comfort and the rating through the different platforms that are very popular already.

Differently, the impact that the big hotels and the resorts have on the infrastructure is extensive. Interestingly, the big resorts that are being planned, are based on development plans that require an extension of the existing infrastructure. As a result, there were cases where the unpaved roads were asphalted and the electricity and water supply network were reinforced and expanded to meet the needs of these new ventures.

The local community did benefit from these investments in a very paradoxical way. It demonstrates once again the dominion of the capitalist state and the big investors over the interests of the local community.

Faced with the “touristification” and the globalization that is taking place so intensively in Himara, the local community feels powerless.

The benefits of this line of development to the local community are minimal and the investments that are planned in the region are not in accordance with the will, needs and desires of the local community.

Synopsis: A graphical representation of the main parameters that contributed to shaping architecture in Himaradardization practice

My analysis focuses on the drastic socio-economic changes that happened throughout history in Himara to accentuate the impact that the socio-economic factors of society have on architecture.

The good practices, as well as the harmful interventions, were analyzed with the aim of creating a basis for further research and documentation that can hopefully be taken as a reference. Studying the process of making architecture throughout different periods and reading the urban environment will, in my opinion, serve the purpose of improving our understanding and our current architectural practice.

A new approach in architecture can have an impact on the social, “you need to know the patterns to see how people are fitting the jumble of facts into what they already have: selecting, misreading, distorting, excluding, embroidering, distributing empathy here but not there, remembering this echo or forgetting that precedent,”[Rebeca Solnit]. Understanding the way society has shaped the built environment, the private and public space, and documenting these processes and occurrences raises the awareness of the community. Moreover, the collective memory is an important part of the social interaction that can benefit greatly from the processes of assembling and archiving knowledge. Data and research on the socio-economic factors that have shaped our society and built environment are the only way to decode the complex stratification and intertwined elements of nowadays architecture in Himara.

Data and research on the socio-economic factors that have shaped our society and built environment are the only way to decode the complex stratification and intertwined elements of architecture in Himara. Starting from the ancient age and until the Albanian Kingdom, passing through byzantine and ottoman ages, there were no major socio-economic changes that have had any great impact in the process of making architecture. Therefore, I will analyze these centuries as a unique socio-economic period that was a period of consolidation of architectural archetypes. As already mentioned in the previous chapters, the first drastic change in the socio-economic structure in Albania happened after WWII. The People’s Socialist Republic of Albania was created and an autarchic government reigned for over four decades.

The extreme conditions the country lived in during the 45 years of the totalitarian regime caused a revolution in 1990 which brought further radical changes to the country.

A schematic diagram of the socio-economic development of Himara through history can facilitate the comprehension and processing of such a broad analysis. The different socio-economic elements and parameters that are being analyzed are always interrelated. Therefore, the interpretation of how a particular social setting can influence the process of making architecture is rather complicated for a project of this size. Without wanting to oversimplify or omit important information or relational ratios, I believe that an abstract and schematic representation of the importance of specific socio-economic elements will make the historical development of the social structure easier to grasp.

