



La produzione di spazio (pubblico) nell'Albania Socialista rurale: due casi studio nella Drino Valley

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In Albania il socialismo si radicò dopo la fine della Seconda Guerra Mondiale, traendo spunto dai principi Marxisti-Leninisti sui quali costruire la nuova moderna società albanese. In quest'ottica, l'Albania socialista tendeva a dare priorità al futuro, seppur glorificando al contempo le radici del popolo albanese, promuovendo l'immagine di un paese moderno che, nell'intento di costruire il socialismo, aveva abbracciato gli sforzi e le sfide di un eroico progresso con l'obiettivo di trasformare profondamente la propria società e il proprio territorio. In questo contesto, accanto ai complessi cambiamenti politici, socioculturali e economici, il ruolo delle aree rurali nel dibattito politico albanese dell'epoca fu rivalutato positivamente, attribuendo ad esse un ruolo centrale nella propaganda ideologica del regime socialista. Il villaggio albanese, concepito come unità, e le comunità rurali subirono profondi cambiamenti in seguito all'introduzione degli innovativi mezzi di produzione economica socialista. Nuovi insediamenti rurali socialisti furono fondati e costruiti accanto a villaggi rurali esistenti, e raggruppati secondo le due principali forme economiche dettate dal regime comunista: le cooperative agricole e le aziende agricole statali. Questo contributo pone l'attenzione sulla progettazione e sul ruolo dell'organizzazione del qendra e fshatit, ovvero il centro del villaggio socialista inteso come spazio pubblico e come parte fondamentale del villaggio o del nuovo insediamento rurale, nel materializzare la svolta socialista nel processo di modernizzazione delle aree rurali albanesi.

The Production of (Public) Space in Rural Socialist Albania: Two Case Studies in the Drino Valley

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The construction of socialism took root in Albania after the Second World War grounded in socialist principles essential for building a modern Albanian society. The aspiration to establish a new, modern society within a socialist utopian framework dictated its development, guided by a pragmatic vision of large-scale industrial and technological advancement. Socialism, in this context, prioritised the future by promoting images of nations that had embraced heroic challenges and efforts to profoundly transform their societies and territories¹.

The socialist ideology encapsulated its ambitions in an alternative model of urban and rural planning, dominated by the idea of achieving the vision of a utopian future. Rural planning, as a significant branch of territorial planning, played a crucial role in constructing the promised socialist future.

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1. SCOTT 1999, p. 97.

The manifestation of socialist material and immaterial interactions sought to overlay a political landscape onto the rural landscape by introducing specific new urban elements. These included squares and neighbourhood greenery, net of streets and pedestrian areas, and new architectural structures, such as socio-cultural buildings, health facilities, and new form of collective housing, that were superimposed on the existing rural landscape. In this context, the production of public space was concentrated in the so-called *qendra e fshatit*, i.e., the village centre. This was conceived as a fundamental part of the new socialist rural settlements, and thus hosted the main public functions. Particularly, it served as the space where the needs of peasants, shaped by the new imposed rurality and influenced by regime's propaganda, aligned with the goal of building socialism.

A new rural dimension

Throughout the communist period, amid the complex political, social, and economic changes, the role of the countryside and peasantry was significantly reevaluated in the Albanian political debate of the time. To understand its role within the abovementioned context, it is crucial to examine the concept of rural space, focusing on how rurality changed and which was the material evidence left in the territory by the socialist transformation. According to sociology, the term village refers to small sparsely inhabited areas where agriculture is not only an occupation but also a way of life. Therefore, the village is an important and viable social entity for its inhabitants, who also take part in the larger society and share its cultural and civic pattern. In other words, the term village implies different individuals coming together to form a community that is basically characterized by a specific area inhabited by a small number of people sharing relationships with one another².

During diverse historical periods, villages, as entities and cohesive units, underwent profound tangible and intangible changes influenced by the prevailing means of production. In Albania, the transformation of the means of production from feudal to socialist conditions dissolved the existing rural village unity. This shift was characterised by the implementation of an intensive socialist work approach and workforce, as well as by a systematised territorial organization that exploited the countryside, impacting the rural landscape. The socialist revolution in rural areas manifested in significant tangible changes to the Albanian rural landscape (fig. 1). These transformations were documented by the French geographer Blanc, who travelled in Socialist Albania between the end

2. MUÇAJ 2007, p. 42.

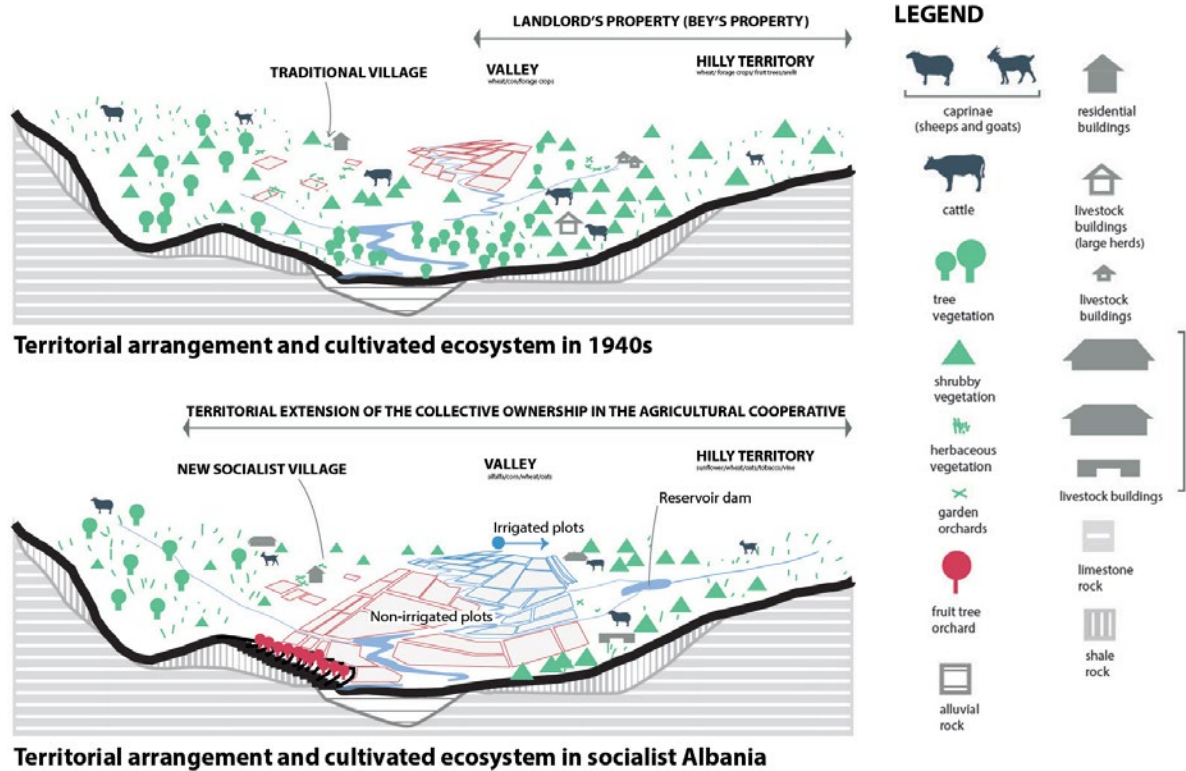


Figure 1. Graphic representation of the territorial arrangement and cultivated ecosystem before and during the communist regime in Albania (E. Londo elaboration based on GAUVRIT, SALIÈRES 2006).

of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s³. Blanc pointed out how land previously owned by a few large patriarchal families was divided and distributed to peasant families, subsequently being gradually incorporated into the collectivization process. The French geographer identified three main types of modern land use introduced by the communist regime: the deforestation of hillsides and their development into cultivable terraces (particularly near inhabited centres), the establishment of orchards, especially citrus tree groves in the Himarë coastal area and in the coastal plains of Vurgu i Delvinës, and the reclamation of marshland⁴.

According to the study conducted in the region of Përmet by Gauvrit and Salières⁵, the socialist Agrarian Reform of 1945 mandated the confiscation of land from owners owning more than 40 hectares, without compensation and following the maxim according to which «the land belongs to the one who works it»⁶. Arable land was redistributed according to the number of mouths to feed, with approximately 3 hectares per family in the Përmet region, to farmers who had little or no land. No land transactions were authorized, and pastures and forests became state-owned. Following this initial stage, the land collectivization process began⁷. Initially, this involved the formation of *Kolkhoze-type* agricultural cooperatives (*kollektivnoe chozjajstvo*, known in Albanian as *Kooperativa Bujqësore* (KB), i.e., collective-owned farm)⁸ in each existing village. Additionally, agricultural state farms of the *Sovkhoze-type* (*sovetskoe chozjajstvo*, in Albanian called *Ndërmarrja Bujqësore Shtetërore* (NBSH), i.e.,

3. The research fieldwork conducted by Blanc resulted in the article *Naissance et évolution des paysages agraires en Albanie*, published in 1961 in the scientific journal «Geografiska Annaler» and can be considered among the very first Western contributions documenting the Albanian rural landscape transformations during the communist regime.

