

Joint Master in European Cultural Governance

*Transition from Post-Socialist Albania
into Fast Tourism: An Ethnographic Case
Study of Lukovë*

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Declaration

I hereby declare that I have composed the present thesis autonomously and without use of any other than the cited sources or means. I have indicated parts that were taken out of published or unpublished work correctly and in a verifiable manner through a quotation. I further assure that I have not presented this thesis to any other institute or university for evaluation and that it has not been published before.

Flakrina Maluku

15.07.2026

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Dedication

To my late father, who fought for the right to education and for the opportunities that my generation was able to inherit.

Your courage and sacrifices gave me the freedom and privilege to pursue my studies. This thesis carries a part of your strength, your dreams, and your belief in a better future.

With love and eternal gratitude, I dedicate this work to you.

Abstract

This research paper deals with the case of Lukovë, a former underdeveloped and remote village which suddenly becomes a “promising” case in the context of its hasty development into tourism destination. The phenomenon of breaking out of social and economic isolation and, instead, plunging into accelerated tourism, is examined in terms of its impacts on local identity, cultural memory and community life while the new realities of local vs. global and authentic vs. commodification are considered. The case of experiential tourism is examined as a cultural practice and as an avenue of tourism development which could contribute to sustainable yet integrated livelihoods rather than reducing culture into a mere commodity.

The research, based on ethnographic methodology, examines storytelling and memory as the major strategies, which allow the local community to reproduce and assert its cultural identity. Oral traditions, daily practices, intergenerational knowledge are regarded as forms of intangible heritage, which tourism promotion seeks to mobilize. Celebration and transmission of memory through storytelling serve as a means not only of preserving cultural heritage, but also of engagement with visitors, which allows local stakeholders to translate their experience into encounters, providing them with references and creating a link to the past.

The final thesis discusses how experiential tourism (cooking local food, fishing tradition, craft and art demonstrations, local traditional festivities) can create greater connection between the tourists and the local community and how it becomes a more sustainable and responsible form of tourism, creating jobs, economic gain, pride of ownership, and the two-way sharing of cultural information. It further states that with the current trend of fast tourism, the tourists will just skim the surface of experiences has its disadvantages including fast-rising foreign investors, commercialization, loss of ownership over cultural history and exploitation of resources and land.

However, from a theoretical perspective, tourism experiences are not neutral or fully authentic encounters.

To sum up, the best practice of sustainable tourism development in Lukovë is to find the balance between its development and its cultural heritage preservation. The author means that in order to achieve the positive practice of tourism governance in this place there should be applied such decision-making models that will take into account the community interests and prioritize its local ownership, intangible heritage, and cultural policies connected with tourism development that will be defined in-situ.

In the context of fast tourism development, these dynamics become more intensified, as tourists often engage only superficially with local cultural life. This accelerates processes such as foreign investment pressure, commercialization of cultural practices, loss of local control over cultural representation, and increasing competition over land and resources.

The thesis shows how appealing these practices might be as the notion of storytelling and memory became the core resources to prove that the future of Lukovë tourism is not only to become a magnet for guests but to become the empowered place that will control how its tourism activities reflect and importance its cultural narrative in the light of globalization and threats it brings to local communities.

Keywords: *Sustainable tourism, Ethnography, Storytelling, Collective memory, rural tourism,*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Migration, rural backfilling, and tourism development are interrelated processes that have transformed contemporary Albania after socialism, especially in rural coastal areas like Lukovë. For a long time, Lukovë itself was a rather isolated place, both geographically, due to the tough mountain ranges, and infrastructurally, as well as economically, as its people traditionally obtained their living mainly through subsistence farming. However, emigration also became a motor for economic and socio-cultural progress in Albania, by bringing in much-needed money through remittances, and more open societal and democratic norms.¹

Today, however, Lukovë has gained a much stronger position in national, regional, and even larger transnational tourism networks. Tourism is not simply movement to a destination, but a socially organized system that structures how places are anticipated, imagined, and consumed.²

This development has not only had economic implications, but also profoundly social and cultural ones, changing the ways in which the locals relate to their land, memories, identity and each other.

As Urry argues, mass tourism emerged historically as a new form of social activity rather than a natural or universal practice, developing alongside industrial society and changing patterns of mobility.³

The thesis, entitled “*Transition from Post-Socialist Albania into Fast Tourism; An Ethnographic study of Lukovë*”, seeks to engage and analyze the process of transition from post-socialist rural backwardness to rapid tourism development and its consequences for the local life in Lukovë, and whether rapid tourism is the right development for Lukovë, and whether it is even sustainable. It primarily aims to look at the problems arising at a local level, and how they cope

¹ Julie Vullnetari, “Albanian Migration and development: State of the art review”, Working paper No,8 (September 2007-2004) 17.

² John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2002), 12.

³ John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2002), 16.

with the discord between economic opportunities versus cultural opportunities against the backdrop of time and rapid external developments.

The research revolves around the main question: how viable is the thesis of rapid tourism as the solution for the development of Lukovë, and at what cost? While tourism development is often regarded as a *panacea* for economic development of the peripheral and rural areas, this thesis unapologetically rejects the basic assumption that development equals sustainability. On the contrary, it maintains that tourism development should be seen as a power-structured social field where various actors (local residents, migrants, investors, state institutions), struggle over the control of land, meaning, representation and also cultural heritage. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett directly argues that heritage is not something simply preserved; it is produced through presentation, performance, and tourism display.⁴

The dynamics involved with the shift of Lukovë from post-socialist isolation to rapid tourism development are multiple and intersect. Economically, the move from agricultural subsistence and seasonal migration to economies based on tourism services. Spatially, the land along the coast is increasingly being sold through guesthouse construction, private investments and infrastructure development. Culturally, and perhaps the most important, the traditions, memories, and quotidian using these locals are reformulated into “experiences” for visitors. At the heart of this transition are questions of authenticity: what is it, who decides it, who gets its benefits and how it is transformed when it gets put into a market logic.

The present thesis uses anthropological and ethnographic methods to record the changes and locate them in people’s perception. It utilizes storytelling and memory as important analytical categories. Places of remembrance converge in Lukovë through the stories told about the past. Narratives about migration, work in the fields, the experience of socialism and post-socialism and the people’s collective memories of their place are not simply a remembrance of the past. Rather, it is a mechanism through which people are trying to understand change and repeat the tracks of their continuity in an ever-changing environment. The act of storytelling is directly connected with

⁴ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

the the preservation of culture and heritage, which in this case has a commercial side as local knowledge is translated into tourism experience.

Within this framework, the basis of this research seeks to demonstrate that experiential tourism is a double-edged sword, allowing for greater interaction (through traditional food preparation, demonstrations, participation in agriculture, festivals, etc.) to create income-generating activities, pride in one's own terms and encourage the conservation of intangible cultural heritage; however, if subsumed to external market logic or the logic of rapid investment, experiential tourism transforms culture into a market value, dissociated from the social and historical context.

The Lukovë case is important in itself, but also as a reference for the post-socialist transformation of the Balkans, where regions that used to be rural backwaters are now being integrated into the global tourism industry without local structures to protect or control these transformations. Here, tourism does not simply replace remoteness with development: new inequalities, dependencies and forms of uprooting emerge. Land is contested, seasonal economies are precarious, and local youngsters find themselves either underpaid in the service sector or caught in migration corridors.

As MacCannell argues, what is presented to tourists often operates through a staged structure of “authenticity,” where cultural practices are selectively performed and organized for visitor consumption rather than experienced in their full social context.⁵ The final salient point made in the article is the problematic nature of authenticity yet its centrality to the study. Authenticity is not viewed as a cultural invariant, but rather a cultural variable that is contingent on the environment. Residents can frame authenticity for visitors, dismantle it, or manipulate and redefine it; this depends on the context and whether it is for economic preservation, the survival of their community or something else. The hierarchical presentation of the article indicates how tourism’s authenticity is not preserved or lost as previously implied but is always in the process of being recreated.

In short, the conclusion of this thesis is that determining how development should be ‘governed’ will be the key factor on whether Lukovë thrives or languishes. This is because rapid tourism development is not going to be sufficient to guarantee a positive legacy. If extractive behaviors are

⁵ Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976).

allowed to dominate in the absence of strong community participation and local resource protection, then it is likely that profit-before-history attitudes will emerge, serving only short-term cultural and economic interests over the long game. If, however, tourism development prioritizes a community-based approach and experience-focused aspirations, then this form of tourism practice might just help build economic and cultural resilience in this beautiful little corner of southern Albania.

Addressing the wider theme of post-socialist transformation in the Lukovë's case study, the paper intervenes in anthropological conversations about rural change, mobilities, history, collective memory, and tourism. It argues that development is a process defined not by a clear outcome, but by a conflict around its meaning, which can be constantly reshaped by its every-day subjects.

1.1 Research question

In this polarized world, what is the suitable rapid tourist growth for the future of Lukovë, and how does the local community perceive the balance between the economic development and the authenticity of its own culture along with its traditions during this process?

1.2 Sub-questions

What are the consequences of moving Lukovë from rural marginality to a post-socialist tourism boom on the site's social, economic, and collective life?

How do Lukovians recognize, oppose, or take a role in the shifting perceptions of their culture's "authenticity" due to tourism?

1.3 Conceptual Definition: Transition from Post-Socialist Isolation to Fast Tourism

The duality of time that characterizes the dynamics of Lukovë is, therefore, its rapid transformation from being a post-socialist underdeveloped rural periphery to an overdeveloped (touristified) destination that has undergone profound economic, spatial, and cultural changes.