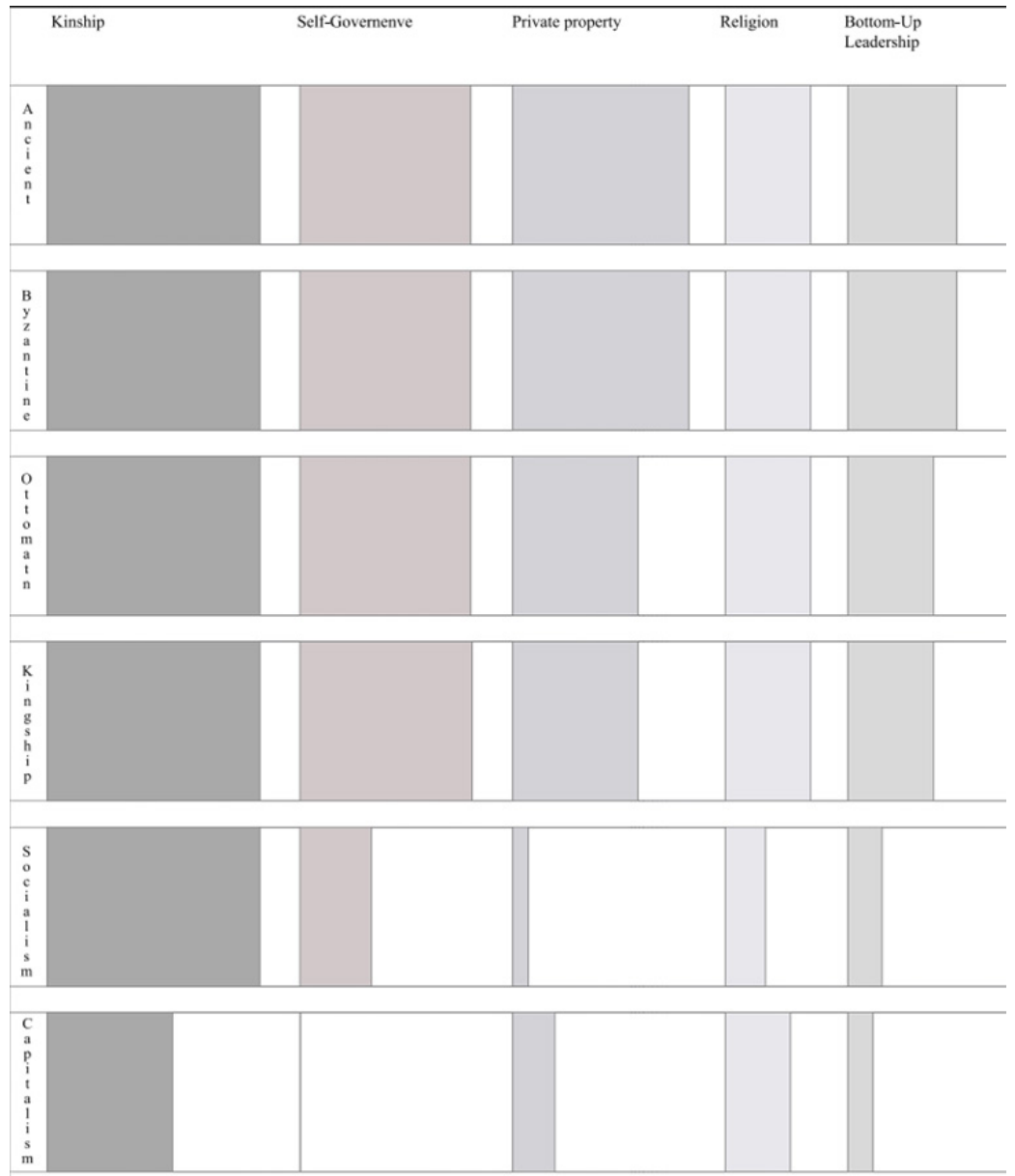


Fig.50: Graphic made by the author

I. Ancient period –Chaonia, Epirus

- i. Tribal community – Family based
- ii. Flat hierarchy
- iii. Self-governed by elected leaders (Eldership)
- iv. Polytheist
- v. Relations with the Greek city-states by sea (ex. Corfu, Sparta)
- vi. Existence of coins and therefore trading
- vii. Property ownership (shared community property and private property of the families/tribes)

II. Byzantine period

- i. Tribal community – Family based
- ii. Flat hierarchy
- iii. Self-governed by elected leaders (Eldership)
- iv. Christian religion- Monotheist
- v. Relations with the Greek city-states by sea (ex. Corfu, Sparta) and Italy
- vi. Trading developed further by seaways
- vii. 3 types of Property ownership: Private property of the families, Shared property of the community and Property of the Church
- viii. Religion takes up a bigger part in the social life