4. BLANC 1961, pp. 13-14.

5. GAUVRIT, SALIÈRES 2006, pp. 1-10.

6. Land ownership before 1945 was dominated by the çiflig land tenure system, where peasants worked under the rule of private landlords and contributed to the state, religious institutions, and the landlords themselves. This system was abolished in August 1945 with the issuance of Law No. 108, About the Agrarian Reform on August 29, 1945. The law mandated the confiscation of land from large owners and its redistribution to peasant families. The Agrarian Reform was declared concluded in November 1946, and collectivization began immediately, starting with the coastal plains and later extending to hilly and mountainous regions. By the end of the 1970s, collectivization had led to the nationalization of all land, and by the mid-1980s, there were more than 400 agricultural cooperatives. The socialist Agrarian Reform also foresaw the confiscation and redistribution of animals from large herds. More information are detailed in POMPEJANO 2023a, pp. 85-87.

7. The collectivization of land and animals gradually took place under pressure, reaching 100% of farms in Permet in 1966. See footnote 5, p. 3.

8. The *Kooperativa Bujqësore* (KB) were agricultural production cooperatives composed of peasants who voluntarily united for the primary purpose of joint agricultural production based on collective labour. The workforce was organized into groups commonly known as brigades. These agricultural cooperatives were required to pay a portion of their income, generated from their economic-productive activities, to the state.

state-owned farm)⁹ were established. Later, in the 1970s, a regrouping of major agricultural cooperatives and the expansion of state-farms took place paving the way to a total state control of productive land and agricultural production. This shift reflected the Enver Hoxha's ideological project which aimed for the entire agricultural system to evolve towards a higher order of socialist agriculture, exemplified by the state farm economy, thereby contributing to the socialist industrialisation of the country.

Ruling a socialist production of space in the countryside

«It might be asked at this juncture if there is any way of dating what might be called the moment of emergence of an awareness of space and its production»¹⁰. According to Henri Lefebvre, the turning point from production in space to production of space corresponds to an increase in the workforce and the involvement of the intellectual class in the material production process. Consequently, the transformations in the Albanian rural landscape under the socialist state's constant intervention manifested as intense spatial alteration and production, corresponding to changes in land ownership, new agricultural production means, and the reorganisation of the workforce. To understand the production of socialist space in rural Albania, it is essential to comprehend the ideology behind socialist rural planning. In socialist Albania, the primary force driving the revolutionary process was the state, specifically the ruling Party of Labour of Albania (PLA) and its leader, Enver Hoxha. Among the PLA's key priorities there was the effort to reduce the disparities between urban and rural areas, as well as between mental and physical labour. The regime's propaganda focused on efforts to establish equal socio-cultural and economic conditions in both the countryside and the city¹¹, as well as the balanced redistribution of the urban and rural populations across the Albanian territory¹². In strictly adhering to the Marxist-Leninist line, the main debate revolved around studying and generalising the following core theoretical and practical issues:

9. The Ndërmarrja Bujqësore Shtetërore (NBSH) were socialist state properties formed based on Marxist-Leninist ideology by a collective of workers. They were conceived as technical production units aimed at producing agricultural and/or industrial goods or performing services. The state owned the means of production and the collective labour. NBSHs were legal entities created and organized by the state. According to the social division of labour, they were provided by the state with the primary means of production, which they were required to manage rationally and effectively. Guided by the general interests of the new socialist society, the NBSH production plan had to adhere to the five-year plan dictated by the centralized state.

10. LEFEBVRE 1991, pp. 123-124.

11. MARA 1972, pp. 16-25.

12. PAPAJORGJI 1982, pp. 14-19.

- «1) [The] Narrowing of differences in the level of development of the productive forces between town and countryside, and between industry and agriculture.
 2) The development of the two forms of socialist property into a single one and the creation of social homogeneity within the socialist society.
 3) [The] Achieving [of] social and economic equality between the working people of the countryside and the town concerning conditions of work distribution, organization, and management.
 4) [The] Narrowing [of] the differences between the working class and the cooperatives' peasantry in the field of ideology, culture, education and living standards, etc.»¹³.

Reaching socio-economic homogeneity on a macro-regional scale involved building new workers' towns in both the agricultural and industrial sectors, situated near mineral and energy resources, forests, and agricultural cooperatives. In this way, the strategy of the regime aimed to reduce socio-cultural and economic disparities between the working class and the peasantry by placing the workers' inhabited centres close to villages in the countryside or remote rural areas. On a local scale, the socio-cultural and economic homogeneity was pursued by transforming the village spaces through the introduction of new and modern architectural typologies and by altering the everyday life habits of the rural population. Papajorgji, serving as Scientific Secretary of the Institute of Marxist-Leninist Studies of the PLA at the time, considered this process pivotal for transforming socialist Albania from an agricultural-industrial country into an industrial-agricultural one¹⁴.

Therefore, the collectivisation of land, the mechanisation of the agricultural sector, and the consequent need to create a new modern rural space and lifestyle led to the rapid socialist urbanisation of the countryside¹⁵.

Socialist urbanisation was a concept central to Enver Hoxha's writings on the role of architecture and urban planning in building socialism in Albania. He frequently emphasised the close connection between new architecture and urbanism with demographic development forecasts and the country's industrial and agricultural growth¹⁶. In a centralised state organization, demographic phenomena were considered a planning output at the service of rural, urban, and architectural planning. This approach had to account for the importance of constructing new agricultural centres and buildings maximising at the same time the conservation of arable and productive land. In his writings, Hoxha stressed the importance of controlling the entire urban and architectural planning and building process concerning the housing problem in the countryside at the central state level, through the PLA's directives and

13. MARA 1972, pp. 18-19.

14. PAPAJOJGI 1982, p. 16.

15. POMPEJANO 2023b, p. 103.

16. HOXHA 1971, pp. 285-286.

propaganda, as well as at the agricultural cooperative's level. Hence, on a local level, state control was exercised through the strict supervision and approval of plans and projects by the People's Council of the Districts and the Chairmanship of the agricultural cooperatives¹⁷. When founding a new socialist rural settlement, according to Hoxha's directives, administrative and social buildings were to be constructed first, following plans developed by the Ministry of Construction. In the second phase, the settlement could have been expanded with new residential buildings. This process was co-supervised by cooperative administration bodies, with a strong emphasis on preserving precious arable land from the impact of construction as much as possible¹⁸.

New forms and new spaces had to reflect the socialist ideology, stressing the collective spirit, the abolition of peasantry exploitation, and a planned economy. Villages were designed as compact monocentric settlements structured around an administrative and cultural nucleus, providing both functionality and social and territorial control. The principle of compactness also aimed to preserve agricultural land, discouraging settlements' expansion beyond the predetermined construction area delimited by the so-called *vija e verdhë*, i.e., the yellow line¹⁹. As Pompejano traced back, the beginning of the urban planning approach to constructing a socialist reality is enshrined in the 1947 report, which included the nomination and appointment of a specific «Commission for the study for the masterplans of the new rural villages, composed mainly of representatives of the various sectors of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and of representatives from the Ministry of Public Works, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, and the Central Committee of Cooperatives»²⁰, to discuss the design and characteristics of the new rural settlements masterplan²¹.

In 1973, the Ministry of Construction issued a Regulation on drafting regulatory plans for villages and agricultural state farms. This Regulation identified the need to create masterplans for new agricultural settlements, delineating areas for the development of economic zones, production zones, residential zones, village centres, road networks, public greenery, new building construction, and the preservation of structures with historical, cultural, and aesthetic value²². However, only the late issuance of the

17. HOXHA 1975, p. 251.

18. HOXHA 1964-1965, pp. 435-437.

19. ISLAMI, BURDA 2019, p. 114.

20. POMPEJANO 2023b, p. 106.

21. Arkivi Qendror i Shtetit (AQSH), Archival Fund (AF) 498 – Ministria e Bujqësisë, Folder (F) 41, Year (Y) 1947, pp. 1-16. Moreover, for a detailed reconstruction about how urban planning evolved in Socialist Albania rural areas, refer to POMPEJANO 2023a, pp. 101-113.

22. AQSH, AF 499, F. 174, Y. 1973, pp. 1-9.

Decree of the Presidium of the People's Assembly (DPPA) no. 5747 *On the drafting, approval, and implementation of masterplans for cities and villages along with the respective Regulation on the drafting and the implementation of masterplans for cities and villages*, approved by the Decree of the Council of Ministers (DCM) no. 47 on July 10th, 1978, was there a clear statement on «where the urban planning responsibilities lay at the central and local government and administration levels, overcoming a long period of professional uncertainty caused by the inexperience of professionals and authorities»²³.