Socially, the post-socialist rural infrastructure in Lukovë shared comparable features with several other rural Albanian areas, such as poor connectivity, minimal contact with market economy, and limited mobility. The economy was mostly dependent on subsistence farming, temporary employment, and migration. Socially, life revolved around the village. Kinship networks were highly developed, while society was relatively closed to outside influences, both economically and culturally. Based on the parameters outlined above, one can conclude that the situation in Lukovë, in terms of poverty, was a type of relative cultural autonomy, whereby local traditions and habits were not affected by the influence of “modernity”, partially due to the lack of the region's participation in tourism development.

1.4 Emergence of Tourism Exposure

Tourism has positive economic impact and creates opportunities, on employment, on gross income and production, but it may also have negative effects, particularly on the environment.⁶With the gradual opening of the coast to Albania and the improvement of traffic connection with the region,

⁶Gorica, Klodiana, Dorina Kripa, and Engjellushe Zenelaj, “Tourism and Sustainable Development: The role of Local Government in Sustainable Development”, AUDCE 8, no.2 (2012): 142

the village of Lukovë started receiving tourists first with few numbers and then as part of the general development of the tourism in the Albanian Riviera. During this period, the local population was “fortunate” to witness economic growth, especially in hospitality, seasonal renting and services, but was also integrating demands from the outside for an “authentic rural life”. The assumption that tourist areas will always remain tourist areas and be attractive to tourists appears to be implicit in tourism planning. Public and private agencies alike, rarely, if ever, refer to the anticipated life span of a tourist area or its attractions.⁷

Lukovë’s rapid development, therefore, is an example of the risks that tourism can pose to a location when there is no long-term planning that takes factors such as environmental limits, social change, and cultural transformation into account. The lack of a sustainable model that balances tourism development and the protection of the life worlds of local residents against overcommodification means that the very dynamics that lead to economic growth can also threaten the future viability of the tourism destination.

1.5 Fast Tourism Development

The transformation of the southern Albanian coast, particularly in Vlorë and Sarandë and the surrounding villages, has happened at a speedy pace because of fast tourism advancement. Characterized by rapid construction, development of a seasonal economy, and the commodification of the coastal landscape, the areas of Borsh, Dhërmi, and Jalë are now facing severe consequences such as transformation of the natural landscape, privatization of the place, desolation of local spatial and cultural continuity. There is still a need for implementing new trends of cultural tourism, such as creative tourism; educational tourism; gastronomic tourism; religious tourism; spiritual and holistic tourism; wellness and spa tourism; cultural volunteer tourism; roots of migrant tourism. All new cultural tourism trends that the Albanian Riviera can possibly host and further develop for a better sustainable tourism.⁸

⁷ . Butler, Richard W. “The Concept of a Tourist Area Cycle of Evolution.” *Canadian Geographer* 24, no. 1 (1980), 10

⁸ Jojic, Sonia. “Sustainable Tourism in the Albanian Riviera – Cultural Routes Contribution in Sustainable Tourism in the Albanian Riviera.” (2023), pp.108-111

In this regard, it is interesting to study Lukovë, a destination that, on the one hand, has already entered into a relationship with the regional tourism fabric, but, on the other hand, has not yet experienced the dynamics of intensive and irreversible development, as the previous case studies. Thus, it is still possible to find remnants of the rural organization of space and life, landscape continuity, social dynamics, etc. As Urim Shehu recollects:

“Since we were a family of four, I received 8,000 square meters of land. After communism, we did not cultivate anything on our land.”⁹



Figure 1. Urim Shehu in his own shop

Nevertheless, we can say that Lukovë is now at a critical juncture. It can potentially either develop like many other villages or maintain its distinct and environmentally friendly character. The experience of the nearby coastal areas indicates that uncontrolled speed and development of tourism is motivated mainly by short-term economic gain, with the cost of a slow demise of environmental and cultural assets.

⁹ Urim Shehu, "Tourism and life in Lukove" interviewed by Flakrina Maloku, Lukove, 2024

This is why Lukovë should be considered as a sustainable tourism management opportunity rather than a corrective measure at a later stage. It can still, given the management, avoid the unmanageable transformation of other regions, that instead of destroying its landscape will preserve it, support local residents and their lives as well as maintain the local culture and environment. However, Urim Shehu is open to new ways of tourism as he expresses:

“Larger supermarkets may come in the future, but let them come. I will simply expand my own store. We worked all day for 100 lek (about €0.80). However, the value of the lek at that time was about ten times greater than it is today.”¹⁰

1.6 Transition as a Lived Transformation

This transition, according to the author, is rather presented as a social conflict instead of a natural path of development: local actors seem to be socially negotiating along economic and cultural divisions. There exist conflicting views regarding the ‘authentic’ character of the village, its preservation or the transition to become a ‘full-time’ tourist destination; the ownership of the businesses is contested between the villagers and ‘outsiders’; the tourists are divided between whether they enjoy the authentic experience or the reproduced and commoditized one.

¹⁰ Urim Shehu,” Tourism and life in Lukove” interviewed by Flakrina Maloku, Lukove, 2024



Figure 2. A beach in Lukove, Albania

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The post-socialist reconstruction of rural Albania cannot simply be seen as economic transition from socialist, centrally-planned economy to market economy. It started a wider social transformation, changing rural's relationship with land, work, mobility and belonging. Post-socialism brought new forms of economic precarity, private possession, international migration, uneven territorial development and so on, all of these playing central role in changing rural realities. In this regard, Lukovë's villages incarnate the cohabitation of new and old times, of recent memories of socialist agricultural production, migration and depopulation, but also of new expectations related to tourism boom.

One of the most important developments that shaped the post-socialist Albania was migration. Julie Vullnetari argues that migration should not be understood only as a demographic phenomenon but as a social process that resulted in its transformations of family forms, economic strategies and ideas of future. Limited employment opportunities and collapse of the socialist economic structures made migration a predominant strategy for survival, especially to the neighbouring Greece and Italy.¹¹

By sending remittances, migrants maintained their power over the rural territories by establishing new links between their hometowns and the abodes abroad.¹²

The notion of rupture is particularly relevant in the case of southern Albanian coastal villages, where migration became an intrinsic part of the narrative about return and belonging. More than creating a radical disorientation between the migrants and their homeland, migration established a certain circularity with the village, allowing some villagers to settle for good abroad, while others would keep a constant economic, emotional and social relationship with the village through their

¹¹ Julie Vullnetari, "Albanian Migration and Development: State of the Art Review," IMISCOE Working Paper No. 18 (2007).

¹² Olsi Lelaj and Nebi Bardhoshi, "The Albanian Village and Modernity: An Outline of a Relation," *Antropologji* 4, no. 1 (2021): 14–21.

returns. As such, post-socialism rural Albania cannot be labelled as ‘abandoned’ or in ‘decline’, but instead as a ‘mobility’ landscape.

The shift from collective agrarian economy to private land ownership was another challenge to the evolution of rural space after socialism. Law, No. 7501 on Land (1991) marked a drastic break with the past, returning some of the land to the rural households and creating individual property, thereby abolishing the collective agrarian economy.¹³ While the new law came to give property to the owners and progress the economy of agriculture, it also had a price to pay. The land became fragmented and the questions that arose around property rights affected the coastal villages, where agricultural land started to take new economic values, thanks to tourism and real estate businesses.

The village of Lukovë is a representative case of complexity and historicity of such transformation. Economically, historically, this was an agricultural productive area that involved olive and citrus production, vineyards and livestock, and to a smaller extent, fishing and other coastal activities. Agricultural production was collectivized during socialism, and after 1991 it was privatised, but this is not an unusual process of full ownership, rather a fragmentation and diversification of private ownership and individual economic strategies. Following this, the growth of coastal tourism along the Albanian Riviera meant that land in Lukovë, previously imagined only through agricultural productive uses, now became increasingly associated with tourism investments and the tourist potential of its natural resources. Finally, the ‘economic’ transformation of an agricultural village into a tourism one implies also a different understanding of the same land, now imagined through different lenses.

Furthermore, anthropological insights into the life in rural Albanian villages could provide an even broader understanding of the society and its transformations. Lelaj and Bardhoshi critique the foundational narratives that depict the Albanian village as an obsolete social arrangement that has radically failed to catch up with modernity. According to them, the village has been ever more a site of a struggle between tradition and change; communities have not abandoned tradition, but instead, they have been redefining their commitment to it, vis-a-vis modernity’s economic, social,

¹³ John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2002).

and political processes.¹⁴ The post-socialist village does not merely reproduce the values of the past, but instead it is a site where different modernities are being lived and negotiated.

This lens provides a context to approach Lukovë as tourism is not simply about a vacant canvas. There are social memories, migration history, agricultural practices, and inter-generational interactions established in Lukovë. The tourism industry will inevitably bring these tensions that present both opportunity and challenges, including a shift in relationship to land, work and meaning of the place to the people.

The Albanian Riviera: between historical imaginaries and contemporary tourism

Furthermore, the history of the representations of southern Albania from the outside, should also be taken into account in the development of tourism in the Albanian Riviera. Although the dynamics of tourism today are mainly a post-socialist phenomenon, southern Albania has been represented for centuries by foreign travelers as a place of spectacular natural beauty, of cultural diversity and authenticity.

The most important potentially historical representation of southern Albania is derived from the visit of the English poet Lord Byron to the Ottoman Balkans in 1809. His famous work *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* continually referenced Albania via romantic and beautiful descriptions of the country's wild areas, local customs and features, and the hospitality of the people. Lord Byron never visited Lukovë, but he still shares credit for establishing the European tradition of thought surrounding Albania as an exotic location and a distant land not touched by modernity and progress established in countries part of the world known today. His work fits into the ethos of the Romantic movement that took travel to be an adventure of experiencing the aspects of a country or place preserved in time and untouched by modern life.