IV. Ottoman rule

- i. Tribal community – Family-based
- ii. Flat hierarchy
- iii. Self-governed by elected leaders (Eldership)
- iv. Christian religion- Monotheist
- v. Relations with Greece by sea (ex. Corfu, Sparta). Relations with Italy get stronger (Napoli, Vatican)
- vi. Trade further by seaways until modern-day Ukraine
- vii. 3 types of Property ownership: Private property of the families, Shared property of the community and Property of the Church
- viii. Religion takes up the bigger part of the social life
- ix. Strong military character
- x. “Venome” as an agreement on autonomy. A special set of rights for the region

V. Albanian State

- i. Tribal community – Family-based
- ii. Flat hierarchy
- iii. Self-governed by elected leaders (Eldership)
- iv. Christian religion- Monotheist
- v. Relations with Greece by sea (ex. Corfu, Sparta) and Italy
- vi. Trade further by seaways
- vii. 3 types of Property ownership: Private property of the families, Shared property of the community and Property of the Church
- viii. Religion takes up the bigger part of the social life
- ix. Strong military character
- x. “Venome” mostly preserved

IV. Socialist State

- i. Family and community based
- ii. Some importance of the Eldership remains
- iii. Governed by the cooperative and socialist leaders
- iv. Christian religion suppressed and churches destroyed
- v. Relations with socialist states for some years and after the 70s isolated
- vi. Trade only within Albania
- vii. Only the public form of property
- viii. Scarce social life
- ix. Agricultural character of the economy

IV. Albanian State – Modern day

- i. Division in municipalities
- ii. Albanian governance
- iii. Totally dependent on the Hierarchy
- iv. Christian religion- Monotheist
- v. Strong relations with Greece as a minority and International tourism
- vi. Economy based on seasonal tourism
- vii. Property issues pending
- viii. Social life during the tourist season only

The forced Internationalization in the region of Himara A new standardization practice



“[. . .], if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is a pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place” (Tuan 1977: 6).

Himara was transformed into a place by the tribes who settled on the hill intending to create a livable and sustainable community.

This community is having a continuous living culture of over 2700 years. Its community is based on kinship and was organized around a flat hierarchy of elected elders. The settlement was built and developed in a way that was mirroring its social structure.

The remains of the ancient castle manifest the traditional character of the settlement.

The ancient castle of Himara is a good example of an architecture that was resilience driven and was based on tradition.

The socio-economic aspect is a very important factor that is inevitably taken into consideration in the urban planning and regulation of the settlement and the castle itself. Having to settle, organize and manage a rather compact settlement, the governance had to make strategic decisions to ensure the prosperity of the castle and its inhabitants. There is a general collective attitude in the town that has made its continuity possible.

The intention of creating a livable and sustainable community was inevitably mirrored in the process of making architecture. With the family being in the centre of the social structure and the house being the main element of the urban grid, this ancient settlement demonstrates a good example of an organic urban extension and intensification. The inherent development of the houses led to a sustainable and organic urban intensification, the remains of which we admire until today.

The continuity of life in the settlement is visible in various places within the castle. The settlement developed in an additive way. Materials are added and recycled in a rather naive manner. New smaller stones are added to the existing walls that needed to be restructured or expanded and in other cases, cyclopic stones were eventually used to support new walls and structures.

The reliance on the tribal character of the community and the common vision enabled the settlement to grow and expand sustainably, ensuring its prosperity and continuity.

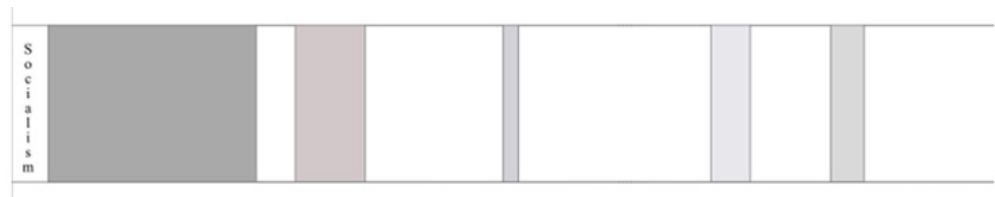
Traditional building practices that stem from the castle are still being applied sporadically from the residents.