Introducing urban culture in the countryside: the role of public spaces in the socialist village matrix

Traditional rural life, as experienced by the peasantry until the establishment of the regime in 1944, soon became a distant memory. The PLA's socialist ideals, inspired by scientific, technological, and cultural progress propelled Albania towards a new urbanised rurality, constantly balancing tradition, nationalism, and socialism²⁴. As Lefebvre asserted «the state binds itself to space through a complex and changing relation that has passed through certain critical points»²⁵. According to Lefebvre, these critical points are the production of space, i.e., the national territory and its physical and material transformations, the production of social space, i.e., an artificial edifice of hierarchically structured institutions (the state itself) and, finally, the “mental space” that encompasses the representations of the state that people construct²⁶. While the first two critical points have been briefly described in the previous paragraphs of this article, the evolution of a “mental space” in rural Socialist Albania occurred through the state's centralised political, economic, administrative, juristic, and cultural control exerted over people's lives. This was consistently implemented by materialising the ideology in architectural buildings erected in the centre of each village, through the functions associated with them, and by establishing well-defined state-people relationships which helped in transforming, *de facto*, rural public spaces into propaganda “(mental) spaces”. As Lelaj states, the transformation of the countryside was accompanied by a new educational system and a controlled flow of information and propaganda, compelling people to learn socialist values and principles whilst understanding the importance of

23. POMPEJANO 2023b, p. 108.

24. POMPEJANO 2021, p. 953.

25. BRENNER, ELDEN 2009, p. 224.

26. *Ivi*, pp. 224-225.

personal sacrifice for the common and collective good²⁷. Books, newspapers, telegraphs, posters, maxims, radios, and cultural initiatives implemented in agricultural cooperatives and state farms were integral to the national propaganda project aimed at profoundly transforming and modernising rural life. «The state took the models applied in urban centres and then adapted them in the rural context. The production of social space comes as a hierarchical model with institutions and laws that put the abstract image of the state at the top of the pyramid. Every state has a social space, just as every institution has its own space: family, school, and work»²⁸. The late debate about rural/urban dichotomy marked a turning point with the issuance of the abovementioned 1978's DPPA no. 5747 and the respective regulation giving directives on its implementation, approved by the DCM no. 47 on July 10th, 1978. In the Albanian academic field, these legislative documents significantly influenced the late academic literature on urban planning in the countryside. A fine example is the book *Urbanistika dhe ndërtimet në fshat*, (Urban Planning and Constructions in the Countryside, written by Enver Faja and Isuf Sukaj), and published in 1990, at the dawn of the regime's collapse.

According to Faja and Sukaj, the entire process of creating an “urbanised rural landscape” involved merging natural and architectural landscape. The architectural landscape within the urban matrix of the village had to include the following architectural typologies: residential buildings with their courtyards and greenery, socio-cultural and administrative buildings, health facilities, public greenery, streets, and squares organized according to socialist aesthetics principles and spatial composition²⁹.

Particular importance was attributed to “public space”, considered as «the place where organized social life reaches its peak»³⁰. The public square and the socio-cultural administrative buildings built in its vicinity were fundamental elements of the village's public space and physically reflected the significant role they played in Hoxha's writing, speeches, and propaganda about villages development.

In fact, Hoxha considered the village centre an embryo that gave birth to the new socialist village and, consequently, to a new socialist rurality³¹. In every new socialist rural settlement, the public space – comprising the square and the main socio-cultural and administrative buildings – was carefully planned and it could be positioned differently depending on the terrain conditions. According to Faja and Sukaj, for new villages established on hilly terrain, it was placed at the highest and most protected location on the hillside. In some cases, where new villages were situated in prominent natural

27. LELAJ 2015, pp. 113-142, 185-210.

28. KOPP 1970, pp. 224-225.

29. FAJA, SUKAJ 1990, pp. 105-106.

30. *Ivi*, p. 95.

31. HOXHA 1964-1965, p. 437.

landscapes considered to have heritage value, or near areas designated as national heritage sites, the public space was intended to be located close to representative natural elements and cultural monuments. This placement also applied to existing villages, where the public space was situated near historically recognized gathering places³².

Within the village centre, public spaces consisted of socio-cultural buildings such as the House of Culture, administrative buildings, retail commercial buildings (known as *Magazina Popullore* or *MaPo*), workers' refectories, primary and secondary schools, sports fields and public greenery. These elements were all arranged around or in the close proximity to an open square or main large street. Depending on the components and their positioning relative to the main street or square, the village centre and its public space were classified into three categories: the "open composition" that foresaw the arrangement of buildings parallel to the main street; the "closed composition" that envisaged buildings gathered around the square; and the "free composition" that conceived buildings spontaneously scattered without forming a clearly defined shape (figs. 2-3). In an effort to establish urban planning indicators, the arrangement of the public space of the village centre was correlated to the population and the inhabited area. For instance, villages with a population of approximately 500-1000 inhabitants had a public space area of 0,75-1,0 m² per person. Villages with a population of approximately 1000-2000 inhabitants had a public square area around 0,75-0,50 m² per person³³.

Projekte-tip, i.e. standardised projects, were designed, assessed, and implemented for residential, simple socio-cultural and educational buildings, as well as for agricultural and livestock constructions³⁴. These standardised projects were particularly replicated in rural contexts and small industrialised towns to address the rapid need for urbanization in the countryside, especially considering the lack of professional resources and skills in the construction sector³⁵. Building typologies were categorised based on usage intensity. Public usage buildings were classified as either daily used facilities and periodically used facilities.

The first group included typologies such as educational buildings (nurseries, kindergartens, primary schools) socio-cultural buildings (House of Cultures, Museum of the village), healthcare facilities, retail commercial services (MaPo, bakeries, etc.) all within a catchment area radius of about 300-500 m. The periodically used facilities included educational buildings (secondary and vocational schools), small health facilities (maternity clinic, pharmacy, etc.), administration buildings (Cooperative's and

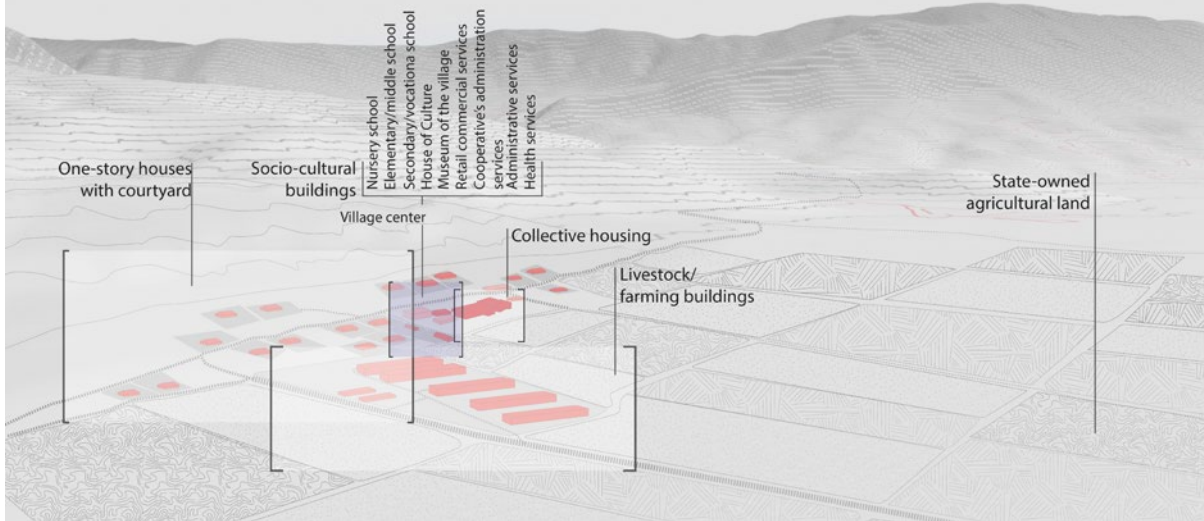
32. FAJA, SUKAI 1990, p. 95.

33. *Ivi*, p. 99.

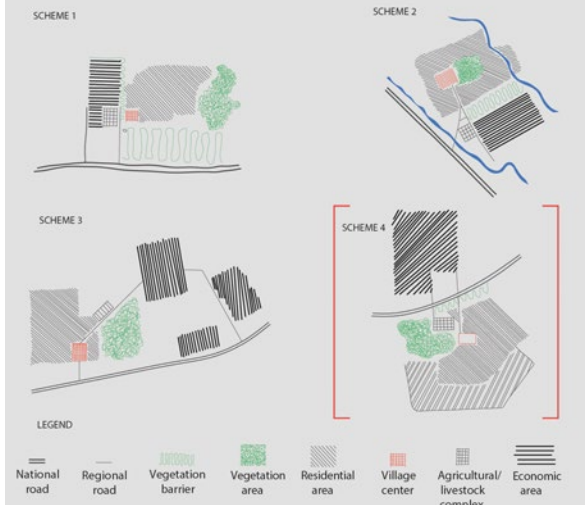
34. POMPEJANO 2021, p. 954.