The construction Albanian history can be aligned with the concept of the tourist gaze introduced by John Urry. Urry defines gaze as the process of the place that resides in a mind rather than its physical visitation. Therefore, when a tourist arrives at an attraction, it is not the location that constructs the opinions, but the socially-constructed expectations that were produced through

¹⁴ Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976).

earlier works in literature, imagery, media and by representing it other times.¹⁵ In other words, never the less the tourist does not land in a place with no perception. There is a system of thought with which they have come to view the bespectacled landscapes and people.

Viewing that in mind, tourism studies define the tourist gaze, Byron's plays can be read as the initial format of that gaze. Through Byron's plays, a certain image of the south part of Albania was created: the land of spectacular nature, traditions, and genuine culture. Now the way how the Albanian Riviera is marketed corresponds to the initial tourist gaze ideas, creating Albania as a new unexplored hidden pearl of the Mediterranean, an idyllic spot with wild nature and authentic lifestyle.

Nonetheless, the complexity of the tourist gaze indicates that it would be unwise to conceive places from the lens of the tourist imagination (which has, to give credit where credit is due, entered into its own vocabulary). While the visitor sees a representation of idyllic values in villages like Lukovë, the resident sees a reality shaped by migration, economic necessity, family histories and living. The village cannot only be regarded as a postcard; indeed, it offers a space where the people who live in it experience contradictions and duplicity.

It is important to distinguish between development and growth for understanding the rapid rise of tourism in Lukovë. It is not just a tourist economic activity revolution; it is a new perspective for the entire valuation of this village. The landscapes, traditions, and everyday practices are now becoming something visible to visitors searching for realization through their own lens of authenticity. The growth of Lukovë as a tourist destination is not only questioned in terms of its benefits, but in whose perspective the village is interpreted: that of the visitor which embraces the wants for authenticity or the connected experiences for resident who lives there.

Tourism, authenticity, and the transformation of cultural landscapes

The social entanglement of tourism and host communities has been investigated through the notions of authenticity, representation and heritage making. The act of tourism is more than just putting people in motion to the destination; it implies the production of meaning regarding place, tradition and identity. In rural and coastal sites such as Lukovë, tourism today is based on the perception by visitors that they experience something authentic, traditional and untouched from

¹⁵ John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2002).

the modernization from the past. It has been shown by scholars, nevertheless, that authenticity is not an inherent quality of an object, but rather a socially contested and produced resource.

Tourism is based on a notion of authenticity proposed by Dean MacCannell. The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class, Davecannell states that the contemporary tourists demand from the activities and experience authenticity as something true, and confidence. The reality is that through tourism activities, a staged authenticity is created based on the tourists' everyday culture presented, packaged and modified.¹⁶ Therefore, the initial experience created serves not only the demand for authenticity but also the staged authenticity notion.

As mentioned above, this theoretical approach best resonates with the case of Albanian Riviera, where the villages are packaged and promoted via representations of traditional buildings, local ways of life, natural landscapes, and historical heritage value. The same features that make these places attractive from a tourism development point of view – their rurality, historicity and perceived authenticity – may be affected by the very tourism development itself. Activities and practices that were once integrated in the local everyday life may re-contextualized as new when consumed by the outside guests.

Finally, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett expands this discussion into the idea of heritage being a process instead of just a legacy from the past. According to her arguments in her book ***Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage***, heritage is a product of selective presentation and interpretation.¹⁷ Culture starts to be used in its elements that are considered valuable, representing and worth to be continued, while others will fade away out of public view. Even the tourism industry is a direct influence in determination of how much of the local lived experience is visible out there and starts to be economically profitable.

¹⁶ Klodiana Gorica, Dorina Kripa, and Engjellushe Zenelaj, "Tourism and Sustainable Development: The Role of Local Government in Sustainable Development," *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 8, no. 2 (2012): 142–143.

¹⁷ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

But for Lukovë this means some vital questions about the rural change. The agricultural past of the village, its architectural identity, the memories of socialist production in agriculture and shipping, the so-called ‘local traditions’, will all be more and more framed and interpreted within tourism. And while tourism can compromise some of the cultural past for the sake of ‘preserving’ it – by transforming its everyday ‘value’ to economic ‘value’ – it will further transform the ‘living’ into a ‘preserved’ picture of the past that is to be consumed by tourism. Therefore, the real question is not whether tourism kills or conserves culture, but how communities are allowed (or not) to manage the meanings and the uses of their past and heritages.

Tourism development, sustainability, and governance in the Albanian Riviera

Albania has gradually gained recognition for its potential to further develop tourism as an engine for regional development, economic diversification and integration into global markets. While coastal tourism is on the face of it a new phenomenon in Albania, following years of isolation under a socialist regime, its resorts are among the clearest expressions of economic change since then. The recent years has also witnessed discussion of some of the impacts of growing tourism, however, in particular with regards to sustainable development, environmental impacts, unequal development and local involvement.

The Tourism Area Life Cycle by Butler is one of the most popular models that explain tourism development. According to Butler, all touristic places progress through a number of stages, including exploration and growth, development, consolidation, stagnation, and decline or rejuvenation.¹⁸ The linearity of the model has attracted criticism, but it is highly adequate for analyzing the places with the exploding pace of tourism development. In this regards, numerous Albania’s ri8veria’ s villages and settlements have jumped from the absence of tourisms to tremendous investments in construction and infrastructure, presenting the difficulty of adapting to these outraging changes.

Recent studies on Albanian tourism have advocated for the need for sustainable development and governance at the local level. According to Gorica, Kripa and Zenelaj, local governance is important for achieving a balance between tourism development, economic prosperity, social and

¹⁸ Richard W. Butler, “The Concept of a Tourist Area Cycle of Evolution,” *Canadian Geographer* 24, no. 1 (1980): 5–12.

environmental sustainability.¹⁹ The concept of sustainable tourism promotes the inclusion of the local population in the decision-making process, and the allocation of the benefits of tourism development back to them.

Joijs also emphasizes the importance of cultural routes and heritage approach to tourism on the example of the Albanian Riviera.²⁰ Here it is possible to create alternative tourism that is not purely mass tourism but allows to connect culture and tourism, as well as to promote development while preserving resources and communities.

The research that focuses on tourism in Albania usually aims to address the policy, the development opportunities, and the tourism planning. These papers tackle development issues but do not approach the tourism experience from a relatable community level. They do not try to ask how locals understand tourism, how they cope with the waves of change, or how different generations converse the idea of development.

The Lukovë case helps fill in this gap because it studies tourism in the local actors' quotidian encounters with the recent history of transitions, from socialism, over migration, rural change, to tourism development. Instead of framing tourism strictly in its capacity as a development strategy, the research understands it as a social process, one that reconfigures the ties between people, land, and memory.

Memory, place, and ethnographic approaches to social transformation

In understanding the change of Lukovë, we should pay attention not only to economic processes but also to memory and experience. Rural environments are not only habitats; they are where histories, identities, and social interactions are created and reproduced. In this framework, the concept of collective memory coined by Maurice Halbwachs can be useful to analyze the ways a community remembers and makes sense of its past. Halbwachs argues that memory is a social phenomenon that is created by the experiences, institutions, and places that people share instead

¹⁹ Klodiana Gorica, Dorina Kripa, and Engjellushe Zenelaj, "Tourism and Sustainable Development: The Role of Local Government in Sustainable Development," *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 8, no. 2 (2012): 142–143.

²⁰ Sonia Joijs, "Sustainable Tourism in the Albanian Riviera – Cultural Routes Contribution in Sustainable Tourism in the Albanian Riviera" (2023): 108–112.

of being reduced to individual memories.²¹ The harbored relationships within the places are particularly important to the discussed lens in the post-socialist villages, where the landscape hold traces from past economic and social structures. The agricultural terraces, family houses, abandoned or well-kept structures, and places of coexistence depict not only a functionality and purpose, but the effort of work, migration, belonging, and time transformation. In Lukovë, in order to perceive the reconfiguration of tourism, it is essential to examine the ways in which today's development is tied to the ideas of the past in regard to socialism, migration, and different forms of existence.

Tim Ingold's notion of the concept of dwelling dilutes this understanding of a place. He illustrates that landscape is not a backdrop for human actions, rather it is a site of ongoing creation which includes the interaction of people, their movements, and daily activities.²² A place is rather established on the union between people concerning their environment. This idea discourages seeing the landscape as elements that can easily be consumed by tourism, thus demonstrating the engagement through which a place is meaningful.

The theories proposed presented are in discussion with the ethnography, as they recognize the need to pay attention to the ordinary life and not only to statistical indicators or to an institutional perspective. Ethnography allows researcher to learn how social change is seen from the inside of the communities.

Ethnography is a method for studying social life, that first and famously introduced by Malinowski, which requires “immersion” in the community and learning from the “details” of people's practices.²³

Ethnographic method takes people's interpretations of social change instead of solely taking outsider's discourse. Ethnography seemed to be suitable for Lukovë context because it is impossible to understand what happened in Lukovë without people's narrations, memories and

²¹ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, (University of Chicago Press 1992)

²² Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000).

²³ Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (London: Routledge, 1922).

experiences.²⁴ A constructivist version of grounded theory is put forward by Kathy Charmaz who emphasizes that knowledge is produced through the interaction of the researcher and the participants.²⁵

Grounded theory is well-suited in approaching rapidly changing communities because the method permits the experience of local residents to elicit unexpected themes and meanings.

Research gap

Some existing literature has previously addressed aspects of migration, rural change, tourism, development, sustainability and heritage are literature on Albanian migration, historical tourism in Albania, tourism models and impacts, sustainable development, tourism and other rural development models. However, these areas have remained comparatively separate fields. Studies on migration looked at mobility and demographic change, while tourism studies addressed primarily the historical economic development, governance, sustainability. The links between these areas especially in terms of specific rural communities of Albania have received comparatively less attention.

