

# Reimagining the Future of the Lake Prespa Region

## A Cross-Border Perspective

DOI: 10.37199/o41010113

**Dr. Malvina ISTREFAJ (KOLIÇI)**, *Polis University, Albania*

**Julian BEQIRI**, *Polis University, Albania*

**Dejvi DAUTI**, *Polis University, Albania*

**Andrea STERPIN**, *Ferrara University, Italy*

**Christin ERDMANN-GOLDONI**, *Ferrara University, Italy*

206

**Abstract -** When in 2000 "United in diversity" was introduced as the European Union (EU) motto, it envisioned a united Europe in the form of the EU to fight for peace and prosperity while also being enriched by the continent's many diverse cultures, customs, and languages when "United in diversity" was adopted as the EU's motto in 2000. The majority of European nations have already eliminated border restrictions throughout time to allow for the free flow of wealth, people, and culture. The western Balkan nations, on the other hand, have been more susceptible to the impact of a borderless society and have been slower to reform.

The fractionary model that dominates the Prespa region's morphology is acknowledged in this study, which also illuminates the development potential that lies beyond national boundaries.

The Prespa region has been recognized as a well-preserved natural ecosystem that demands unification, but these intersecting landscapes that span three separate countries present significant obstacles to accessibility and collaboration between cities and villages.

'Prespa Renaissance' embraces the concept of a borderless society and examines the significant effects it may have on how the communities and public areas grow in the future. A collection of principles is extracted and applied to various areas through regional case studies. It is anticipated that these important measures would improve the current urban tissue and lay the foundation for resilient expansion that remains uninfluenced by boundaries and encouraged by neighbors.

**Keywords** - Cross-Border Cooperation, Regional Revitalization, Borderless Settlements, Vernacular Urbanism

### Introduction

Prespa Lake's surrounding area, which includes Albania, Greece, and North Macedonia, is home to more than 40 villages and towns, each with its own distinct settlement layout and features. These differences have been shaped by natural and political borders, which have affected growth and, more significantly, the fall of the population over the last thirty years. The presence of stable minority communities and cross-border labour movement have made it possible for the villages in many states to share cultural characteristics despite these disparities. There are two kinds of borders in this region: manmade, which includes traditions, commercial interests, and ethno-cultural barriers, and natural, which include the lake, mountains, and forests.

In anticipation for Albania's possible EU membership, in this study, the idea of removing the transnational borders around the lake has been

explored. There would be serious repercussions from such a removal, especially for the Albanian side, which faces a concerning demographic loss toward larger urban areas or other nations, much like many other peripheral Albanian communities.

Over the past few decades, the lake's water level has fluctuated constantly, gradually declining. There are no trustworthy claims to support the numerous ideas and myths that have been put up to explain this phenomenon. This has caused communities like Pustec, which in 1990 had a direct border with Lake Prespa, to be farther away from the lake's edge. Therefore, the so-called "buffer zone," which each lakeside village has approached in a more or less planned way, has been exposed by the retreating water.

As a result of the lake's waters draining, the "buffer zone" was exposed, and each lakefront city has dealt with it in a more or less organized or

unplanned way. Since Albanian people have a less controlled and more unplanned approach to this area, it has been considered crucial to acknowledge it as a key resource for the development of future settlements.

Opening borders and permitting the unrestricted flow of individuals and goods is thought to provide new momentum for regional revitalization, along with ways to assist local towns' demographic and economic growth. Undoubtedly, tourism has the potential to be a substantial resource, particularly considering the magnificent lakeside scenery and the existence of genuine, traditional local communities. But careful planning in terms of the environment, infrastructure, urban landscape, and culture is necessary to protect and improve the region's natural and human capital. Therefore, the objective is to present plans and strategies for supplying settlement and economic resources that will help to revitalize the region and its inhabitants. The settlements, public areas, and residential areas will be the subject of in-depth analysis and recommendations at the urban scale in this investigation in relation to a number of settlements visited in Greece and Macedonia during the workshop, special attention will be paid to the municipality of Pustec in Albania.

## Process and Methodology

In order to achieve a better understanding of the area towards the goals of this workshop, the methodological steps at first, an Ethnographic Investigation was taken in consideration, while relying on the analytical data and application on the case study.

It was necessary to carry out a comprehensive ethnographical inquiry in order to better comprehend the cultural diversity of the region and its spatial distribution as the project morphologically examined one region that spread over three distinct countries. In order to capture patterns of growth, social interaction, and local perspectives for future development, this research largely depended on participant observation, at least in a minor role, by examining the cultural phenomena from the perspective of the study's subject.

Relevant data from both the national and local

governments were presented in order to address the growing problems of depopulation. Gaining a better grasp of the region's demographic concerns was greatly aided by this comprehensive quantitative study that was rationally based and mainly depended on numerical analysis of actual data. The project's hypotheses were examined using a method that made it possible to interpret the provided statistical analysis. Alongside this, a thorough on-site survey was conducted in an effort to contextualize the data by country and read it territorially. A comprehensive analysis of regional case studies was also used in order to conduct in-depth study on a specific topic and gain a better understanding of its functionality and achievements.