35. ISLAMI ET ALII 2018, pp. 15-16.

MAIN ELEMENTS OF THE RURAL LANDSCAPE IN SOCIALIST ALBANIA (1944-1991)



FUNCTIONAL ZONING OF NEW SOCIALIST RURAL SETTLEMENTS



Above, figure 2. Overall configuration of the socialist rural landscape in Albania. The main elements of the rural landscape in socialist Albania. Graphic elaboration by E. Londo 2022; on the left, figure 3. Functional zoning of the new socialist rural settlements (the four urban planning schemes have been elaborated by E. Londo based on FAJA, SUKAJ 1990).

state-farms' administration services)³⁶. Educational facilities were recommended to be located near main streets with high traffic flow, connecting the residential area with the economic/production area. Their capacity was determined based on the village population; however, in very remote areas, the population was sometime so low that these facilities were grouped together, forming collective classes of pupils. Retail commercial and administrative services were new additions requiring innovative building typologies within the socialist rural village³⁷. Finally, socio-cultural buildings, in particular, received pivotal attention since they were intended to elevate the cultural level of the rural population³⁸ through an intense agenda of recreational activities, Party members' conferences and lectures, infused with socialist propaganda. According to Mosko and Sukaj, the number of socio-cultural buildings expanded significantly, from 140 in 1950 to 1300 in 1960 and 2100 in 1987³⁹.

Socio-cultural buildings such as the *vatra e kulturës* or *shtëpi culture*, also hosted libraries and small theatres where cooperative workers could read authorised books and newspapers and perform shows emulating socialist art and culture.

In practice, the introduction of new building typologies, primarily designed to create the "socialist public space" in each village centre, aimed to enforce a manipulated sense of collective belonging, this strategy was crucial in the regime's planning for shaping the new socialist Albanian working class (fig. 4).

The Drino Valley case study

In this contribution, the Drino Valley (fig. 5) has been selected as a case study that exemplifies the socialist self-sufficient territorial unit, illustrating how the communist regime transformed the existing rural landscape by applying its ideological perspective on the countryside.

According to the administrative division of the time, Drino Valley belonged to the Gjirokastra administrative district, a region of pivotal economic importance in southern Albania⁴⁰. During the communist regime, Gjirokastra district developed mechanised agriculture within a collectivised system, alongside a significant light and manufacturing industry⁴¹. Today, Drino Valley land use still

36. FAJA, SUKAJ 1990, p. 88.

37. *Ivi*, p. 94.

38. MOSKO, SUKAJ 1987, p. 54.

39. *Ibidem*.

40. BËRXHOLI, QIRIAZI 1986, p. 79.

41. *Ivi*, p. 110.

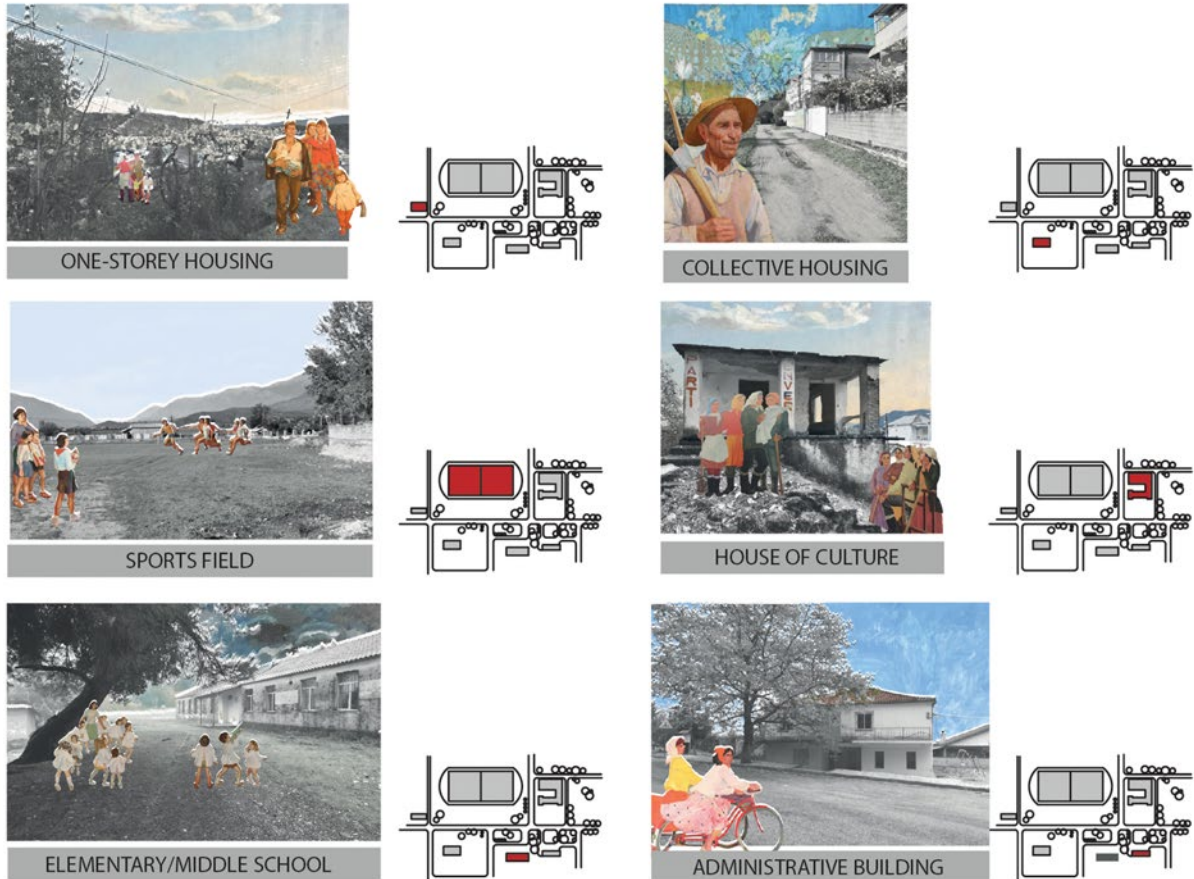


Figure 4. Buildings composing the qendra e fshatit in the new socialist rural village in the Albanian countryside (Elaborated by E. Londo based on LONDO 2022, p. 33).



Figure 5. View of the Drino Valley from the road to Çajupi Mountain (Photo by F. Pompejano 2022).

reflects traces of the extensive pastures and forests areas that were once utilised by cooperatives and state-farms. Only a small portion of the land remains dedicated to the cultivation of tobacco, wheat, and corn⁴².

The villages of the Drino Valley, situated near the river or on the slopes of the hills, have historically maintained and developed an economic profile primarily based on agriculture. In contrast, villages located 700 meters above sea level relied on sheep and goat herding activities. The constant interaction between these villages, each with its distinct economic profile, facilitated coexistence and prosperity among the population despite their different locations within the Valley. This relationship between territorial features and settlements was a notable example of how diverse economic activities could coexist and support a community⁴³.

The implementation of socialist rural planning transformed the Drino Valley landscape by establishing agricultural cooperatives and state farms. These changes aligned with the two main stages of building socialism into the countryside: first, the establishment of agricultural cooperatives, and second, the formation of the state farms. In the Drino Valley, as observed by Pompejano in other Albanian rural contexts, «Most cooperatives started on a village basis, but later several settlements were combined

42. GEÇO 1964, p. 130.

43. ISLAMI, VEIZAJ, QAMO 2022, pp. 69-70.

to form bigger [agricultural livestock] units»⁴⁴. Initially, collectivisation and the establishment of the first agricultural cooperatives and state farms in almost every village, aimed to evaluate the economic production capacity of the system locally. Later, the number of state-farm increased, and starting from the 1960s, previously single cooperatives were consolidated into larger groups formed by three to four villages. These groups were called *kooperativa të bashkuara*, i.e., grouped cooperatives, each with a main village serving as the new cooperative village centre. Within this context, the following villages were recognised as the main village centre of the grouped cooperatives in the Drino Valley: Sofratika, Frashtan, Peshkopija, Asim Zeneli, Dhoksati, Erindi, Vithuqi, Kardhiqi, Çatistë-Mavrojëri, Zhej, Dritë, Suhë, Mashkullorë, Jergucati, Bularati, Zervati, Vriseaja, Longo, Poliçani, Nivani, Picari, Golemi and Fushëbardha⁴⁵. In the 1970s, some of these villages were further grouped into *kooperativat të tipit të lart (KTL)*, or high-level cooperatives, representing a further step towards «the impellent need to transform one of the two social forms of property, namely, the cooperative property, into state property by transforming the major cooperatives into state-farms»⁴⁶. In the Drino Valley these were Vrisera, Sofratika, Asim Zeneli, Picari, Erindi, Mashkullorë, Poliçani and Nivani⁴⁷. On the other hand, the *Ndërmarrja Bujqësore Shtetërore (NBSH)*, i.e., the state farms, in the Drino Valley, were fewer in number. Among the main ones were the *NBSH Gjirokastra*, the *NBSH Muzafer Asqeri*⁴⁸, and the *NBSH Valare*⁴⁹.

Nevertheless, the implementation of socialist ideology at the village scale level facilitated the creation of a vast network of agricultural cooperatives and state farms, where each *qendra e fshatit* with its public spaces composed of diverse building typologies and socio-cultural encounters mirrored the socialist urban lifestyle. In the Drino Valley, this territorial network featured periodically used and diverse facilities within each village centre, set up with a catchment area radius of about 2-3 km (fig. 6).