A hindrance of the societal organization of the ancient and medieval period in Himara is the lack of written artefacts. The society that was based on non-written laws was functional for its own time but in retrospective, we have now to rely on the documentation made by travellers and researchers of the time.



Fig.51: Ruins n the old castle
Photo by the author

The contribution to the community as an incentive for urban development



The major societal change that happened in 1945 with the election of the Labor Party and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat changed the social structure fundamentally.

The totalitarian regime had implemented archiving processes from the regulatory instances. The regulation and standardization that was implemented from the socialist state had the purpose of exerting complete control over the community and all its processes and interactions.

The pressure of the socialist state on the built environment is evident already after a first glimpse as a consequence of the standardized apartment buildings that do not fit, neither the landscape nor the built environment.

Nevertheless, the changes in property relations and the disintegration of the private property were what influenced the process of making architecture the most. The social structure changed remarkably. The different way in which the society was organized shaped the way the city was organized and the direction in which it developed.

The community work and the contribution to the community were highly valued. The tribal community of Himara was already familiar with the concept of contribution but the lack of freedom and the expropriation of the private property were unacceptable.

Despite the harsh regime, there were economic, political and other regulatory processes in place, which enabled the country to recover from the destruction of the war. The development of infrastructure and the urban expansion were thoroughly planned and performed under the control of the government.

The new archetype that is being added to the urban grid is the four to five-story building, which did not fit to the urban grid and character of the town. This was a practical solution to accommodate the growing population.

Another important practice established by the socialist state was the processes of assembling and archiving information from the intelligentsia and the responsible entities. The will to control the present and envision the future made these processes indispensable.

We are able now to draw important information from different sources, institutional and private over the developments and decisions that were made at that time. This practice was missing in Himara during the previous centuries of development. The former leader of the cooperative, Simo Milo, created one of the most comprehensive private archives. The deep knowledge of the governmental processes enabled him to recognize and document all the relevant processes, developments and strategies of the state and the cooperative.

For purposes of propaganda, data and documents may have been falsified or distorted but this has not happened with the private archives.

After many decades, the importance of such processes and the value of the archive itself are coming to light. Values such as contribution, cooperation, and a common vision are what made Himara thrive during the hard decades of the dictatorship. Looking back to these values and processes, there is an urgent need to reflect on our current development and draw the best out of the good practices of the past.