## Unfolding the Landscape Exploration Dialogue

**Investigating the Lakeside Tapestry:** An Exploration of Albania (Kallamas, Gollomboc & Pustec), North Macedonia (Ljubochno), and Greece (Agios Achillios). The settlements surrounding the Prespa Lake, tucked away at the intersection of Albania, North Macedonia, and Greece, invited us on an adventure that transcends national borders.

Mental maps played a crucial role in guiding views and experiences of the various communities scattered along the lakeshore as the journey proceeded. Mental mapping became a dynamic tool that influenced the perspective and connection with each location, guiding the investigation through the complex tapestry of cultural nuances, architectural variations, and the distinct pulse of life in each community. This journey was more than just a physical exploration; it was a sensory and emotional immersion into the essence of these villages. The mental map that was created by reflecting on the location functioned as a narrative thread that connected further interactions with Diellas, Pustec, Ljubochno, and Psarades.

On this mental map process, each settlement is a unique point that adds to the complex narrative of lakeside life. Mental mapping enhances comprehension and appreciation of the connecting settlements surrounding the lake through a trip of the mind between reality and perception. As you go

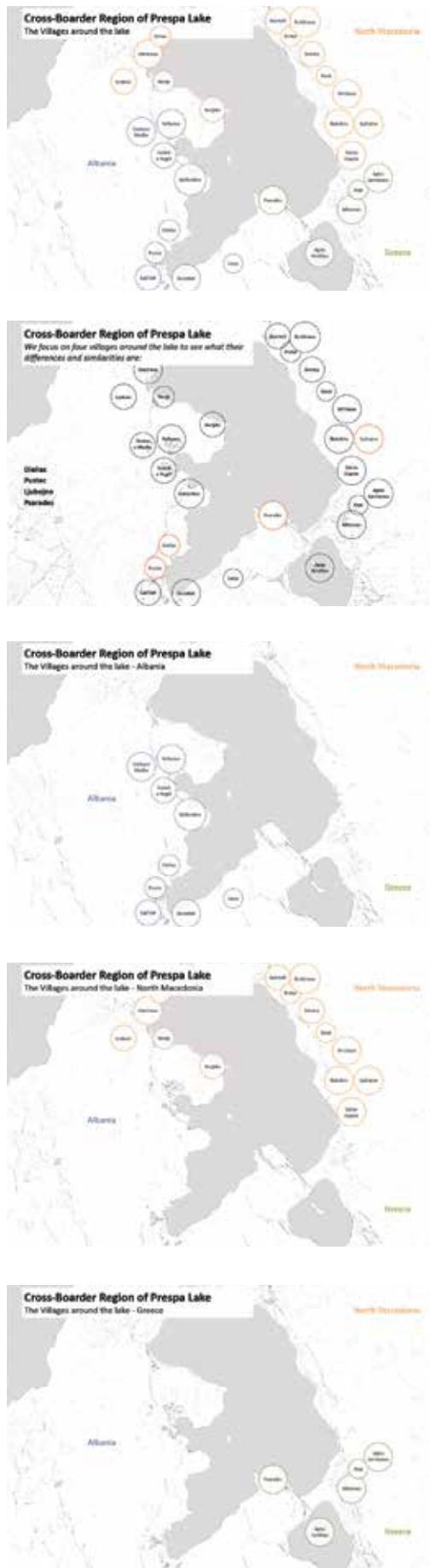


Fig. 1. Mapping the settlements around Prespa River. Source: PhD Candidates

Elaborations: Christin Erdmann-Goldoni, Julian Begiri, Dejvi Dauti, Andrea Sterpin, (2023)

over this terrain, it becomes a dynamic painting that captures the spirit of each community and the unity that unites them.

During the workshop and working on site, the collective thoughts transformed into a cohesive plan and future vision for the Prespa Region through the discussion of observations, opinions, and hypotheses. Distinctive difficulties were acknowledged and found to be important elements affecting the development of the area. Housing problems, underdeveloped public areas, inherent spatial constraints, inadequate service accessibility, long commutes for necessities and education, and a general trend of depopulation are some of these difficulties.

### Envisioning a Borderless Future for Lakeside Villages

The research's primary investigation revolves around the possible future of borderless settlements. This investigation focused on four different communities around the lake: Diellas, Pustec (Albania), Ljubochno (North Macedonia), and Psarades (Greece). Analyzing the range of patterns that define their organic growth, as well as the variations and shared traits.

Guy Debord's 1957 map, "The Naked City," which depicts the city as a dynamic mechanism with fluctuating patterns of mobility, occupation, and density, served as inspiration, guided by theoretical frameworks that aligned with the vision of the working group. As stated in "Cities for People" (2010), Jan Gehl's worldview reaffirmed the aim to create environments that are conducive to human activity and put people before vehicles or structures. The ageless wisdom of Jane Jacobs highlights the critical function of sidewalks and streets as a city's most important organs. From this perspective, the investigation of particular villages takes place:

**Diellas Village** represents a distinctive pattern of organic growth influenced by the prevalent idea of land and house as a single entity, within Puster Municipality

**Pustec's** unique character is shaped by the buildings' repetition as a unit, demonstrating an alternative method of organic development, in Korçë County

**In Ljubochno**, the Village in Resen, North Macedonia, how shared spaces promote community interactions by highlighting the extent of public space in the village is examined.

**Psarades Village**, in Greece demonstrates a dedication to protecting the environment by emphasizing buffer zones as protected areas and streets as lively public areas.