44. POMPEJANO 2023b, p. 102.

45. AQSH, AF 490, F. 469, Y. 1970, pp. 1-103.

46. POMPEJANO 2023b, p. 102.

47. BYROJA JURIDIKE në aparatin e Këshillit të Ministrave 1986, pp. 885-889.

48. AQSH, AF 490, F. 849, Y. 1955, pp. 137-144.

49. AQSH, AF 495, F. 100, Y. 1968, pp. 1-69.

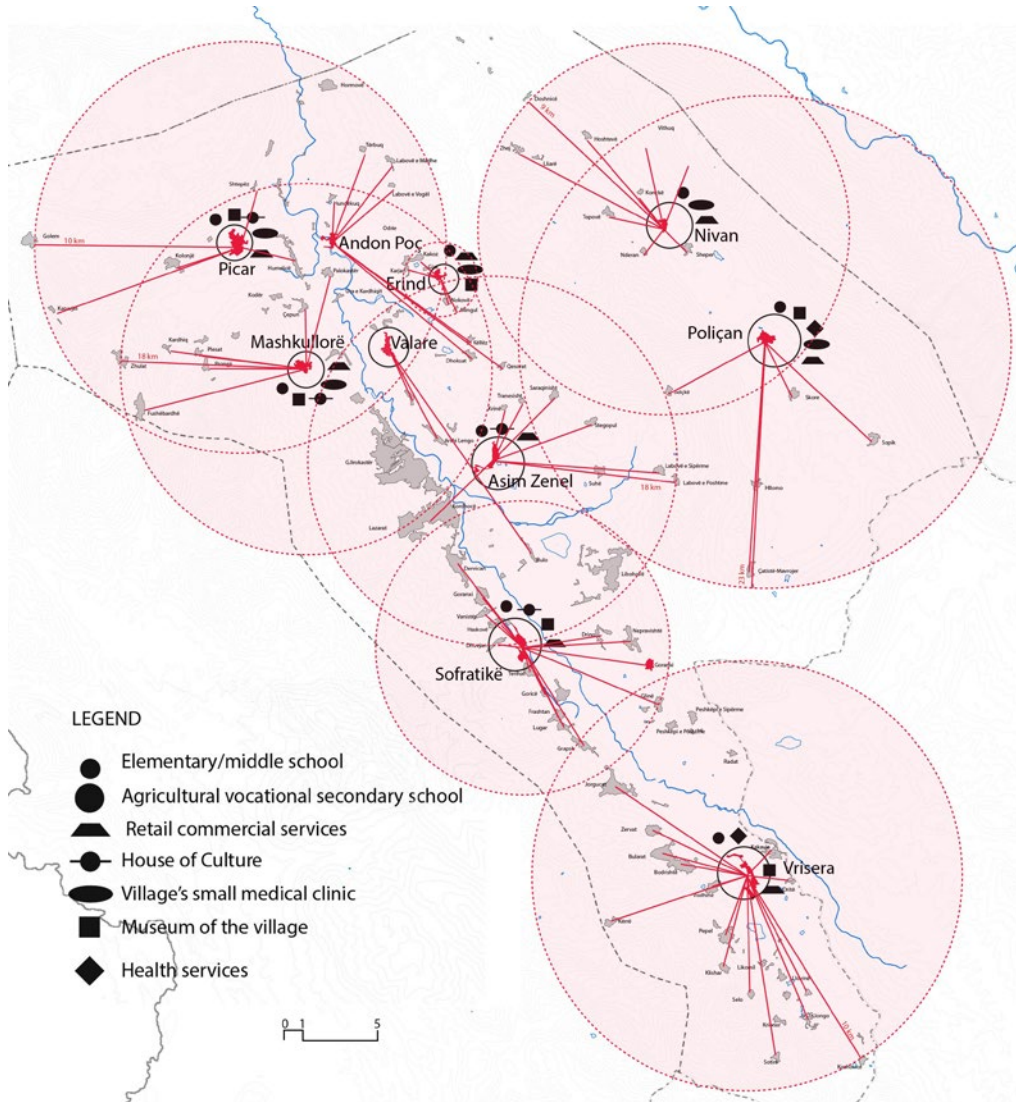


Figure 6. Territorial distribution of the agricultural cooperatives and state farms in the Drino Valley and the main architectural building typologies constituting the *qendra e fshatit* (Elaborated by E. Londo based on LONDO 2022, p. 39).

New socialist rural settlements in the Drino Valley: the cases of the agricultural cooperative “Asim Zeneli” and the state farm “Muzafer Asqeri”

In 1956, during a political meeting of the Central Committee of the Albanian Labor Party, Hoxha delivered a speech addressing urban planning issues related to the establishment of new socialist rural villages. He suggested building villages in proximity to economic or production areas, preferably on hillsides, to maximise the preservation of arable land for agricultural production⁵⁰. During his speech, he specified that the *qendra e fshatit*, had to be established first, alongside the main socio-cultural, educational, and administrative buildings. The residential area was to develop around or in close proximity to the *qendra e fshatit*.

In the Drino Valley case, the new rural settlements and their central public space designed to form and serve as the centre of the villages, were positioned near the hills at elevations of about 184-390 m above sea level. Most of these new settlements were established in the 1950s as part of the Valare, Arshi Lengo, Bulo, and Nepravishtë agricultural state farms. The exception was the village of “Asim Zeneli”, which was founded as the first agricultural cooperative in that area. The phenomenon of establishing new rural socialist settlements in the Drino Valley provides a clear example of the modernisation process of the countryside and highlights the significant role that the *qendra e fshatit* played in this transformation.

In the Drino Valley, land collectivization commenced at an early stage and, to some extent, serving as a crucial test of the socialist economic model’s efficacy in establishing a strong socialist economy across the country, involving the formation of agricultural cooperatives and state farms. Furthermore, the electrification campaign in rural areas was a primary objectives of the regime, with the villages in the Drino Valley being among the earliest recipients of electricity in 1971⁵¹. Each new rural socialist settlement adhered to a meticulously planned layout, where socio-cultural, educational, and administrative buildings, alongside health services and housing, were rationally built. This development followed the masterplan and the so-called *vija e verdhë* or yellow line, which demarcated the maximum permissible expansion of the residential areas, as designed by the architects and engineers working at the Ministry of Construction. Each rural settlement, whether existing or newly established, was equipped with its its own socio-cultural facilities. However, the centre of the village,

50. HOXHA 1964-1965, p. 436.

51. «The directives of the Plenum of the Central Committee of Albanian Labour Party, held in December 1967, anticipated the achievement of providing electricity supply in all rural areas by November 8th, 1971 [...] expected to be achieved in 1985», POMPEJANO 2023b, p. 102.

strategically envisioned as the core zone of the cooperative, was singularly designated to be the space to accommodate this essential institutional function. The *qendra e fshatit* was connected to other small retail units in neighbouring villages within the cooperative, mainly facilitating the distribution of food supplies distributions. Meanwhile, socio-cultural activities evolved autonomously within each village's dedicated socio-cultural buildings of the villages. Exception arose during major ALP celebrations or festivals, where gatherings of rural populace were coordinated to occur at the *qendra e fshatit* in the principal village of the cooperative⁵².

Among the villages situated in the Drino Valley, the agricultural cooperative "Asim Zeneli" (figs. 7-10) was founded in 1947, as one of the earliest livestock and agricultural cooperatives formed following the land collectivisation process, «based on the joint collective economy of a group of shepherds coming from Kurvelesh's villages of Progonat, Golem, Lekdush, and Rexhin to the nationalised summer and winter pastures in the mountains facing the museum city of Gjirokastra»⁵³. According to the Albanian ethnographer Fiqiri Haxhiu, despite the cooperative's initial nomadic character rooted in transhumance activities, the establishment of a permanent new settlement began in the early 1950s⁵⁴. The first constructions, referred to as *vllaqiko*, resembled huts more than houses and were built using local provisional materials starting from 1949⁵⁵. By 1953, spurred by the cooperative's growing economic strength, the construction of masonry houses commenced, coinciding with the development of the principal street that served as the central axis for the emerging residential areas. The Ministry of Construction oversaw the design of the central public space in the village of "Asim Zeneli" while the entire construction process was executed by brigades consisting of villagers led by a few carpenter.

The typical single-family one-storey house featured a straightforward rectangular layout comprising two rooms, a central corridor, and a kitchenette. Constructed from limestone blocks and mortar, these houses characterized the residential architecture of the village⁵⁶. The socio-cultural, educational, administrative buildings, and sports facilities played a significant role within the urban matrix of the village. The public space they composed, served as a platform to vehicle the regime propaganda, facilitating organised recreational and cultural activities. Additionally, this socio-cultural-educational-administrative nucleus held significant importance also as a gathering place for the

52. LONDO 2022, Annex II, p. 74.

53. POMPEJANO 2023c, p. 69.

54. HAXHIU 1963, pp. 5-7.

55. *Ibidem*.