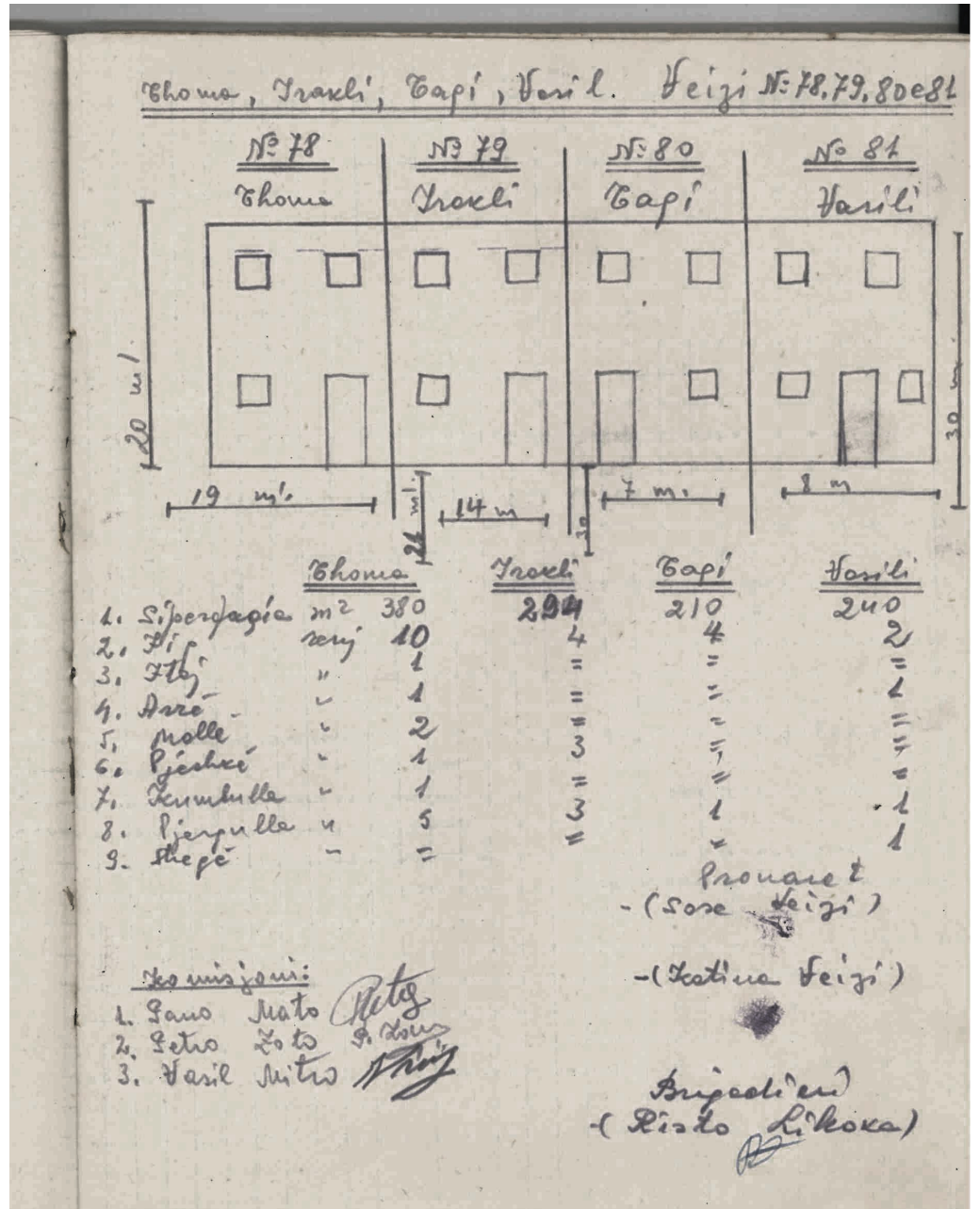
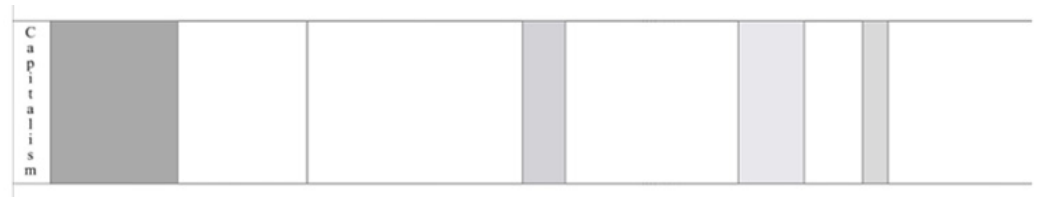


Fig.52: Extract from the private archive of Simo Milo

The “apartmentization” as an incentive for urban development



In 1990, the sudden change to a liberal regime found the people and the system entirely prepared. What they saw as freedom became chaos and uncertainty. The social structure is undergoing a transformation that is affecting urban development and the way architecture is perceived. Nowadays the house is adapted to fulfil the basic contemporary requirements. This is however performed with questionable quality and means.