The Lukovë case demands to expand the analysis of tourism development beyond its own borders and situate it in a long history of post-socialist transformations. Tourism cannot be understood outside of the pre-existent narrative of the village characterized by socialisms, migration, property and unequal relations, and memories. For this reason, the key question of the thesis is not if tourism is development or not, but what the consequences of accelerated tourism development are in local narratives of place, belonging, and authenticity.

The thesis is aiming to add scholarship with ethnographic method and grounded theory. Opening post-socialist rural community that is converting to a tourism destination, study mapping daily life, memory and other kinds of movement tension between the new economy and maintaining a culture, between.

²⁴ Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967), 4.

²⁵ Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (London: SAGE Publications, 2006), 8–9

Chapter 3: Methodology

Reflective to qualitative research, the complexity of method is multi-level, ethnographic fieldwork, utilized in the current study, allows for understanding of experience, interpretation and negotiation of the rapid development of tourism in the village of Lukovë. Grounded Theory, ethnographic observation, semi-structured qualitative interview and secondary literature on post-socialist transformation, property ownership, tourism development in Albania were conjointly employed during fieldwork.

The main methodological framework for this study is Grounded Theory, which is an open-ended, flexible analytical approach that generates concepts inductively from field data instead of relying on existing theoretical models. Kathy argues, I view grounded theory methods as a set of principles and practices, not as prescriptions or packages.²⁶

Grounded theory can help to forestall the opportunistic use of theories that have dubious fit and working capacity.²⁷ So often in journals we read a highly empirical study which at its conclusion has a tacked-on explanation taken from a logically deduced theory. The author tries to give his data a more general sociological meaning, as well as to account for or interpret what he found. Most grounded theories are substantive theories because they address delimited problems in specific substantive areas such as a study of how newly disabled young people reconstruct their identities.²⁸ Grounded theory guidelines describe the steps of the research process and provide a path through it. Researchers can adopt and adapt them to conduct diverse studies.²⁹

²⁶ K Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (London: SAGE Publications, 2006) 9

²⁷ Barney, G. Glaser and Anslem L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, 4.

²⁸ Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (London: SAGE Publications, 2006), 8.

²⁹ Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (London: SAGE Publications, 2006), 9

This proved helpful in capturing the emerging understandings that local residents have about tourism, authenticity, and socio-cultural development. Grounded Theory enabled the flexibility of data collection efforts, where experiences and concepts drawn from the earlier fieldwork helped refine interviews and observations with other participants and settings. This proved useful to understand not only the content of the residents' discourses around tourism, but how forthcoming or reticent they are in their narrations about sensitive issues such as land ownership, economic dependency, and foreign investment.

In this regard, ethnographic methodology is fundamental to our research as it allows us to better understand the daily life of Lukovë. Participant observation, informal interviews, and recurrent fieldwork allowed us to contextualize the meanings attached to tourism in Lukovë as embedded into daily life, seasonal cycles and social networks. Ethnography has not been regarded as a mere descriptive tool, but rather a reflective and interpretative engagement with the place, people, and environment, requiring time and familiarity with their interrelations. If ethnography is one of the pillars of our methodology, being *a “geographer”* has also been key to understanding Lukovë. The geographical embeddedness of the social developments in the village – including the relationship of coast, village, farmland and tourist facilities – means that knowledge and understanding of the social phenomena were helped through the lens of their spatial relations. In this sense, ethnography has been understood as practice that is supported by “geographical sensitivity,” whereby the ethnographer pays particular attention to landscape as a text that can be read in terms of its relations to social phenomena. It must be stated that other theoretical approaches influenced by characterology, racial studies, or Indo- European theories also permeated the scientific modernist discourse inquiring about the *spirit*, *body* and *political ethos* of Albanian rural communities and village life. However, evolutionist and romantic approaches are underlined here as the two dominant theoretical approaches to influence the ethnological and anthropological research on Albanians’ rural communities.³⁰

The qualitative semi-structured interviews were a prominent source of empirical material, allowing the respondents to share their own experiences while providing a common thematic framework

³⁰ Olsi Lelaj, Nebi Bardhoshi. “The Albanian village and Modernity: An outline of a relation” Department of Ethnology – Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Art studies Academy of Albanian studies, 16

among the interviews. Three in-depth interviews with the local main actors were chosen for the study:

These are the main informants involved in the interviews.

Teo Cetri is the village head (ALB: *kryeplaku*), who sheds light on governance, community development, and decision-making mechanisms;

Urim Shehu is the owner of the market, who provides insights into daily economic utilization, consumption, and tourist activity, both at some time high and low;

Mondi Cetri is the beach caretaker, who is arguably an influential actor in the tourism land use and a vital link, facilitating cooperation from the local population, especially during the peak months.

The interview subjects were selected based on a specific and purposive rationale rather than a random one, as different forms of mobilities and lives that reflect the impact of the post-socialist transformation in Lukovë had to be represented. The three main interlocutors correspond to different forms of tourism, belonging and mobility. Teo Çetri, the kryeplaku (head) of the village, is a representative of return migration, after having worked in Greece for thirty-five years. He decided to come back to Lukovë and reintegrate in his native village. His position of the local power and his status as a lifelong resident allows him to see and share with others the effects of long-term changes on the local social fabric and institutions. Urim Shehu's path is different. He hails from Përmet and established himself permanently in Lukovë after the collapse of socialism, choosing to make a living here instead of emigrating abroad. He joined the community in Lukovë rather than being born in it, and his narrative shows the impact of the transition and subsequent mobility on economic life and local identity from a different perspective. Mondi Çetri has a third type of life story, being part of generation which came of age during the transition, Mondi travelled seasonally to Greece to work but never left the country definitively, as he still lives in Lukovë. His life reflects what is called circular migration, or at least a form of it, that consists in a form of temporal mobility. Their respective mobility conditions, migration histories, generations and religious affiliation (Orthodox – in the case of Teo and Mondi, and Bektashi Muslim – in the case of Urim) augment the perspective on the interplay between tourism, mobility and identity in contemporary Lukovë.

Finally, I also had a couple of informal conversations with **Lendita Gjendra**, a nurse and owner of a small-scale farm, whose experience offers a compelling narrative of the nuances of health, agriculture, and subsistence, and of how rural livelihoods adapt to unprecedented changes. The rural was introduced as part of the scientific explorations, by other intellectualist movements as well, which articulated the modern idea of people's self-determination.³¹

To better sit the case in a broader analytical picture, secondary ethnographic and anthropological writings dealing especially with analyses of 'Albanian society' are also considered in this study. Specifically, the works of Nebi Bardhoshi and Olsi Lelaj regarding the property relations, land reform and processes of dispossession during and after the socialist period are particularly valuable to relate and give historic background of current changes in Lukovë. Theoretically, these elements help to place the ongoing land-surge linked to the expansion of tourism in the longer picture of the processes of collectivization during socialism, privatization after socialism, as well as current informal processes of land grabbing and alteration of property relations.

The methodological conceptualization of the research is also reflexive and ethnographic in nature, with an understanding of the researcher role in the construction of the interaction, meaning-making and access to information. Navigating a small rural community and "breaking into a closed social system" requires sensitivity to trust, social boundaries and the ethics of representation. Data, therefore, is collected not as a simple and neutral endeavor of extracting information, but viewed as a relational process influenced by (length of) acquaintance, positionality and the time spent in the field. Malinowski argues, the final goal of which an Ethnographer should never lose sight, is, briefly, to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of his world.³²

³¹ Olsi Lelaj, Nebi Bardhoshi. "The Albanian village and Modernity: An outline of a relation" Department of Ethnology – Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Art studies Academy of Albanian studies, 15

³² Malinowski, Bronislaw. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. London: Routledge 1922, 25

Chapter 4

4.1 From Socialist Isolation to Tourism: Historical Context

In order to understand the metamorphosis of the village of Lukovë from a secluded and unimportant rural settlement to a burgeoning nexus of tourism projects, it is essential to put it in the context of historical developments in the territory of Albania before and after 1991. Specifically, the fall of socialism opened up the doors to greater possibilities for the Albanian populace who had known decades of isolation, whether political or economic, and conjoined with the latter a complete re-setting of social interactions, mobility, and spatial organization. In the case of the southern Albania, and especially in the coastal settlements such as Lukovë, the historic trajectory of the post-1991 development is characterized by much irregularities and these have to be taken into account when discussing the new right-wing-dominated tourism landscape. After Hoxha's death in 1985, and reflecting some of the changes that were taking place in neighboring communist countries, the successor government headed by Ramiz Alia started to loosen its grip. However, the reforms were too little, too late. In the winter of 1990 and early 1991, popular student protests forced the government into democratic elections. These dramatic changes and the general political and economic chaos which took place at this time, are the context which framed the large-scale migration of Albanians after 1990: confirmation of the fact that the history of Albanians was not only one of the wars and battles, but also one of migrations.³³

³³ Julie Vullnetari, "Albanian Migration and development: State of the art review", Working paper No,8 (September 2007-2004) 8.



Figure 3. The oldest church of Lukove, Albania

4.2 Albania before 1991: Socialist Isolation and Controlled Mobility

Before 1991, Albania in the socialist regime of Enver Hoxha was one of the most isolated countries in Europe. During communism Albania was less accessible for the international tourists, and its tourism was based mainly on domestic tourism activity.³⁴ The state exercised strict control over its people regarding movement, access to information and, especially, contact with foreigners. The

³⁴ Enkela Krosi, “Year-Round Tourism in Albanian Riviera: Case of Qeparo” (Master of Science thesis, Department of Architecture, Epoka University, 2017) p. 20

ideological framework led to a centralized economy which not only dictated policies but also influenced daily life over decades. Boundaries were safeguarded with weapons ready to shoot and emigration was forbidden, of course. The policies of *vetëmbështetja* (self-reliance) inspired by Marxist-Leninist anti-revisionism demonized imports.