The process of exploration unfolded the following variables that are emerged from the layers of Built Environment, Natural Landscape, and Human Sources. These constituted the main pillars of the generated vision, which gave rise to a number of concepts meant to improve and revitalize the Prespa Region's future. A unified approach that integrates several smaller projects, able to create a vibrant dynamic and interconnected future to surface in the cooperative investigation of the Prespa Region. The vision included a thorough strategy to deal with obstacles and take advantage of opportunities, by enhancing the impact of the existing resources.

### Vision for the Prespa Lake Region

The framework Vision for the Prespa Region represents a dynamic network that skillfully connects settlements through easily accessible amenities and well-placed highlights. The goal of this careful integration is to produce a seamless tapestry that strengthens the region's overall fabric while also connecting local communities. Developing

a feeling of shared identity and cooperation among the various villages is aimed to be achieved by promoting accessibility and connectivity, which will ultimately strengthen the communities unity and vitality.

The strategic initiative of Establishing Strong Tourist Spots is another integral part of the vision. This entails creating alluring tourist attractions that highlight the unique appeal of the area and attract tourists from both nearby and distant locations. These thoughtfully chosen locations are intended to not only highlight the region's natural and cultural diversity but also make a substantial economic contribution. By developing captivating attractions, the possibility enhances for the establishment of the Prespa Region as a must-see location and promote tourism as a vital engine of prosperity and sustainable development. Public spaces must be integrated with vital economic infrastructure and cultural institutions in order for them to be connected to them.

The goal of this integration is to promote a vibrant and rich community experience. Simultaneously, Enriching Public Spaces with Cultural Activities entails bringing these areas to life through a variety of cultural events, such as festivals, markets, exhibitions, and more. When taken as a whole, these programs produce active areas for social interaction, making public areas not only useful but also dynamic hubs that support the Prespa Region's cultural and economic life. The Preservation of the Natural State of Buffer Zones initiative is part of the dedication to preserve the Prespa Region. This entails maintaining buffer zones' inherent integrity as crucial ecological protections. At the same time, carefully chosen social activities to activate these areas are suggested to take place.

The vision established during this work, seeks to achieve a balance that not only safeguards the ecological significance of buffer zones but also encourages communities to actively engage with and value these priceless natural areas by balancing preservation with mindful involvement. Identifying and protecting natural highlights that emphasize the area's natural beauty and provide spaces for reflection and interaction with the natural world. An encompassing plan for the Prespa Region smoothly combines two essential projects.

First and foremost, the Reconnection of Villages to the Lake is a strategic step that aims to revitalize the relationship between villages and the lake by creating a mutually beneficial partnership that enhances the recreational, cultural, and economic aspects of lakeside living. Concurrently, the endeavor to Establish Hubs as Connecting Points to the Lake concentrates on developing strategic spots that function as essential points of connection to the lake. In addition to fostering a feeling of community, these focal points offer necessary services and facilities, guaranteeing a connected and prosperous lakeside environment for the locals. The unique patterns seen in the communities of Diellas, Pustec, Ljubochno, and Psarades serve as inspiration the concept of the future settlement and way of life surrounding Lake Prespa.

In this ideal environment, the notion of land and house are combined to create a single, cohesive whole. This creative method reflects a strong bond between the built environment and the surrounding land and helps create a distinctive and harmonious pattern of organic growth. The dedication to a comprehensive and sustainable future for the Prespa Region is reflected in this integrated vision. By combining these efforts, we hope to build a strong and cohesive network that honors the area's natural beauty, cultural diversity,