It's noticeable that architecture stands in an intermediary stage between vernacularism and internationalization. We live in an age where tourist development stands in the centre of economic life and is a radical stimulus for urban development. The phenomenon of “touristification” is having a dramatic impact on the process of making architecture and on the urban intensification as it has been analyzed in the previous chapters.

This apartmentization of Himara is not a sustainable process. The high financial interest has raised the informality and corruption to unbearable levels, especially considering the ongoing struggle about the land ownership and the titles of property.

We live in the age of information but in Himara the data and documentation are mostly inaccessible. The cadaster in Albania is lacking proper and trustworthy documentation. In the light of the latest developments, there is an urgency to create trustworthy regulatory instances and to re-establish the processes of documenting and archiving.

Open collaboration and community work are unfortunately notions that have gone lost in the last decades. Consequently, the development in Himara is hindered and the life-cycle is not sustainable throughout the year. Moreover, the risk of land expropriation and the “invasion” from big investors has created a very hostile environment in the broader region.

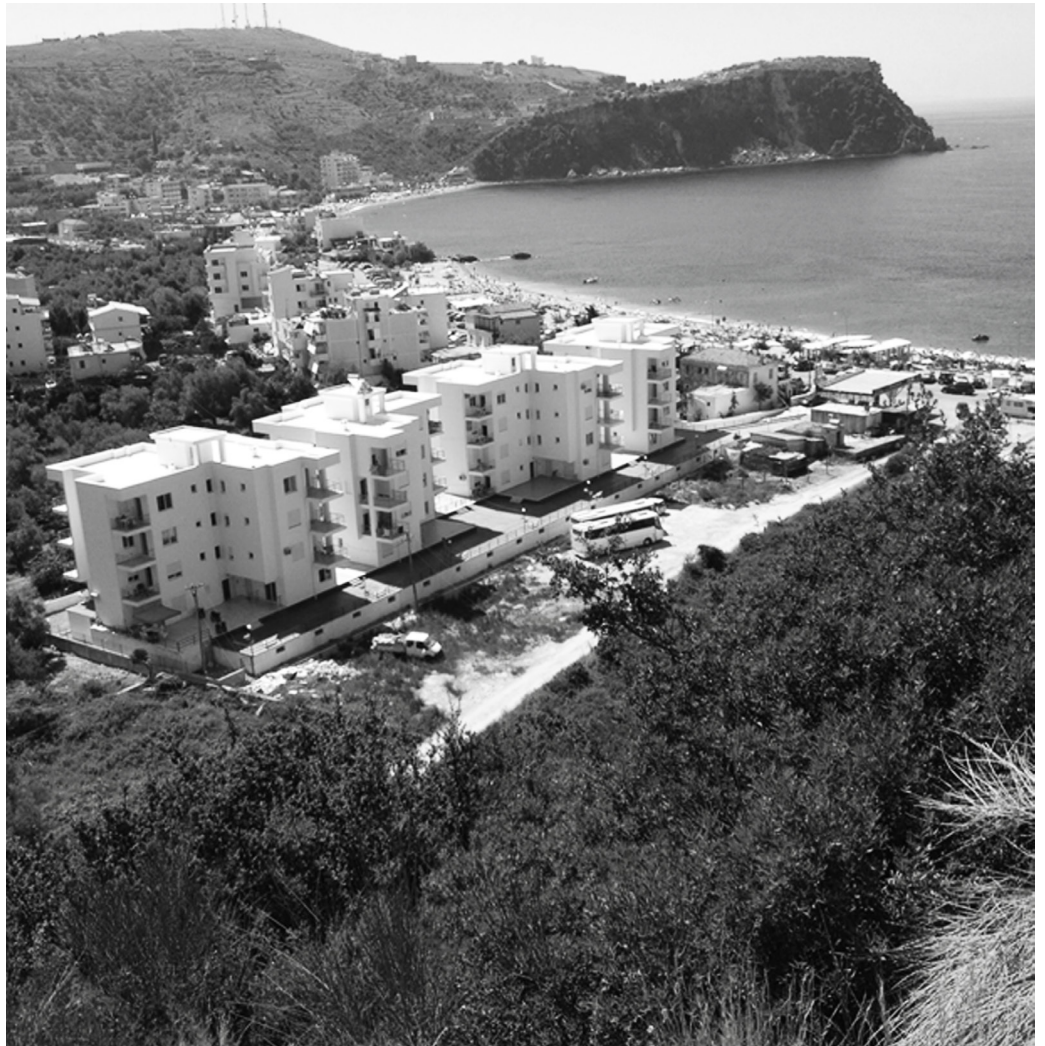


Fig.53: Irregular urban intensification in the center.

Conclusion

The purpose of this master thesis is the introduction of the assembling process and archiving as an important element of scientific knowledge, with the aim to create a solid basis for common and shared knowledge.

A socio-economic analysis throughout the main historical periods that shaped the region of Himara led to an illustration of the factors that have influenced the diversity that we encounter in the urban grid

This initiative stems from an architectural research interest and intends to build a solid basis for collaboration and knowledge sharing. An ongoing project of assembling, archiving, and sharing information is the future vision of what has started with this master thesis. The development of this project made me realize that the exchange of ideas and information along with the creation of a common database is a key catalyst alongside practice. The discussions and interviews that were carried out with locals who had a long journey working and researching the developments in Himara, emphasize the importance of the collective memory. The tribal character of small communities makes documentation of the collective memory an indispensable factor to read and understand the specific features of these communities. The process of archiving and assembling information is not only important for the regulatory instances but also serves the remembrance of the community for the generations to come. The existing documents are especially important given the accuracy of information and excellence of the organization, adding the fact that no other official documentation exists elsewhere in archives.