Lukovë and most of the country's rural areas, the view on social life was settled in how the agricultural production, cooperatives and labor structures, were working. The village and rural life were transformed into a scholarly modernist project with the discovery of Albania by foreign and national intellectuals with a primary interest in philology, ethnography, history, or archeology during the 19th century and onwards.³⁵ The socialist perspective, that started from the land ended with the collectivization of property. Not only were houses the property of the state, but even land was put in the hands of the cooperatives. Sure, this labor arrangement brought workers together under one social umbrella in the form of secure employment and social rights, however, it was also oppressing the right of the individual farmer to dictate their own fate and to emigrate out of the cooperative.

Southern Albania was very important strategically; at the same time, it was a territory undeveloped economically. Firstly, the village is not articulated as a social unit on its own right but rather as a mere settlement within tribal areas. The tribe is a central concept that frames people's way of life and their relation to territory. The perspective set by Durham is also reflected in the work of many other scholars of the time, who equally fail to observe the village unit of ethnographic investigation.³⁶ The whole infrastructure was minimal and access to the coastal areas was often limited due to security issues. The sea is an important element of economic today, a forbidden and militarized where access was limited for reasons of security, the sea itself was a geostrategic point and identified the political fragility of the country and the separation ideologically from the outsiders.

³⁵ Olsi Lelaj, Nebi Bardhoshi. "The Albanian village and Modernity: An outline of a relation" Department of Ethnology – Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Art studies Academy of Albanian studies, 15

³⁶ Olsi Lelaj, Nebi Bardhoshi. "The Albanian village and Modernity: An outline of a relation" Department of Ethnology – Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Art studies Academy of Albanian studies, 17

During this phase, semi-structured forms of indifference flourished. The groups were isolated – both physically (the natural barriers limiting migration) and institutionally (among those who kept the tidal wave of men, money, and ideas out of the bubble of life) – from the expanding circles of thought and control. The native societies enjoyed the lost independence despite being the least livable of the world (including their labor, their labor). Locked in the proximity of the community, kinship, effective labor ties, and collective memory turned out to be valuable social assets.

4.3 Southern Albania: Peripheral Development and Cultural Continuity

The cultural heritage found in the Albanian Riviera is one of the most crucial elements in building up and promoting Cultural Routes in the area.³⁷ Southern Albania and cities like Gjirokastra, Vlora and Saranda have a unique place in terms of the national historical geography. Even though the socialist state made an effort towards territorial unification, a cultural divide between town and country remained. Areas like Himara, Saranda, and remote villages like Lukovë were economically underdeveloped but culturally rich areas with flourishing oral histories and agriculture, and patterns of intra-state seasonal migration.

The socialist state in Albania, despite its project for radical modernization and ideological unification, brought different forms of social and spatial change rather than full homogeneity. As underlined by Olsi Lelaj, the socialist state managed to create new modernity that penetrated daily life practices, where state ideology was constantly being renegotiated and translated at the local level before being applied, rather than being imposed from the center.³⁸ In these terms, the periphery and the countryside were not unified and systematized under the same denominator as the rest of the nation but were integrated under specific regimes of labor, learning and social organization due to collectivization and local adjustments. The complementary findings by Nebi Bardhoshi prove that customary practices, kinship and informal regulatory systems did not disappear or stopped existing, but rather cohabited and guided the social order even within state

³⁷ Joić, Sonia. “Sustainable Tourism in the Albanian Riviera – Cultural Routes Contribution in Sustainable Tourism in the Albanian Riviera.” (2023), p.112

³⁸ Olsi Lelaj and Nebi Bardhoshi, “The Albanian Village and Modernity: An Outline of a Relation,” *Antropologji* 4, no. 1 (2021): 14–16

institutions.³⁹ All these theoretical findings imply how the countryside of southern Albania was not homogenized but integrated through the socialist structures. Practices of social continuity such as orality, family agriculture and seasonal mobility continued to exist under state socialism.

Despite state intervention, cultural reproduction was possible and continued at the level of everyday life, family, and unofficial and local “knowledge” systems. The population of Albania lived mainly through agricultural activities and society at the time relied heavily on this. The agricultural tourism in Albania is mainly offered from rural areas, and in the case of Riviera it is an asset found in all villages. This potential has been undercover because of the lack of integrative tourism strategies and networks among these places.⁴⁰ The cultivation of olives and livestock were at the center of the country’s activities and those of the people, along with minor self-subsistence agriculture production. Though now firmly rooted, migration was a possibility at the time for the country, within Albania. The country saw movement of its population into factories - industrial centers and collective farms of the various communes. These would later become important migration issues for the country following the fall of socialist structures.

Additionally, under socialism, the southern Albanian coastline was not seen as a tourism destination; it was often referred to as a security zone in parts of it, which meant limiting access and disallowing the tourism-related commerce that occurred post-1991. This is key to understanding the transformative potential at the border of this section of the Albanian coastline. The period 1945-90 in Albania was characterized by centrally planned population movements within the country, at times very strictly regulated and at other times not so efficiently enforced. A number of studies on population growth and movement in Albania existed during this time, primarily from Albanian scholars within Albania, but these were of course influenced by the ideology of the political system in place. Only very few scholars outside Albania had access to (reliable) data and thus were able to produce independent accounts and analysis of these processes. The data and studies available from this period suggest that internal migration in Albania took place more than conventionally thought.⁴¹

³⁹ Lelaj and Bardhoshi, “The Albanian Village and Modernity,” 19–21

⁴⁰ Enkela Krosi, “Year-Round Tourism in Albanian Riviera: Case of Qeparo” Master of Science thesis, Department of Architecture, Epoka University, 2017, p 21

⁴¹ Julie Vullnetari, “Albanian Migration and development: State of the art review”, Working paper No,8 (September 2007-2004) 8. 23-24

4.4 Lukovë: Local Life in Isolation

Being a rural village located at the southernmost part of Albania, Lukovë combines both the general traits of the structural characteristics seen within socialist rural communities with its own particularities arising from its geographical location and community characteristics. As a farming community settled between mountains and the coastline of the Ionian Sea, Lukove was fairly self-contained and not well-connected to the outside world.

The daily rhythm was defined by the *agricultural calendar*, and subsistence was based on olive groves, seasonal crops, and livestock. Social structure was based on kin and neighborhood ties, and labor was organized spontaneously and collectively. The state provided education, health care, and basic services, but there were few opportunities for economic alternatives.

Narratives about memories from this period suggest a sense of stability, predictability, and strong social ties in general, accompanied by loneliness and limited motion. The proximity of the sea on the one hand and the symbolic distance on the other represented a border rather than a source. This spatial and symbolic bifurcation established the future redefinition of Lukovë as a tourism destination. Tourism can have opposite effects, in one hand it reinforces the cultural identity and allows the traditions and local customs to be known worldwide, but it can happen that there is a loss cultural due to cultural colonization induced by tourist flows pressure.⁴²

4.5 The Opening of Borders: Post-1991 Transformation

In 1991 the socialist regime collapsed and introduced dramatic changes in the country. Migration began across opened borders, the economy was reshaped, and farms were being slowly liberated

⁴² Drita Kruja, Mariza Lufi, Iris Kruja, "The role of Tourism in developing countries. The case of Albania", European Scientific Journal, September edition vol.8, No.19, 131

from collectivization. For rural settlements like Lukovë, the socialist transition was certainly a downfall but also a great change.

Perhaps the most notable process was open emigration. Many residents left to find work in Greece, Italy, and other European countries. This led to the creation of new transnational networks, a remittance economy, and changes to the family structures. Villages faced a decreasing and aging population along with seasonal return migration.

In parallel with this, the privatization of land policies restored the private property, but with first steps, fragmentation and even conflict. The redistribution of agricultural land produced a complicated arrangement where in many cases the formal ownership structure and the informal practices and claims were intertwined. This transition established the conditions for the later use disputes, particularly in coastal regions destined to tourism expansion. A few years behind other ex-socialist countries, where this kind of experience has been proposed to tourists for some time, a new way of relating to the totalitarian past is also emerging in Albania.⁴³

Likewise, crossing the borders also created new cultural and economic imaginaries. The impact of global media, travel, and diaspora life- also transformed the local perception of what their aspirations and development should be. The coastline, once prohibited, was also beginning to receive symbolic value as a potential economic resource.

4.6 Tourism Development: From Periphery to Destination

The development of tourism in Lukovë and the Albanian Riviera, in general, started not long ago, frequently amplified in the last 20 years. The first period of tourism development populated local tourism, as well as visits from the diaspora and their relatives, and later, it was an increasing interest from foreigners and investors.

This transformation takes place through a quick invention of guest houses, small hotels, restaurants and the development of informal accommodation networks. Compared to other long-established

⁴³ Vietti, F. 2023. "UNESCO and the Dictator: Cultural Heritage, Totalitarianism and Mobility in Albania." *Quaderni Storici* 15 (2): 410

Mediterranean tourism destinations, development in Lukovë was uneven and disorderly and produced a hybrid landscape of traditional agricultural practices and tourism infrastructure.

Economic opportunities have been made available through tourism, especially for the younger generations and families who can adjust their residences or job to align with the demands of the seasons. It has led to conflicts however with ownership of the land, and pressures on the environment and representation of a culture. Increasingly a commodity, coastal land raises issues about who develops the land, and who benefits from it.