Diellas



Pustec



Ljubochno

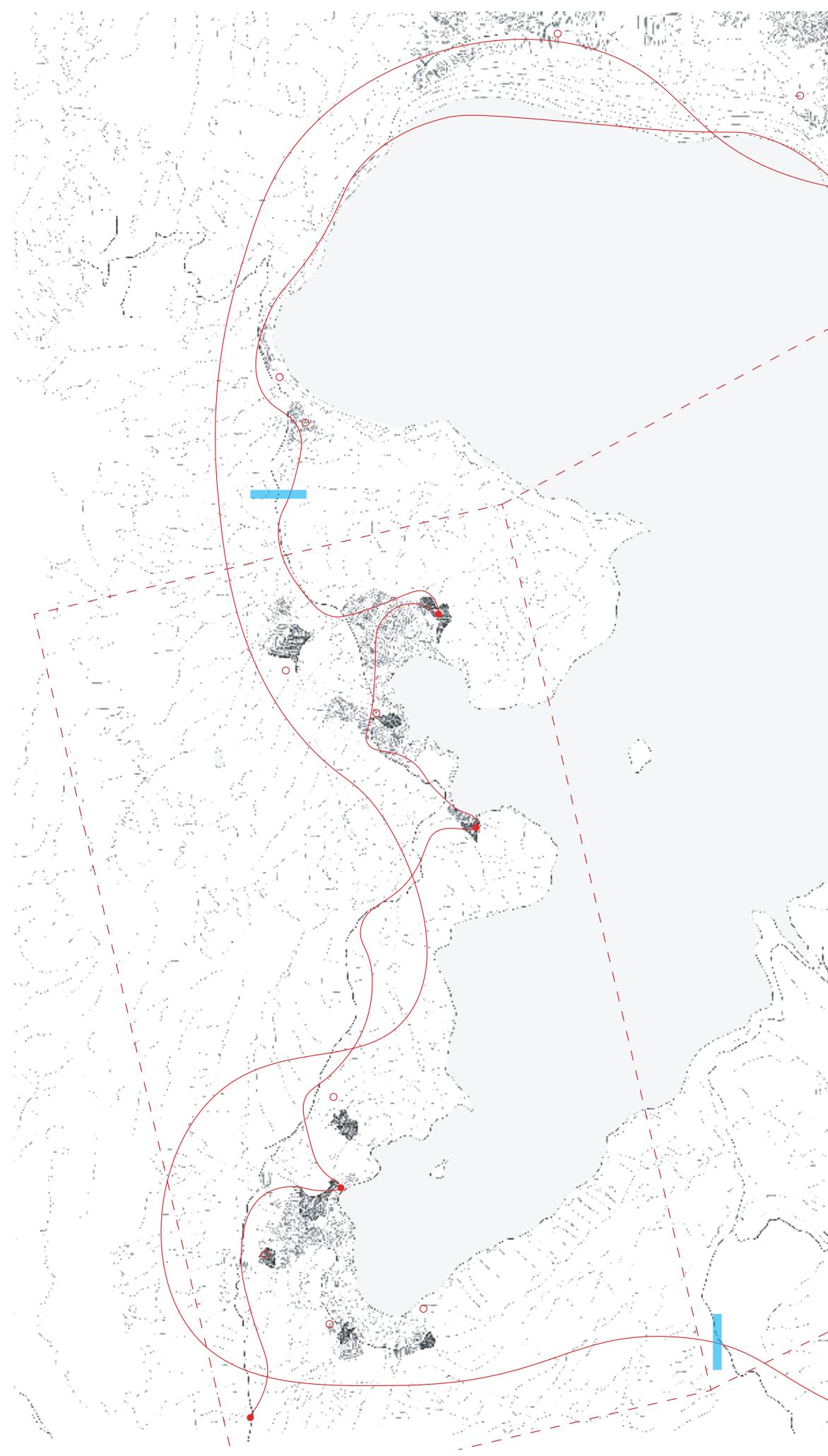


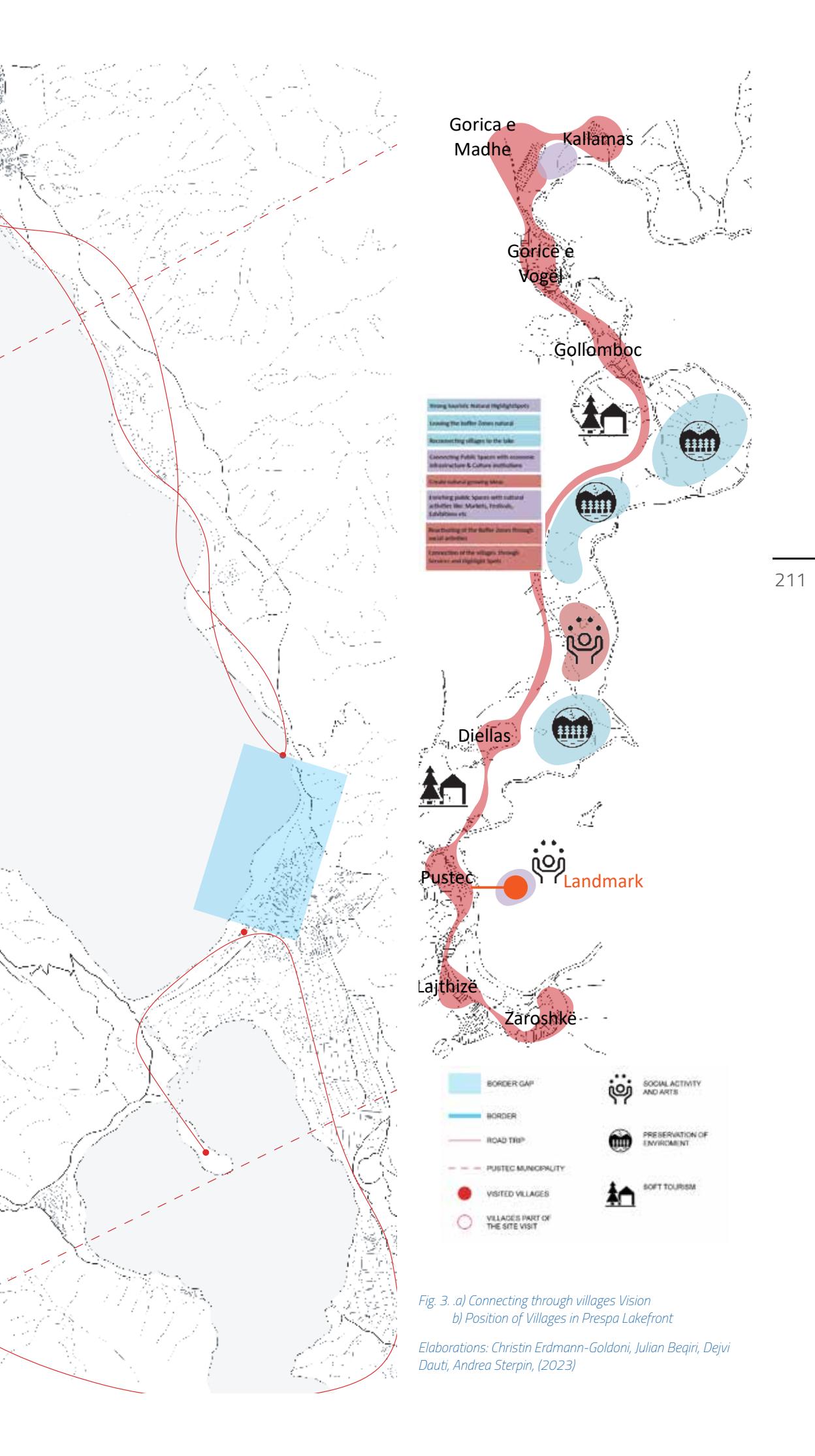
Psarades

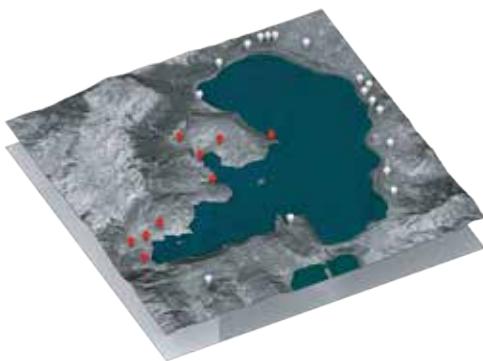


Fig. 2 .Patterns of organic growth of the 4 villages selected.  
Source: PhD Candidates

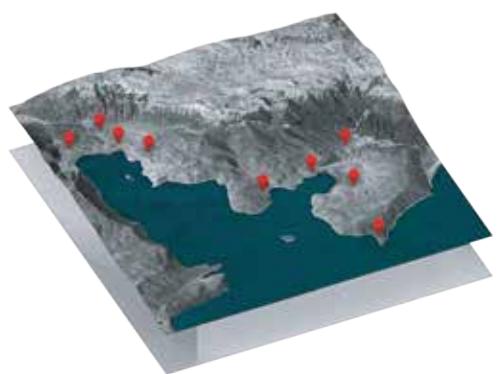
Elaborations: Christin Erdmann-Goldoni, Julian Begiri, Dejvi Dauti, Andrea Sterpin, (2023)







PRESPA LAKE : CROSS-BORDER RELATIONS VIEW

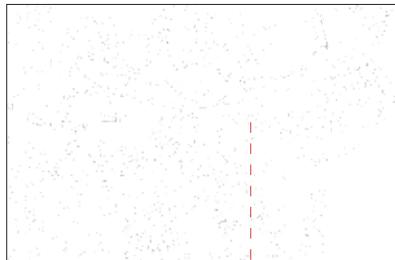


PRESPA LAKE: PUSTEC MUNICIPALITY

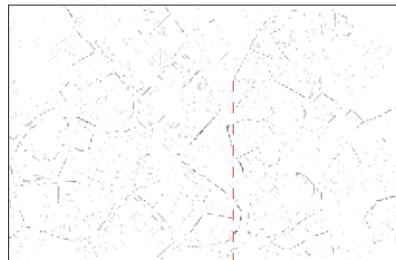