We can trace back the social structure of the settlement from the Middle Ages until the period after WWII from the documents of the travellers, artists, and researchers who were travelling through Albania. Another source of information is the notes of the priests and monks that served in the region. Here we see how it is possible to retrace the social, political, and economic developments by reassembling the documents of foreign agents.

Himara was a society living by unwritten laws that also didn't have any established archiving and documenting processes. Although the community was rather small and manageable, it is important to understand how much information we need to draw in order to bring up the main elements of social life and its interrelation with architecture.

The insights on the history of urbanisation are a fundamental part of this archiving process. The layers of urbanisation through the ages can be considered as informational layers that, due to the particular conditions existing in Himara throughout the centuries, sometimes have been overwriting one another and sometimes coexisting. The documentation of the information that we read from the urban environment, starting from the ancient walls of the castle until the contemporary houses and hotels, is important for establishing the processes of archiving at first and will facilitate other significant future undertakings.

Simo Milos' archive represents a starting point for this documentation process. The aim of reclaiming the heritage and documents that are relevant for a mindful assessment of the socio-economic developments in Himara is in the centre of this thesis, which should represent a milestone and inspiration for building the new archive. Moreover, creating a shared library of documents, projects, and artwork either created from locals of Himara or providing us information on Himara is a significant contribution to the community.

In the last decades in Himara, as in all other cities around the country as in the whole country, the access to information and documentation is hindered. The state archives in many locations have been severely damaged after the 1990s. The information and the collective memory that we lose is a lost value of our society with no hope of recuperation. The collections and archiving facilities fell into disrepair during the communist regime. As also in the case of the private archive of Simo Milo, the collections were written by hand, and the archives had no formal collection management system. Upon the fall of the regime, the archives were looted.³⁴

Setting up the base for future collaboration is important now that the community is facing mass migration and a seasonal lifespan. We have to actively learn from our past in order to create a sustainable future. A settlement that has had a distinct identity for over 2700 years can provide interesting insights into the community life and organization as one merged cell of greek and Albanian cultures offering the best amalgam of unique existence.

³⁴ General Directorate of Archives (Albania)





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