As in all European countries, also in Albania the small villages scattered throughout the territory have always been a cohesive force of cultural identity. Although often they still preserve ancient traditions and a remarkable cultural heritage, their role was weakened over time. Due to emigration of the younger and more active inhabitants, often villages cease to be a living and productive world and slip into a state of abandonment: the forest advances and takes the place of agricultural land that is no longer cultivated; the transfer of social traditions and practices from one generation to another is in serious danger of being cut short.⁴⁴

Albania has unique ecological features that provide significant but under-utilized tourism potential, including coastal areas, mountainous terrain, rivers, parks, and protected areas. The tourism industry in Albania currently focuses on coastal areas, rather than on the unique features that set this country apart from its neighbors. Albania's natural features have the potential to attract tourists seeking ecological and cultural experiences.⁴⁵

Cultural activities have also changed from being exclusive to integration into tourism. Traditional food, agricultural practices, and community customs are homogenized in this new touristic context within which authenticity is highlighted as a market attribute. Consequently, the integration leads to increased cultural exposure, while there is a risk for massive commoditization.

⁴⁴Antonio Lauria, Valbona Flora, Kamela Guza." Five Albanian Villages: Guidelines for a Sustainable Tourism Development through the Enhancement of the Cultural Heritage" Firenze University Press 2020, 30

⁴⁵ Drita Kruja, Mariza Lufi, Iris Kruja, "The role of Tourism in developing countries. The case of Albania", European Scientific Journal, September edition vol.8, No.19, 132

Chapter 5

5.1 Teo Çetri – An Ethnography of Memory and Local Transformation

The other key informant interview used in this chapter represents the first of all key interviews that have been conducted for the purpose of this research. It involves Teo Çetri, a 75-year-old male villager, whose career life has been dictated by his continuous labor migration to Greece. During the time of the interview, he resided in the village of Lukovë in Albania, where he was also born and raised. Teo served as the kryeplaku (the village head who is elected by the village elders) of the Lukovë community and as such he could provide a thorough historical and scholarly analysis of Albanian migratory dynamics in the case of Lukovë, starting from the socialist collectivization years, to the post-socialist years of migration and the current phase of tourism development. Interviewing Teo was invaluable not only from a historical-biographical point of view, but also ethnographically because it gave access to collective memory, and the revival of events that graph the changing portrait of land, work, migration and identity, in parallel with the changing regimes and politics of economy.



Figure 4. Teo Çetri during the interview in Lukove, Albania

Here the frame is not simply biographical, this interview is positioned as an instance of situated memory, where the individual reflects the structural change. Teo Çetri links the experience of the socialist past, experience of the migration after 1991 and the touristification now. It is a story producing continuity and rupture and loss and adjustments.

5.2 Socialist Lukovë: Collective Life, Discipline, and Local Vitality

The recollection of Teo Çetri, about the socialist period relies on both hindrance and community. He describes Lukovë during communism as the synergy between agricultural cooperatives and later state farms, and between the mid-1950s and 1970s the area's land was collectivized. He states that the private property that existed before the commune system, and from which the village lived, was a big part of the land itself that was taken by the state:

“Everything used to be private property; from ’56 to ’58 the state took it... it became cooperatives, then a state farm.”⁴⁶

However, the memories of this shift were the rupture, the withdrawal of land, animals and free agricultural life to families. It is interesting, however, that the period of socialist thought is mentioned as a period of organized social life and cultural activities at the local level. According to Teo, there were football tournaments, theater performances and many visits to universities during the winter months. Although the regime was restrictive, it seems that the cultural life of the Lukovë community was active.

In that sense, the perception of the controlling power and potential of cultural-centered vitality as described in this duality links with the wider anthropological perspective regarding the notion of post-socialism, as the experience of life in the particular context relates to the critique of the state and recognition of a common good and order.

5.3 Land, Property, and the Politics of Dispossession

A prominent theme that Teo Çetri’s storytelling provided us is land and its restorative transfers across political dominions. Teo Çetri gave us a long history of dispossession and re-appropriation: from pre-socialism individual property to socialist collectivization and post-1991 appropriation through Law 7501.

Law 7501 was the 1991 Albanian land reform law that dismantled the socialist agricultural cooperative system by distributing agricultural land of former cooperatives and state farms to rural households, granting them ownership or usage rights. Rather than restoring pre-communist property ownership, the law redistributed land according to the principle of “the land to the tiller,” generally based on household size and residence in rural communities.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Teo Cetri,” Tourism and life in Lukove” interviewed by Flakrina Maloku, Lukove, 2024

⁴⁷ Republic of Albania. Law No. 7501, dated 19 July 1991, “On Land.” Tirana: People’s Assembly of the Republic of Albania, 1991.

"Now it became privatized; even the foreigners or newcomers after the communism are now allowed to take the land."⁴⁸

This assertion brings forward an image of continuity in dispossession, where the lands are usurped time and again under a different paradigm, from the local populace. Particularly, Teo is careful to underline the long history of the agricultural environment of Lukovë, pointing to the olive groves, citrus and vineyards. He goes on to call some the “century-old olive trees.” Under this notion, the land has more significances than economic purposes as it becomes integrated into a fabric of memory across generations.



Figure 5. A typical door entrance of Albanian architecture in Lukove

⁴⁸ Teo Cetri, "Tourism and life in Lukovë" interviewed by Flakrina Maloku, Lukovë, 2024

In this sense, the transition from socialism to the post-socialism cannot be reduced to a simple “re-privatization” statement. The whole process represents a struggle between different stakeholders and outcomes that eventually make property ownership split, legally obscure, and threatened by private purchases. This aspect is even more pregnant when one considers that coastal land is becoming more and more valuable in light of the contemporary tourism development.

5.4 Migration and the Experience of External Labor

The Hoxha regime launched a radical reform programme that destroyed the power of the landlords, nationalized all industry, banks and commercial properties, banned private property and foreign investment, and created a state-controlled socialist society.⁴⁹ Teo describes a crucial moment in his life narrative to be the opening of the borders in the early '90s and his subsequent migration to Greece, where he spent the next 35 years. He describes his experience of migration as a rupture, albeit a necessary one:

“Neither going out nor coming in... when the borders were opened, we all left... because we had seen nothing.”⁵⁰

Migration can also be seen not just as individual choice, but as a group phenomenon that develops due to pressure of the economy and the will to know the outside world. In Greece, he worked in the gardens of villas, where for a meagre payment, he worked the land. This is different from the experience described upon his return to Lukovë, where he owned land and worked as a fisherman.

Above all, migration has not been presented as a verb of an act of permanent spatial displacement. On the contrary, it has been framed into a cyclical relationship with the item of home, putting an emphasis on the importance of the act of returning. Returning to the village of Lukovë, after decades abroad, Teo has resumed agricultural and fishing jobs. This return is of paramount

⁴⁹ Julie Vullnetari, “Albanian Migration and development: State of the art review”, Working paper No,8 (September 2007-2004) 7.

⁵⁰ Teo Cetri, “Tourism and life in Lukove” interviewed by Flakrina Maloku, Lukove, 2024

importance to an anthropological discovery of post-socialist Albania, as displacement did not break its association with the original place, but evolved it instead.

5.5 The Sea, Fishing, and Non-Privatized Space

Teo's most important symbolic element is undeniably the sea. The sea is collective, as opposed to the land that 'so often changes hands', the land, unlike the sea goes through cycles of occupation:

"The sea was never private, and it still is not private; the sea belongs to everyone."⁵¹

As an identity practice and a practice of livelihood, fishing is established in the local tradition. Teo illustrates that spearfishing, fishing in winter without the use of wetsuit, and leftovers practices, such as catching octopus, were skills passed over from ancestors to descendants. Further, fishing under socialism remains in his memory as a regulated practice, although culturally- transmitted, despite restrictions and military services to control this practice. As Ingold argues, we learn to perceive our environment not by acquiring mental rules, but by 'hands-on' training in everyday tasks.⁵²

Consequently, the sea becomes a counter-space to the politics of land property. Land, and specifically land ownership, exemplifies a fragmented and territorialized vision of time and embodied knowledge, whereas the sea equals continuity, freedom, and embodied knowledge.

5.6 Militarization, Fear, and Restricted Mobility

In Teo's communist memory, fear and control are also an important element. It is in this case associated with the coastline. Breaching fishing was illegal, guarded and controlled because it

⁵¹ Teo Cetri," Tourism and life in Lukove" interviewed by Flakrina Maloku, Lukove, 2024

⁵² Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000), 166.

could become an escape to Greece. Land was basically surrounded by military patrols and navy decrees. It was part of the daily life:

“Military patrol at the sea; there were naval officers, day and night.”⁵³

Furthermore, the last landmark close to the beach of Kakome is remembered for being a military zone. It emphasizes once more the idea that the coastal strip was not only strategically valuable but also out of reach for most people. Finally, reintroducing the role of militarization likewise corresponds to the thesis on the profound symbolic change this relocating of Lukovë's seafront has produced, from a space of confinement located at the borders to a profitable form of tourism.

5.7 Post-Socialist Decline and Tourism Re-Emergence

However, he remains ambivalent in the post-socialist present. On one hand, he sees signs of deterioration such as overgrowth, impassibility, and public spaces, such as the football fields, being overtaken by private complexes. On the other hand, he sees the emergence of new economic realities in the form of tourism.

So far, the mentioned topic is related both to the diaspora and to regional mobility. Regarding Kosovars, he talks about “patriotic tourism” as a significant presence; German tourists are a new international line. He emphasizes the comparative advantages of Lukovë.

“We have 4 kilometers of clean, authentic beach.”⁵⁴

Tourism and its marketization are properly examined in the context of authenticity, important concept to the text as authenticity, based on the premise, is not a static cultural characteristic but rather a comparative resource. At the same time, marketized authenticity is mobility and exploitable, for it is exclusive to the place and has to remain untouched from other places, and overdevelopment.