Fig. 4. .a) Connecting through villages Vision  
b) Position of Villages in Prespa Lakefront

Elaborations: Andrea Sterpin, Christin Erdmann-Goldoni, Julian Begiri, Dejvi Dauti (2023)

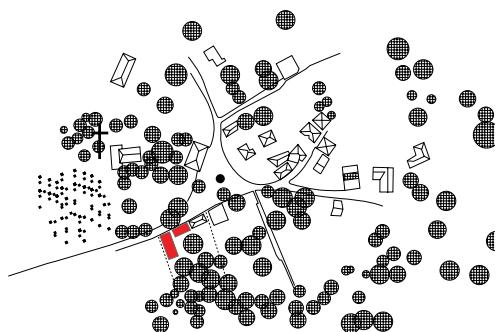
### Ljuboyno



### Diellas



#### CENTRAL GRAVITY



#### OPTIMIZING PRIVATE PROPERTY

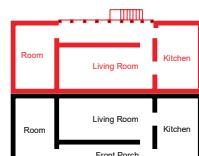
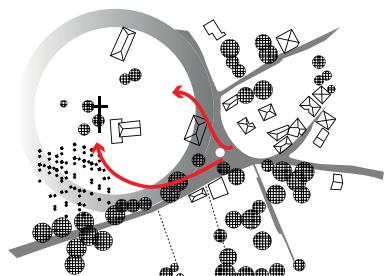
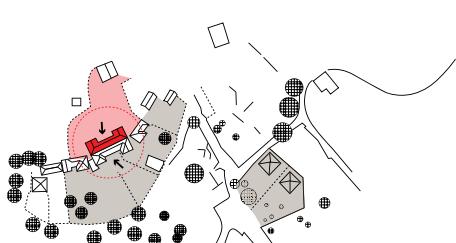
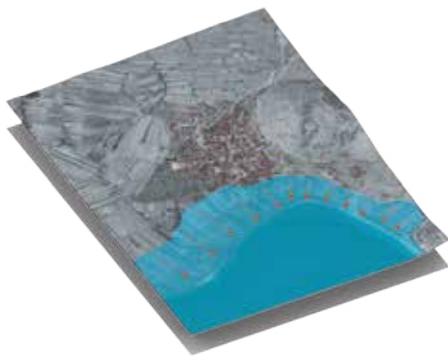
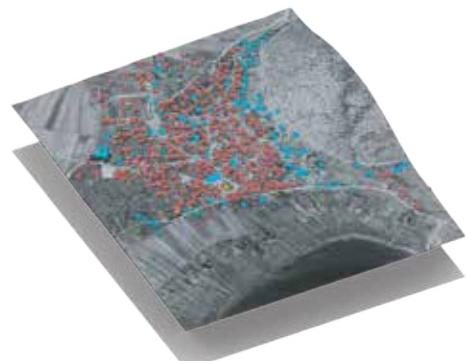