56. LONDO 2022, Annex II, p. 73.

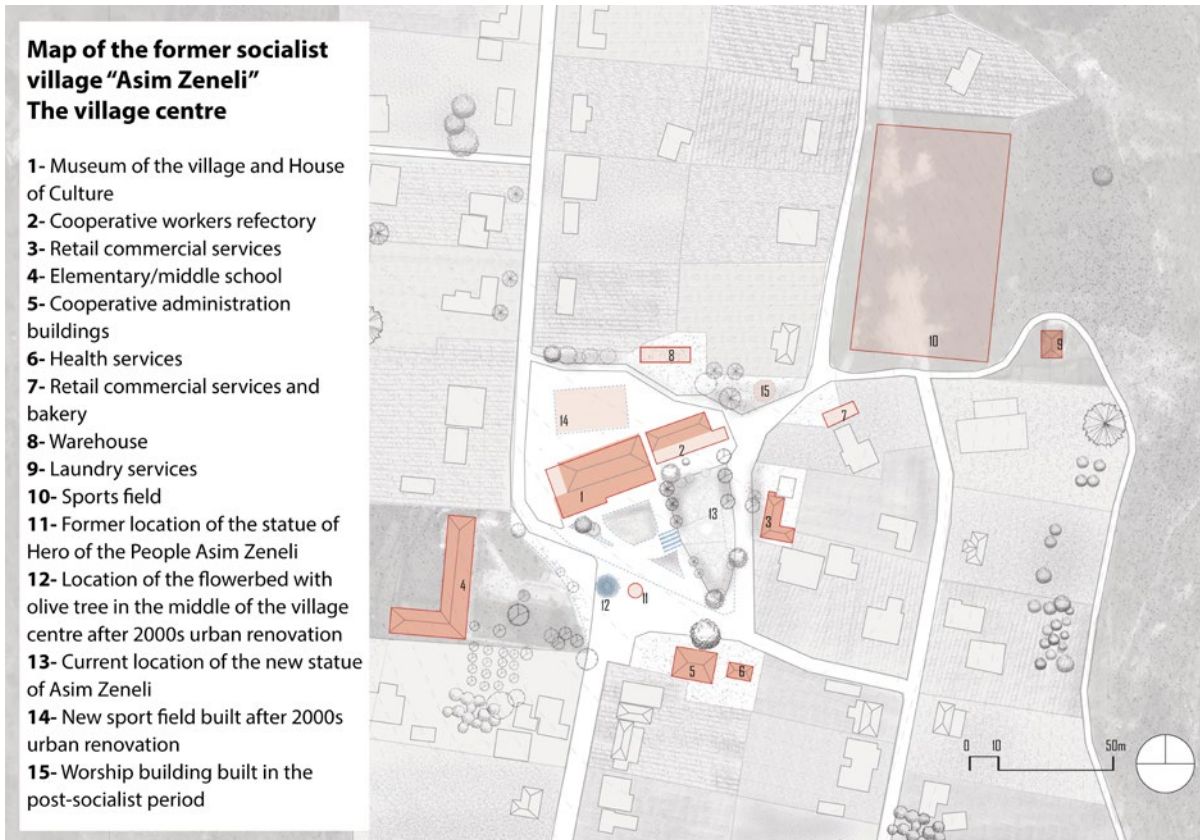


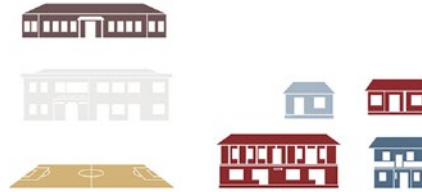
Figure 7. The *qendra e fshatit* in the former socialist village of "Asim Zeneli". Current condition assessed by E. Londo in 2021 fieldwork activities (by LONDO 2022, p. 75).

In the next page, figure 8. Architectural buildings typologies composing the *qendra e fshatit* in the former socialist village of "Asim Zeneli". Past and present use conditions assessed E. Londo in 2021 (by LONDO 2022, p. 75).

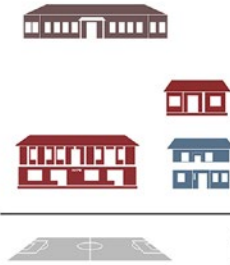
PLANNED DURING 1944-1991



BUILT DURING 1944-1991



IN USE
AFTER
SOCIALISM

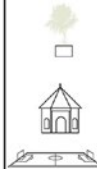


DISMISSED

NEW USE
AFTER
SOCIALISM



NEW
BUILDINGS
AFTER SOCIALISM



LEGEND

BUILDING TYPOLOGIES

- WAREHOUSE
- NURSERY
- ELEMENTARY/
MIDDLE SCHOOL
- HOUSE OF
CULTURE
- SPORT FIELD
- HEALTH SERVICES
- RETAIL SERVICES
- RETAIL COMMERCIAL
SERVICES (MAPO)
- PUBLIC GREENERY SPACE
- AGRICULTURAL
VOCATIONAL
SECONDARY SCHOOL
- ASIM ZENELI
STATUE
- ADMINISTRATIVE
BUILDINGS
- WORSHIP
BUILDING

FUNCTION

- ADMINISTRATIVE
- HEALTHCARE
- ABANDONED
- EDUCATIONAL
- RETAIL-COMMERCIAL
- DEMOLISHED
- CULTURAL
- RECREATIONAL AND
SPORTING
- RESIDENTIAL

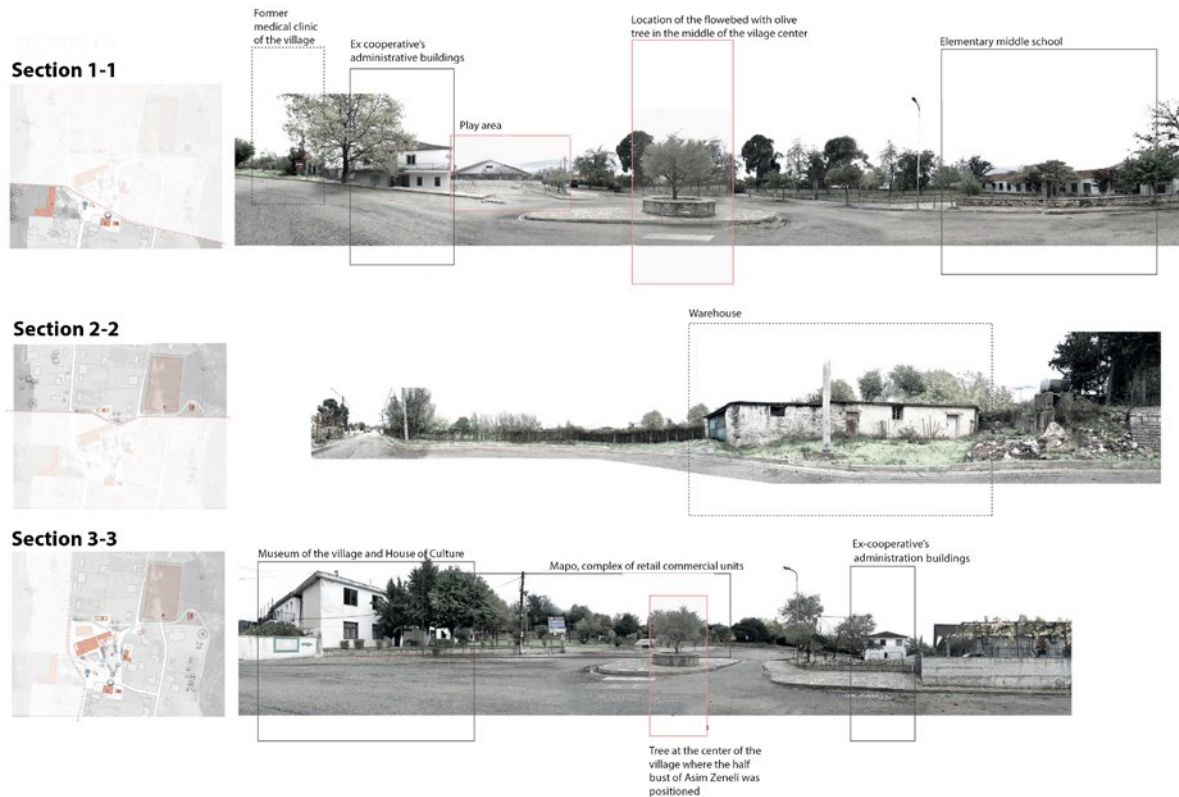
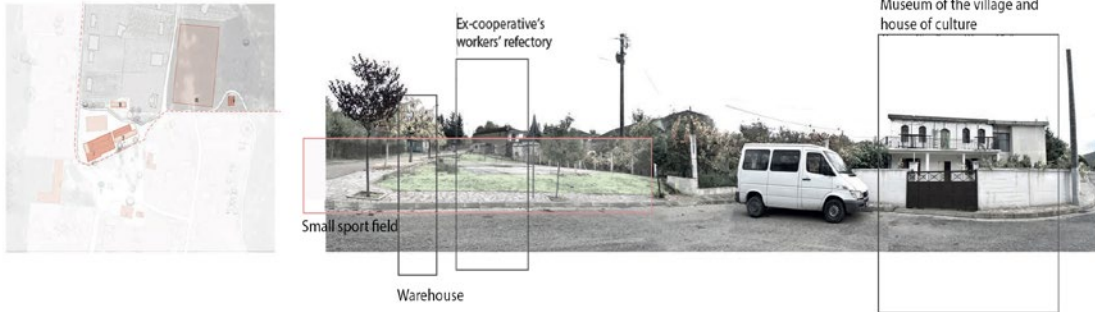


Figure 9. Architectural buildings typologies composing the *qendra e fshatit* in the former socialist village of “Asim Zeneli”. Sections views no. 1-3 (by LONDO 2022, p. 76)

leading representatives of the Council of the Cooperative. The latter serving as the highest local governmental body in charge of addressing daily issues and managing the cooperative’s economy⁵⁷. As the construction of the new settlement of “Asim Zeneli” progressed, three existing villages were incorporated into the cooperative in 1959: the villages of Krinë, Saraqinisht, and Traneshisht.