⁵³ Teo Cetri, “Tourism and life in Lukove” interviewed by Flakrina Maloku, Lukove, 2024

⁵⁴ Teo Cetri, “Tourism and life in Lukove” interviewed by Flakrina Maloku, Lukove, 2024

5.8 Memory, Continuity, and Return

One of the prominent themes in Teo's story is that of return, a recurring term with both literal and symbolic meaning. After so many years of migratory life in Greece, Teo returns to his village of Lukovë, returns to farming, fishing, the production of raki, and to restoring and conserving the way of life of his native people. The continuation of fishing has now moved unto his grandson.

"You cannot separate Albanians from tradition."⁵⁵

Bringing the quote back is part of a larger ideological assertion about the cultural homogeneity exhibiting permanence versus the structural changes. The memory is not an establishment of nostalgia but the practice: it structures contemporary activities and justifies demand for land, identity, and belonging.

Through the interview with Teo Çetri, we encounter an ethnography of Lukovë's historical layers of socialism, migration, and tourism. Teo's testimony reveals the land, sea, and mobility as not only economic spaces but political and metaphorical ones articulated through different forms of power.

There are three main themes that emerge in this narrative. The first is the theme of land and ownership, which sees a thread of dispossession and contestation of ownership across different times. In the second theme, migration manifests itself as a rupture and a return, with transnational lifeworld's that remain placed in a given locality. In the third theme, tourism appears as an inchoate yet ambivalent development that affords economic opportunity, while simultaneously reviving older anxieties about heritage, authenticity, ownership and control.

Teo's narrative reveals that Lukovë is not a historic site to be transformed into a tourist-destination, but a palimpsest in which history unfolds in layers and the past bleeds into the present.

⁵⁵ Teo Çetri, "Tourism and life in Lukove" interviewed by Flakrina Maloku, Lukove, 2024

Chapter 6: Fast Tourism and Cultural Transformation

6.1 Between Continuity and Acceleration

Fast tourism development on the southern coast of Albania - the Albanian Riviera - seems to have become one of the most prominent post-socialist changes visible in the region. The villages like Lukovë in the past live mainly based on agriculture, periodic migration and relative autonomy from outside impacts, tourism nowadays is transforming their socio-economic reality and is fully joining them into the touristic map of the world. However, the impact of tourism in the case of the discussed village is more than economic, especially in what concerns its identity markers: it is a cultural change related to the notion of how and what, from the point of view of tradition, memory and identity is constructed, represented, and contested.

Similarly, these days in Albania there are protests, social unrest concerning issues like governance, land, environmental destruction and inequalities in distributing tourism revenues. Protests sadly point to the heart of the matter: who defines development and who pays to produce it? In this light, fast-tourism is a development strategy that soon pits competing cultures against one another.

This chapter deals with an examination of the cultural identity shared by the southern Albanian villages that seemed to have resisted obliteration. Overall, it claimed that culture and tradition is not something that can be “broken,” or easily supplanted; and that instead, these elements continue to have agency even when expectations from the economic and political spheres would suggest otherwise. The image to convey is that of a safe place where authentic an Albania on a geographically limited and managed eco-socially responsible focuses considerable attractions easily accessible to European tourists.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Drita Kruja, Mariza Lufi, Iris Kruja, “The role of Tourism in developing countries. The case of Albania”, European Scientific Journal, September edition vol.8, No.19, 138

6.2 Fast Tourism and the Reconfiguration of Space

Tourism hinterland in South Albania is marked today by rapid infrastructural developments, seasonal congestion and influx of foreign financial capital for investment in coastal land. Quaint small villages emerge spontaneously as prominent tourist destinations for each new summer. Guesthouses, resorts and short-term rentals alter the urban landscape and the pace of everyday village life. The tension between consumed space and lived space is ever-present throughout the process. Urry argues that tourism creates hierarchies of destinations, where some places become symbols of mass tourism while others are valued as more exclusive or authentic.⁵⁷ Tourism provides a major economic development opportunity for many countries and a means of improving the livelihoods of its residents. Both the public and private sectors involved in tourism depend on planning to achieve sustainable tourism development that respects the local community, creates appropriate employment, maintains the natural environment, and delivers a quality visitor experience. However, many tourism destinations have pursued development without proper planning and without considering the many impacts such development will bring to the community.⁵⁸

For local farmers, Lukovë is a site of memories of fields, kinships, and “use.” On the other hand, the tourist experience reinvents this space into a sight of “authenticity,” aesthetics, nature, or an escape. Such a process influences the scope of the project negatively, especially when the locals feel that they do not have a say in how the decision-making process is carried out or when the rightful ownership to the land is contested.

This shift demonstrated that now more than ever culture can be perceived as a resource. Culture-based timeworn foods, lifestyles, fishing or living practices, oral traditions etc. can be transformed into an “experience” with tangible results. However, as the majority of anthropological literature reveals, the transformative process of culture into a commodity does not take place without

⁵⁷ John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2002)

⁵⁸ Gorica, Klodiana, Dorina Kripa, and Engjellushe Zenelaj, “Tourism and Sustainable Development: The role of Local Government in Sustainable Development”, AUDCE 8, no.2 (2012): 142

implications. Rather, it is a continuous process of negotiation and renegotiation, embedded in daily practice.

6.3 Cultural Persistence: Why Tradition Is Difficult to Break

Notwithstanding the accelerated economic growth and territorial transformations in the southern Albania, cultural patterns remain remarkably stable. I believe this can be explained through an interrelated triad of memory, practice, and identity.

The first point where I agree is that memory connects the community to its historical experience. Even when the physical landscape changes, the community's collective memory keeps the stories about their land, work, and where they belong. Their memories are preserved by narrating stories, sharing genealogies, and communicating it during the day-to-day activities.

Second, practice also creates continuity through bodily knowledge. For example, agricultural cycles, fishing practices, food preparation, and seasonal celebrations are not so easily eliminated by the move to tourism economies. These may shift, but they are not erased.

Third, identity is a structure of belonging that operates on a more emotional level. While migration may disrupt the ties between people and places, both for the migrants and those left behind, as in the case of Lukovë transnational migrants, this case may further enhance the symbolism and emotional attachment of those who have spent decades in the West.

Therefore, culture always stays relevant, which disproves the overly simplistic idea that tourism necessarily leads to the loss of tradition. Tradition moves along to become a fluid structure that participants adapt to in order to perceive the changes.

6.4 Historical Depth: Nopcsa, Byron, and the Imagining of the Albanian South

Since the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the cultural continuity of southern Albania has attracted the attention of external observers. Two personalities who are of primary importance in this regard are Franz Nopcsa and Lord Byron.

Austro-Hungarian Aristocrat, geologist and ethnographer Franz Nopcsa was one of the most influential travelers of early 20th century in Albania. He extensively traveled in the highlands of Albania and his work on Albanians focused on the way the mountain communities stand out for the independence of their life, their strong system of customary laws and their elements of resistance against the influences of the state in the political order. To Nopcsa, Albania was not an inexact geographical periphery, rather it represented a sophisticated order of social life and an unmistakable depth of culture.

Another significant figure in this sense is Lord Byron. His travels through the Balkans and southern Albania helped to build a perception of the region in the romantic European imagination. In his *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron writes about the Albanian lands and its people with admiration, portraying them as wild yet noble, foreign yet rich in culture. Byron's journey through the south created a lasting image of Albania as a land of impressive nature and cultural heritage.

The perspective provided through history is not a neutral one, however, its representation is within the historical process in which this “imagination” of Albania was constructed from abroad. Nonetheless, it is inarguable that in this level it is once again addressed this continuity: the perception of the nation as culturally robust, resistant, and ungovernable or homogenous.

6.5 Local Memory and the Figure of Byron in Lukovë

Locally in Lukovë, however, these external historical narratives are not distant. As a Teo Çetri remembers, there is a local consciousness that Lord Byron walked through Or's associated with the place's history, imparting a sense of gravity and symbolic recognition to it. Whether historical verified or just following oral tradition, such narratives serve the function of a cultural anchorage. He says: “As elders always told us, when Lord Byron passed here in Lukove he was fascinated by

the beauty of our country. He even said there was no more beautiful place in the world than Albania”⁵⁹

They tie the village to universal historical and literary geographies, bringing it to the imagination of the Mediterranean and European culture. Therefore, the tourism today is not the first external look on the region. Instead, it is a continuation of a much older path of outsider attention, reinterpretation, and symbolic appropriation.

6.6 Protests, Land, and the Politics of Development

Currently, the protests in Albania express an emerging discontent alongside the imbalances of touristic development, especially along the coast, accompanied with increasing struggles of land ownership and environmental protection and the access to public space. This seemingly spontaneous rise in protests, however, is not just a knee-jerk reaction, but rather, a political one; proving how development is perceived as out of control or controlled by outside forces.

The core issue concerning these conflicts is about ownership. Who owns the coast? Who benefits from tourism? And who owns the land? Most of the time, communities feel like they don't have a voice in the decision-making process, especially when large investors or those affiliated with the political class acquire valuable coastal property. Government's planning role is important to the success of tourism and resort development. Good planning requires that all levels of government are active in the management of a balanced growth approach.⁶⁰

Culture, therefore, sits at the intersection of both resistance and negotiating processes. Communities deploy discourses of rootedness, traditions and historical attachments, to make claims over space.

⁵⁹ Teo Cetri,” Tourism and life in Lukove” interviewed by Flakrina Maloku, Lukove, 2024

⁶⁰ Gorica, Klodiana, Dorina Kripa, and Engjellushe Zenelaj, “Tourism and Sustainable Development: The role of Local Government in Sustainable Development”, AUDCE 8, no.2 (2012): 143

6.7 Fast Tourism as Cultural Negotiation, Not Cultural Loss

This chapter posits that instead of supplanting the prevailing narrative of fast tourism as a phenomenon of cultural devastation, it would present a more appropriate representation to frame it as a cultural negotiation under duress. The traditions are not obliterated but rather reshaped to a new economic context.