Fig. 6. Connecting through villages Vision

Elaborations: Julian Begiri, Andrea Sterpin, Christin Erdmann-Goldoni, Dejvi Dauti (2023)



PRESPA LAKE: 1990 - 2023 SHRINKING

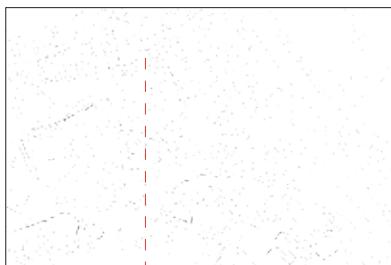


PUSTEC VILLAGE: CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS

Fig. 5. a) Connecting through villages Vision  
b) Position of Villages in Prespa Lakefront

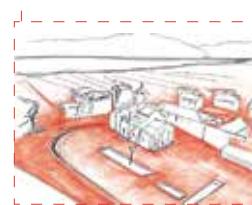
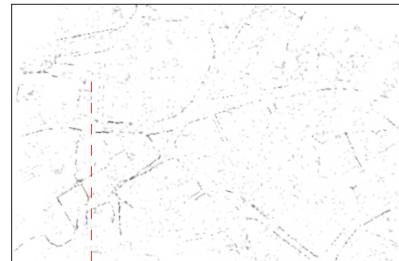
Elaborations: Andrea Sterpin, Christin Erdmann-Goldoni, Julian Begiri, Dejvi Dauti (2023)

### Psarades



PRESERVING NATURAL AREA

### Pustec



STREETS AS REAL PUBLIC SPACE

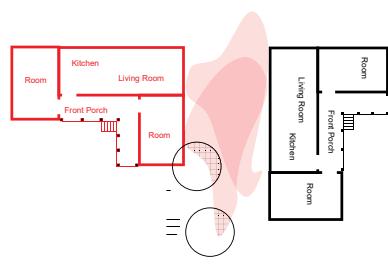
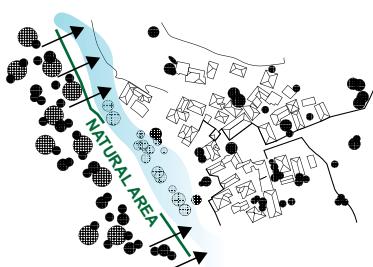
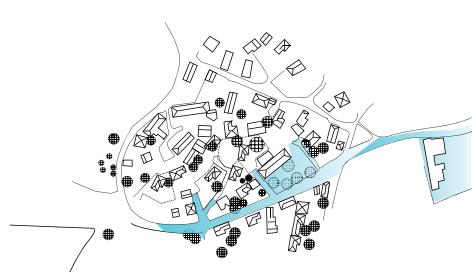
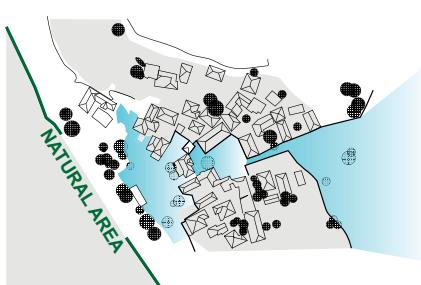


Fig. 7. .a) Connecting through villages Vision  
b) Position of Villages in Prespa Lakefront

Elaborations: Julian Begiri, Andrea Sterpin, Christin Erdmann-Goldoni, Dejvi Dauti (2023)

and sense of community. Together, these concepts provide a thorough strategy for resolving the issues raised by emphasizing community involvement, interconnectedness, and the peaceful merge of natural and cultural aspects to revitalize the Prespa Region.

This investigation aims to rethink these lakeside settlements using concepts from the creation of organic dwellings and studies on vernacular architecture. In order to promote a linked and borderless future, it seeks to incorporate many patterns while valuing the individuality of every community. The aim is based on the conviction that recognizing and appreciating these patterns can help build thriving, livable, and sustainable lakeside communities.