57. HAXHIU1963, pp. 5-7.

Section 4-4



Section 5-5



Section 6-6



Figure 10. Architectural buildings typologies composing the *qendra e fshatit* in the former socialist village of "Asim Zeneli". Sections views no. 4-6 (by LONDO 2022, p. 76).

Subsequently, the cooperative continued to expand with the inclusion of nearby villages such as Suhë and Stegopul. Finally, in 1970, the village of Lazarat, situated on the opposite hillside of the Drino Valley, became part of the cooperative as well⁵⁸.

By 1961, the Annual Report of Agricultural Cooperatives⁵⁹ highlighted that “Asim Zeneli” had established a consolidated village’s centre. It boasted two theatre groups, choirs, reading rooms, a healthcare centre, cooperative offices, secondary school and the so-called *MaPo (Magazina Popullore)*, i.e., retail units offering services such as tailoring, blacksmithing, shoemaking, barber and hairdresser shops, and other artisanal shops⁶⁰. The sport field was located slightly apart from the centre of the village.

In the centres of the existing villages of Saraqinisht, Tranesisht, and Krinë, remnants of typical pre-regime Albanian public gathering spaces can still be observed. These spaces typically consisted of small squares adjacent to the local Orthodox church or a small *teqe*. Even during the communist era, these places continued to serve as gathering locations. On the contrary, worship buildings were exploited for regime propaganda purposes. For example, they were converted into *vatër culture* or socialist houses of culture, like in Saraqinisht, or transformed into warehouses for agricultural products or cattle, like in Krinë, or were completely destroyed, like in Tranesisht.

Following the principles of the “ideal communist city”, which advocated for extensive territorial urban organization and production and a settlements urban matrix divided in specific sectors or areas, the Albanian new socialist rural centres were meticulously studied and designed as integral entities of state farms. These were envisioned to establish a comprehensive large-scale economic infrastructure; in the Drino Valley they formed a network of *qendra e fshatit* that repeated at the territorial scale to answer to the new economical and socio-cultural needs of the new socialist rurality⁶¹.

Another critical component of the large-scale territorial and economic infrastructure in the Drino Valley was the establishment of state farms, exemplified by the development and subsequent downsizing of the “Myzafer Asqeri” state farm. In the masterplan, the new socialist rural settlements composing the “Myzafer Asqeri” state farm (figs. 11-12) tended to develop and organise in a linear scheme where the sectors were stretched out along a single line and educational and socio-cultural zone run parallel to the residential one. This linear scheme proved to be «the more reasonable when a great part of the [...] population is active in a kind of economic production that does not need to

58. AQSH, AF 490, F. 469, Y. 1970, pp. 1-103.

59. AQSH, Arkivi Shtetëror Vendor (ASHV) Gjirokastër, AF 1, F. 205, Y. 1961, pp. 1-263.

60. AQSH, ASHV Gjirokastër, AF. 1, F. 424, Y. 1980, vol. 3.

61. GUTNOV 1971, p. 11.

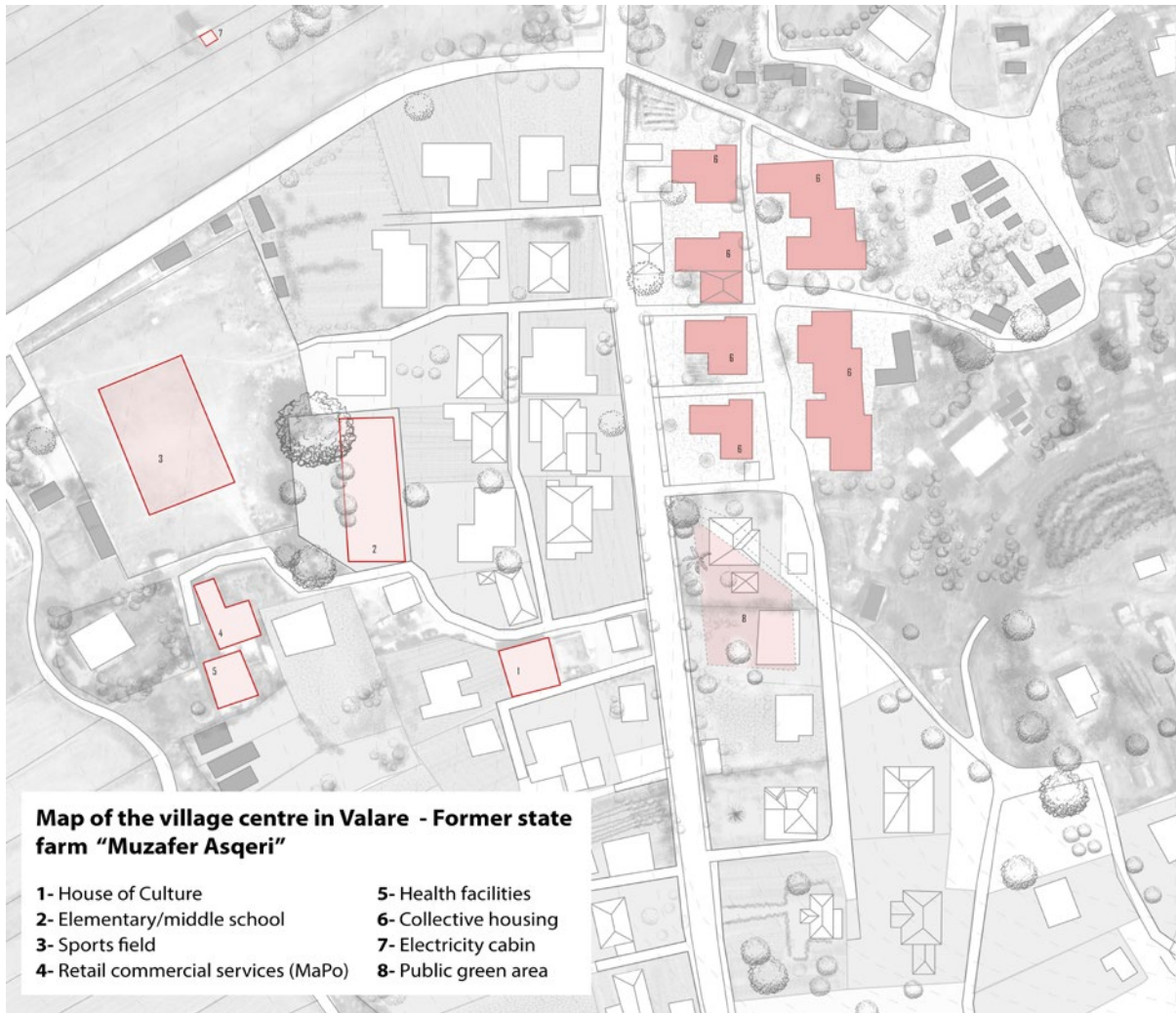


Figure 11. Map of the *qendra e fshatit* and its building typologies in the former socialist village of Valare, one of the new socialist villages composing the state farm "Myzafer Ashqeri". Condition assessed by E. Londo in 2021 (by LONDO 2022, p. 88).