In Lukovë, for example, ‘the fishermen, farmers and raki producers’ still maintain a foothold alongside the tourism industry within the village. Thus, while some local practices are incorporated into the tourism experience or specific activities, many ‘underlie processes in daily life independent of the consumption of the village by tourists. The challenges of the tourism industry in Albania are related with the sustainable visions. There is necessity for actions to preserve the authenticity of places, to maintain the environment and natural resources, and to have soft and physical access by improving the service infrastructure. The sensibility of the “designers” in all fields can point out the potentials of the country, consequently preserving and designing a competitive image in international domain.⁶¹

The duality of lived culture and performed culture complicates the idea of transformation. Culture is a process that allows for change both in substance and degree, but it is also not an infinitely scalable element. It is always a result of production, in a continuous mode and through a constant interplay of tensions.

6.8 Continuity in Transformation

In Southern Albania, boom tourism is capable of causing immediate and spectacular impacts on the environment, economy and social life. Even the fact that Albania is later than some other places of region in tourism development there is a big progress in tourism numbering and their

⁶¹ Enkela Krosi, “Year-Round Tourism in Albanian Riviera: Case of Qeparo” (Master of Science thesis, Department of Architecture, Epoka University, 2017, p 21

nationality.⁶² Yet, even in these circumstances, it does not wipe out cultural continuity but instead it subjects cultural tradition to new dynamics of invisibility, visibility, negotiation, and adaptation.

Albania has been a land of cultural depth, as shown in Nopcsa's ethnography on the mountain villages and Byron's literary sojourn to the southern villages. For contemporary Lukovë, this cultural depth is preserved through the recent history of memory, migration and everyday practices.

Culture in southern Albania, in the end, is not so fragile that can be broken under pressure from tourism or foreign influences. It continues to live, though not in its original form but one which is now all too malleable, in the very processes that aim to destroy it.

Chapter 7: Storytelling as Cultural Preservation

We preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated. But precisely because these memories are repetitions, because they are successively engaged in very different systems of notions, at different periods of our lives, they have lost the form and the appearance they once had.⁶³

It is worth mentioning that one of the key results of the current study is that cultural continuity in Lukovë is achieved not only through material practices such agriculture and fishing, but also through storytelling. Tales recounted orally serve as archives of collective memory, creating a connection between today's villagers and those from the past and embedding past experience into daily life.

The stories about St. Friday Church (Alb: Shën Premte) were often mentioned during the fieldwork as an example of how local people use narration to keep their identity. Mondri Çetri, a local dweller and a steward of much of the farm and beach land, characterized the church as a sacred space

⁶² Gorica, Klodiana, Dorina Kripa, and Engjellushe Zenelaj, "Tourism and Sustainable Development: The role of Local Government in Sustainable Development", AUDCE 8, no.2 (2012): 148

⁶³ Maurice Halbwachs. "On collective memory" 47

cherished by the community of villagers. Although it was impossible to establish the church's age, Mondri claimed it was older than 600 years and that it survived the period of communism when religion was being put down.

The people there were not sure who the church was dedicated to but remembered to me that:

“We came only to light a candle. We were afraid. The church was half destroyed during communism, but after the fall we restored it together as a community.”⁶⁴

They also said how the church was built with stone. I realized while there that the church had been in ruins and had not been worshipped at for such a long time. The fear of communism getting back in was a concern and therefore why there were not coming donation for the new space. The troops were organized between the allies and it almost came down to rubble. The church restored its position back then. They are proud of it.

This narrative illustrates how the religious ritual, too, was carried out independently during the period of atheism in Albania. The preservation of the church, therefore, stands as an enduring sign of memory and belief rather than simply an architectural one.

The most entertaining point of Mondri Çetri's storytelling is about the church snake legend. It is said that the elders of the region believe that there is a big snake living close to the church for centuries and it guards the church. Because of this reason, the people in the region do not kill this animal. The villagers regard the snake as holy has a relation with the history of the place.

“We never touch him and we never touch us. He is the church's snake, the church's protector.”⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Mondri Çetri, "Tourism and life in Lukove" interviewed by Flakrina Maloku, Lukove, 2024

⁶⁵ Mondri Çetri, "Tourism and life in Lukove" interviewed by Flakrina Maloku, Lukove, 2024



Figure 6. Inside of Lukove's church

However, the myth passed down generations, said that even the communist soldiers who were ordered to destroy the church refused to kill the snake as they were frightened of the curse. It doesn't matter if it is taken in a literal or a metaphorical sense, the point is that even the official socialist ideology couldn't erase the local cosmologies.

Anthropologists have also argued that heritage is not only material and attach to physical sites but also categorical and this can also refer to as intangible heritage or non-material aspects of heritage. intangibles heritage includes oral traditions, the ethno societies' fears, beliefs, moral values and the relationship between society and landscape. Storytelling is thus used as vehicles of continuity by communities' even where power hierarchies (political) alter.

The account of Mondri Çetri also connects heritage to the territory. The storyteller opens not in the position of the church but rather the possession of the land:

"Inherited from my grandfather, this is my land. The country took it during communism, and we took it back after the tree."⁶⁶



Figure 7. Mondri Cetri during the interview in Lukovë

His account relates the ownership of a piece of land, the memory of a family, and the idea of a sacred space. All these elements are connected and intertwined, thus showing how identity in Lukovë is once again based upon a collection of stories that refer to ownership, family, faith, and a place. The church, the land, and the snake are here placed on the same ethical territory.

These narratives find their significance in relation to the development of tourism in recent years. With the further popularization of Lukovë in the territory of the Albanian Riviera, legends like that of Saint Friday Church may find their application as tourist attractions. However, for the inhabitants of Lukovë, this is clearly not the main reason why their stories should be kept alive. As they have mentioned, storytelling has an important role in preserving collective memory.

Moreover, storytelling also proves to be an important means of cultural resistance to standardization. It is also true that tourism generally exposes some traditions to commercialization.

⁶⁶ Mondri Cetri, "Tourism and life in Lukovë" interviewed by Flakrina Maloku, Lukovë, 2024

However, oral stories convey meanings that cannot be articulated through the sole logic of the market. By means of stories, villagers maintain a relationship with the past and try to handle the effects of significant social and economic changes.

Conclusion

The objective of this thesis was to analyze migration, abandonment of rural areas, tourist development of the region and induced changes in local culture. The ethnographic approach, allowed to demonstrate how the global processes related to the expansion of tourism and economic and social changes were understood, negotiated and interpreted at the local level. The research did not consider tourism as a prospect or a danger for the local community, but rather as a process that redefines their social relations, cultural values and sense of belonging to the place.

This thesis contributes to understanding, with regard to the research questions, that “tourism” is not a panacea to “rural decline” but a process shaped by governance, local engagement and the ability of communities to retain ownership of their culture and their landscapes. Lukovë has changed demographically and from a migration and tourism perspective, but local identity is still claimed and negotiated on a daily basis through practices and memories and attachment to place.

The main findings suggest that the issues faced by Lukovë are historically rooted in its socio-economic history in socialist times with agricultural organization, post-socialist developments, and the legacy of land ownership issues, and decades of migration. Despite resulting in demographic decline and a weakening of specific social structures, these are the same historical developments that have also provided new mobility networks, economic strategies, and linkages that now have a significant effect on Lukovë.

This research paper argues that the development of Lukovë through mass tourism in a short time period cannot be considered sustainable development. While mass tourism brings opportunities for the local economy and raises Lukovë’s profile, uncontrolled development of the village converts its existing cultural heritage into an asset, just as much as a beautiful beach and natural

scenery, do for the tourist, in terms of the reality for the local residents. The ‘value’ of Lukovë is not especially found in its landscape or its ‘attractiveness’ for a visitor. It is in the memories, the know-how, the agriculture, the networks and the stories through which local inhabitants still give the place its ‘value’.

Finally, the thesis also demonstrates that tourism is not a death sentence for culture. It is not a frozen substance to preserve; it is a fluid process that arises from ongoing practice and social interaction. Cultural evolution can be supported and taken further if the locals keep getting a say. Tourism can be a means of cultural sustainability and evolution. The challenges then become not whether Lukovë should have tourism, but how and why it is developed, who profits from it, and whose interests are considered.

This research was conducted in a short period of a single village case study and ethnographic fieldwork. As such, results are not intended to generalize to every rural community in the country, but to be an in-depth representation of the particular local implications of the broader developments in migration, tourism and development. The single fieldwork phase is also promising for future research covering the long-term undergone and undergoing changes, the changing village perceptions of tourism, and the perceptions of today’s local youth and all external agents in development.

Author’s Outlook

I have reaffirmed my own previous conviction after having done this research: Lukovë’s future should not be determined simply by the number of tourists it counts, or by how quickly it can boost its financial profits. The valley is so valuable not only for its scenery, but also for the people making that very scenery meaningful through memory, labor, storytelling, agriculture, fishing, and their day-to-day lives.

Overall, I learned that culture is stronger than we thought. Tourism is not a contributor to the loss of an identity, but an identity cannot be formed if there is no living community able to continue

the process of preservation, reinterpretation, and transmission of its legacy. Lukovë's future is in the equilibrium of welcoming opportunities and the preservation of the social and cultural pillars that are fundamental for what makes it unique.

In my opinion, the village of Lukovë is a place that is still not lost for development. If tourism is based here on the principles of participation, empowerment of village people, respect for their ownership and also for their intangible heritage, then Lukovë could serve as an example of progressive rural development, rather than another site ruined by the influence of outsiders' needs and greed. I personally wish this place to develop and see tourists, but also to stay as a place where people live with their memories and stories and with their heritage.

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