## Conclusions

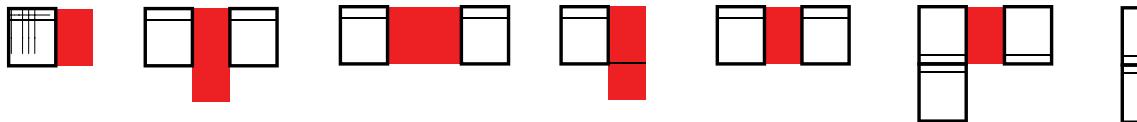
The product of this workshop, under the project name "Prespa Renaissance," was developed as a dynamic investigation within the imagination of a borderless future inside the Prespa Region's changing story. The study, which is based on the European Union's motto, "United in diversity," embraces the notion of a borderless society and acknowledges the potential for revitalization concealed behind

the borders of the nations surrounding Lake Prespa. The research highlights the possibility of transformative interventions that could go beyond the Prespa region's artificial and natural bounds, while also acknowledging the particular difficulties these boundaries present. Revealing the complex fabric of lakeside life, influenced by both natural and political factors by analyzing the morphology and dynamics of more than 40 communities in Albania, Greece, and Macedonia.

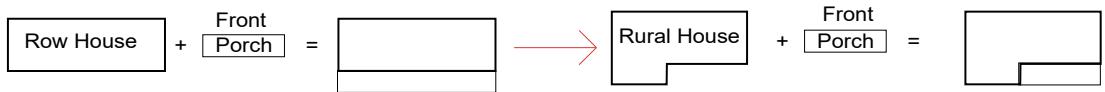
In light of Albania's prospective membership in the Schengen Area and the European Union, the idea of eliminating transnational barriers around the lake becomes a focus point. The study examines the population decrease, spatial limitations, and developmental difficulties that Albanian settlements like Pustec, emphasizing the importance of well-thought-out remedies. A "buffer zone," a region mostly used for farming and agriculture, has been revealed by Lake Prespa's water level oscillations over the past few decades, providing a rare chance to reinvent lakeside areas.

Under the speculation that opening up borders and permitting unrestricted travel could boost population and economic expansion, it is expected that with the immaculate lakeside scenery and

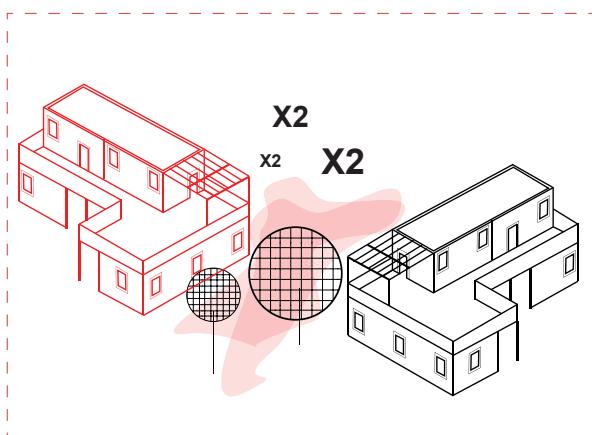
214



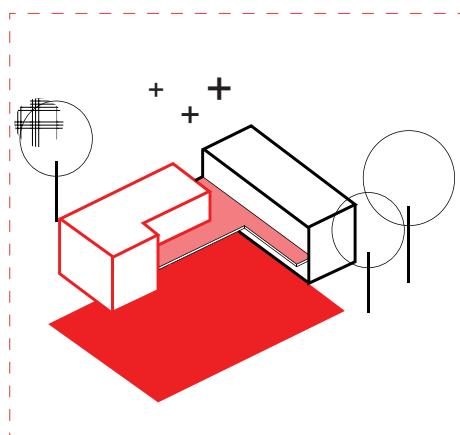
PRINCIPLE OF GROWTH



ADDITION IN VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE



MIRRORING AND MULTIPLYING



CONNECTING AND ADDING

Fig. 8. Connecting through villages Vision

Elaborations: Julian Begiri, Andrea Sterpin, Christin Erdmann-Goldoni, Dejvi Dauti (2023)

genuine local communities enormous potential is offered based on the tourism emerging as a crucial resource. This project work integrates case studies, quantitative analysis, and ethnographic research to provide a thorough picture of the region's growth trends, demographic challenges, and cultural diversity. The theoretical framework-driven investigation of certain villages highlights the natural evolution of each community.

The Prespa Region's unified vision focuses on establishing strong tourist destinations, integrating public spaces with economic infrastructure and cultural institutions, enhancing public spaces with cultural activities, maintaining buffer zones in their natural state, reconnecting villages to the lake through strategic hubs, and connecting villages through services and highlight spots.

This integrated vision celebrates the area's natural beauty, cultural diversity, and sense of community while working toward a robust and connected network. It imagines a world without borders in which the Prespa Region's lakeside settlements are thriving, habitable, and sustainable thanks to an awareness of and acceptance of the diversity of patterns. A fascinating story of possibility is revealed as one travels through the complex

tapestry of settlements surrounding Lake Prespa, which have been fashioned by many cultures, natural boundaries, and historical influences. The idea that population and economic growth could be accelerated by border removal offers a novel viewpoint. It becomes an important catalyst for sustainable development because of its capacity to highlight the region's allure.

This investigation presents essentially an affirmation of the transforming potential of teamwork, creative thinking, and a common dedication to creating a future that honors diversity, promotes connectivity, and revitalizes the spirit of lakeside towns. It inspires a sense of purpose and optimism for a Prespa Region that is borderless, vibrant, and prosperous.