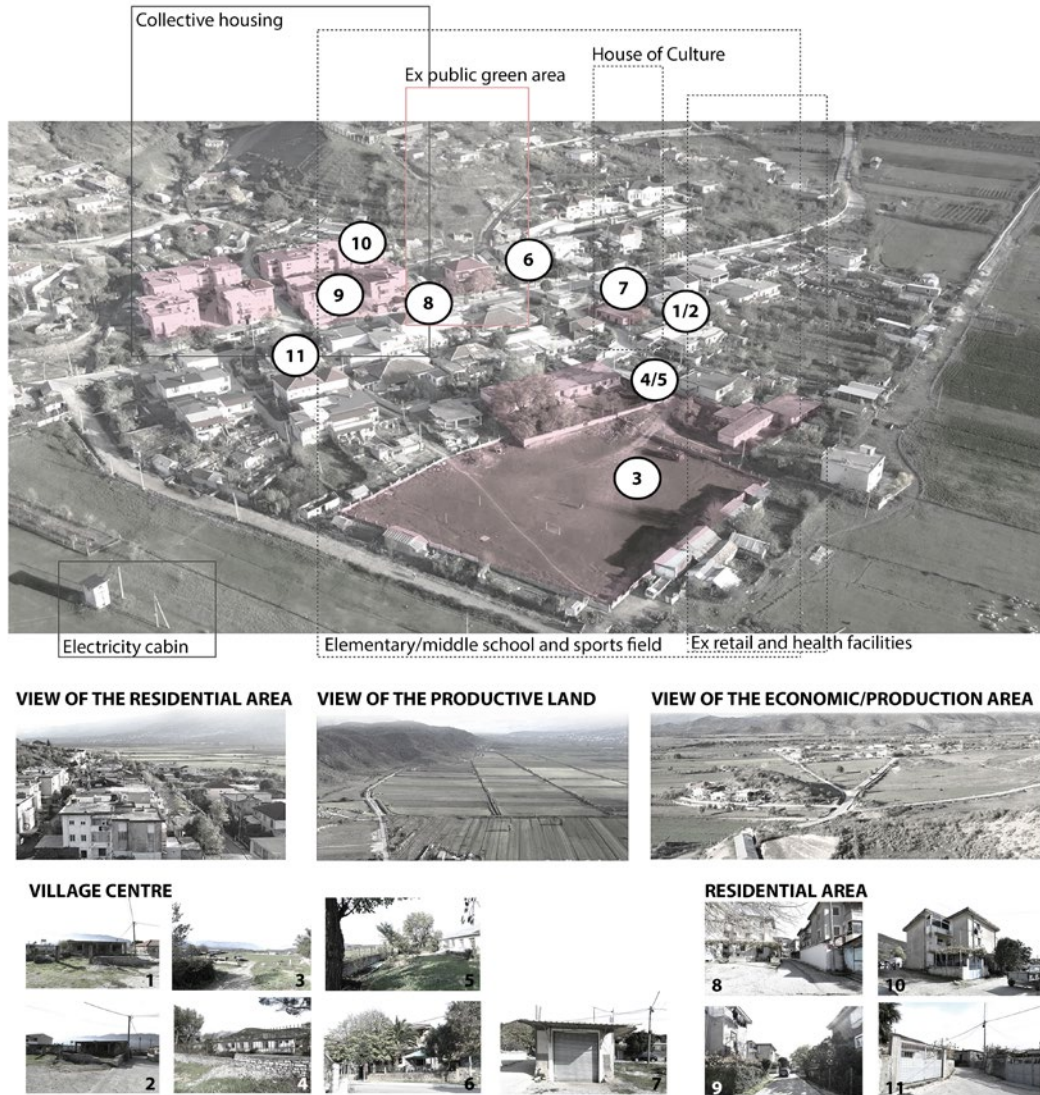


Figure 12. View of the areas and of architectural buildings typologies in the former socialist village of Valare, one of the new socialist villages composing the state farm "Myzafer Ashqeri". Condition assessed by E. Londo in 2021 (by LONDO 2022, p. 89).

be segregated from the residential area»⁶². Despite its benefits, the linear arrangement occasionally resulted in unequal distances between neighbourhoods and the socio-cultural centre, located at the village centre. However, it facilitated direct transit between homes and workplaces. In the Drino Valley, the planning of the new socialist rural settlements according to this linear scheme was also influenced by the region's North-South longitudinal development of the Valley and the presence of the national road likewise oriented that served as primary artery. This road, akin to a highway, branched out to provide access to the various new settlements of the state farms, thereby structuring the spatial organization and connectivity within the valley.

Moreover, the “Muzafer Asqeri” state farm stood for a case in which the joining of new rural settlements aimed at maximising the land use and agricultural productivity in the Drino Valley. The process began with the establishment of the “Goranxia” state farm, which later integrated the NBSH “Arshi Lengo” and the NBSH “Valare”. These latter entities were newly developed rural settlements founded in 1950s to accommodate displaced inhabitants from the towns of Tepelena and Përmet, as well as from the geographic regions of Skrapar and Kurvelesh. By 1961, the state farm encompassed four sectors extending over a 25 km stretch in the valley⁶³.

In 1970 the “Muzafer Asqeri” state farm expanded with the incorporation of the “Gjirokastra” state farm, extending its boundaries up to Tërbuq, a village in the far North-East of Gjirokastra district⁶⁴. In 1978 the management of the “Muzafer Asqeri” state farm faced significant challenges due to its extensive 60 km stretch along the valley, and was in need of improvements. The management of thirteen villages organized in eight sectors, out of which six were agricultural sectors and two were machine tractors stations, i.e. *Stacionet e makinave dhe të traktorëve* (SMT), started to be cause of administration difficulties. The vast administrative area under the “Muzafer Asqeri” state farm management encompassed productive plains, hills, and mountains whose land was also exploited by agricultural cooperatives such as “Misto Mame”, “Sofratika”, “Cepo”, and “Asim Zeneli”. Moreover, insufficient workforce and residual issues inherited from merged state farms further compounded the administrative and managerial difficulties.

Consequently, in 1983 the “Muzafer Asqeri” state farm was divided into two new entities: the NBSH “Lunxhëria” centred around the rural settlements of Arshi Lengo, Bulo, and Valare with the city of Gjirokastra serving as its main socio-cultural and administrative centre; and the NBSH “Labova”

62. *Ivi*, pp. 98-99.

63. AQSH, ASHV Gjirokastër, AF 1, F. 471, Y. 1978, pp. 1-13.

64. AQSH, AF 490, F. 148, Y. 1970, pp. 1-7.

focusing on fruit production and centred in the village of Labova, including the villages of Qestorat, Dhoksat, Karjan, Andon Poçi, Hundëkuq, Labovë e Madhe, and Labovë e Vogël⁶⁵.

Conclusion

The production of public space in socialist Albania played a crucial role in embodying the new socialist principles adopted by the country after the Second World War. At the dawn of the second-half of the 20th century, amidst diverse developmental processes expected to modernise a previously backward country, the collectivisation of land and the mechanisation of agricultural production in rural areas were pivotal. These efforts sought to achieve socio-economic homogeneity on both a macro-regional scale, through the construction of new workers settlements adjacent to agricultural cooperatives already composed by existing villages, and on a local scale, by transforming village spaces with the introduction of modern architectural buildings typologies and altering everyday life habits of the rural population.

In this context and following the Marxist-Leninist principles, the regime implemented a large-scale territorial urban organization and production strategy, establishing a new territorial matrix of rural and urban settlements divided into specific sectors or areas. The Albanian new socialist rural centres, conceived as integral components of the state farms, aimed to establish extensive economic production and service infrastructures across the territory.

To prove this new configuration of the rural landscape, the Drino Valley served as a case study, exemplifying the network of socialist self-sufficient territorial units, encompassing both agricultural cooperatives and state farms, and illustrating how the communist regime transformed the existing rural landscape in alignment with its ideological framework. Within this context, the agricultural cooperative “Asim Zeneli”, founded in 1947, as one of the first livestock cooperatives in the country, and the agricultural state farm “Myzafer Asqeri” are considered as representative of this two production economy structures that underpinned the socialist transformation in the countryside.

At the local scale, the socialist transformation focused on reshaping the settlement matrix and architecture of villages by introducing new and modern building typologies, thereby altering the everyday lives of the rural population. The *qendra e fshatit*, or the village centre, within agricultural cooperatives and state farms exemplified this shift, featuring public spaces composed of diverse building typologies and serving as socio-cultural encounters. These villages centres reflected the

65. AQSH, ASHV Gjirokastër, AF 1, F. 77, Y. 1983, pp. 1-2.

emerging socialist urban lifestyle, emphasizing public spaces designed to foster communal activities and promote socialist values.

The village centre and its public spaces in the Drino Valley, as discussed in this context, were primarily classified into three categories based on their components and positioning relative to the main street or square: open composition, closed composition, and free composition. In the case studies examined within the Drino Valley, the open composition – where buildings were arranged along the main street – was predominantly adopted in the planning of the majority of new rural settlements' masterplans.

The creation of these new public spaces, which included socio-cultural buildings such as the House of Culture, administrative offices, commercial establishments, workers' refectories, primary and secondary schools, sports fields, and green areas, arranged around or in proximity to an open square or main thoroughfare, represented a critical strategy. This approach aimed to achieve one of the paramount goals set forth by the Party of Labour of Albania (PLA): narrowing the disparities between urban and rural areas. This initiative underscored the regime's commitment to fostering a unified socio-economic and cultural environment across Albania's landscape.

The introduction of new building typologies within the village centre public space, aimed at enforcing a manipulated sense of collective belonging that, in the regime's socialist planning was crucial for shaping the new socialist Albanian working class. Retrieving Henri Lefebvre's theories on the relationship between state power and the production of space, the evolving of a mental space came into rural Socialist Albania through the centralised political, economic, administrative, juristic, and cultural control exerted by the state on people's lives.

As the planning of the *qendra e fshatit* exemplifies, this was consistently implemented by materialising the ideology in architectural buildings erected in the centre of each new rural settlement, or through the transformation and adaptation of worship buildings to new desacralized functions, and by establishing well-defined state-people relationships that facilitated in transmuting rural public spaces into socialist propaganda "(mental) spaces".

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