215

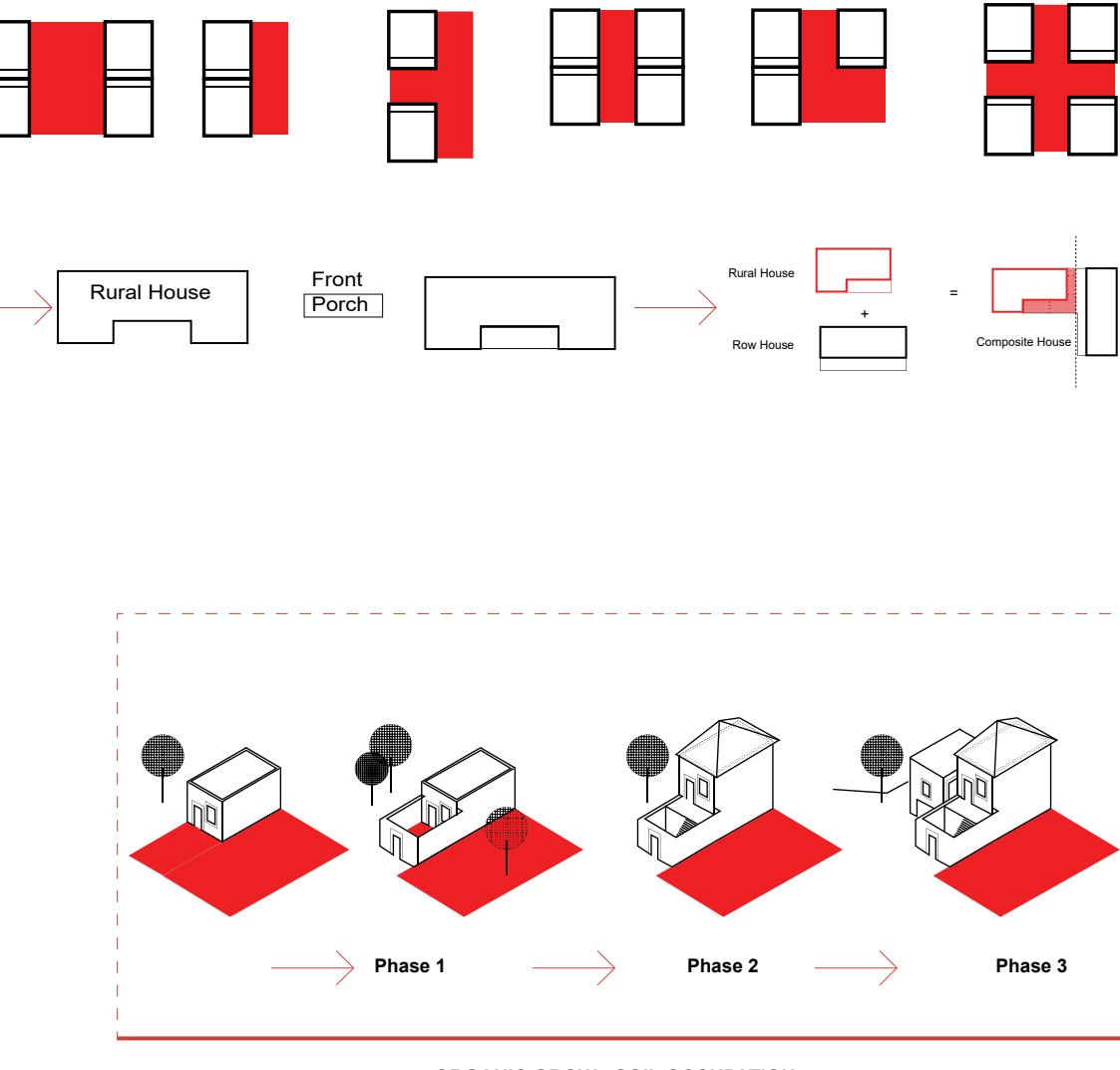


Fig. 9. Connecting through villages Vision

Elaborations: Julian Beqiri, Andrea Sterpin, Christin Erdmann-Goldoni, Dejvi Dauti (2023)



216

Fig. 10 .Envisioned Spatial Vision Map. Source: Authors



Fig. 11 .Envisioned Spatial Vision Map. Source: Authors



Fig. 12 .Envisioned Spatial Vision Map. Source: Authors



## References

Alexander, C., Ishikawa, S., & Silverstein, M. (1977). *A pattern language: Towns, buildings, construction*. Oxford University Press.

Gehl, J. (2010). *Cities for people*. Island Press.

Gehl, J. (2011). *Life between buildings: Using public space*. Danish Architectural Press.

Jacobs, J. (1961). *The death and life of great American cities*. Random House.

Lynch, K. (1960). *The image of the city*. The MIT Press.

McHarg, I. L. (1969). *Design with nature*. Queen Size Books.

Rowe, C., & Koetter, F. (1978). *Collage city*. MIT Press.

Sennett, R. (2018). *Building and dwelling: Ethics for the city*. Penguin Books.

Debord, G., & Jorn, A. (1957). *The naked city* [Map/ Illustration].

Nolli, G. (1748). *Pianta grande di Roma* [Map].

European Union. (n.d.). *EU motto: United in diversity*.

European Union. [https://europa.eu/principles-countries-history/symbols/eu-motto\\_en](https://europa.eu/principles-countries-history/symbols/eu-motto_en)