BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

# 1st International Conference on Built Environment

# ICBE 2026

MAY 08th-09th, 2026
POLIS University, Tiranë

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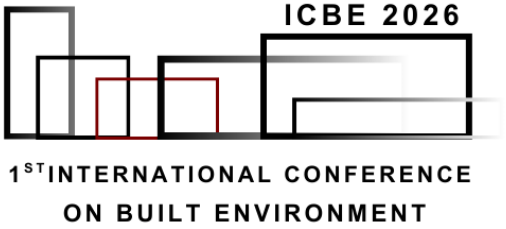
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# 1st International Conference on Built Environment

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## Conference Theme and Rationale

The 1st International Conference on Built Environment (ICBE 2026) was conceived as an international and interdisciplinary forum for advancing knowledge, critical discussion, and innovation across architecture, urban planning, engineering, construction, materials, design, and the wider built environment. Organized by POLIS University in collaboration with the National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation in Albania (AKKSHI), the Academy of Sciences of Albania and the University of Ferrara in Italy, the conference brought together academics, researchers, practitioners, students, and industry representatives to exchange research findings, professional experience, and emerging perspectives on the transformation of contemporary cities and territories.

The conference theme reflected the increasingly complex challenges shaping the built environment, with particular attention to sustainability, resilience, technological innovation, heritage preservation, and socially responsive design. Contributions addressed sustainable architecture and green building, innovative construction technologies and materials, climate-responsive and energy-efficient design, disaster risk reduction, circular approaches to construction, and the integration of renewable energy. Equal emphasis was placed on digital transformation through Building Information Modeling, Geographic Information Systems, artificial intelligence, data analytics, automated solutions, digital fabrication, and advanced manufacturing.

ICBE 2026 also recognized that the future of the built environment cannot be approached through technological innovation alone. Urban transformation, cultural heritage, adaptive reuse, inclusive design, ecological thinking, art, and interdisciplinary research were therefore integral to the conference rationale. The scientific sessions examined topics ranging from seismic resilience, geotechnical engineering, and structural safety to urban fragmentation, public space, heritage conservation, adaptive environments, and new relationships between human and non-human systems.

Through keynote lectures, scientific presentations, case studies, and interdisciplinary debate, the conference encouraged connections between research and practice while promoting approaches capable of responding to environmental, social, cultural, and technological change. The breadth of contributions demonstrated the value of bringing engineering, architecture, urbanism, design, heritage, and emerging technologies into a shared academic framework for more resilient, sustainable, adaptive, and human-centered environments.

Held on 8-9 May 2026 at POLIS University in Tirana, with in-person and online participation, ICBE 2026 welcomed guest speakers and participants from Albanian and international universities, research institutions, professional organizations, and industry. Its sessions established a platform for presenting current research, exchanging expertise, strengthening meaningful collaboration, and identifying future directions for the built environment.

## The event

The **1st International Conference on Built Environment (ICBE 2026)** is an interdisciplinary academic and professional forum dedicated to exploring contemporary challenges, emerging research, and innovative approaches shaping the future of the built environment. Bringing together researchers, academics, architects, engineers, urban planners, designers, practitioners, and industry professionals, the conference promotes the exchange of knowledge and encourages collaboration across traditionally interconnected disciplines. Its thematic scope encompasses sustainable and resilient construction, technological innovation, advanced building materials, urban transformation, cultural heritage, and interdisciplinary design approaches. Particular attention is given to the growing role of digital technologies, data-driven methodologies, intelligent design processes, and advanced analytical tools in supporting more informed and responsive approaches to architecture, engineering, and urban development. At the same time, ICBE 2026 recognizes the importance of environmental responsibility, cultural identity, social needs, and human-centered design in shaping contemporary cities and territories. Through keynote lectures, scientific sessions, case studies, and interdisciplinary exchange, the conference provides a platform for presenting current research, discussing professional experiences, and developing new perspectives capable of contributing to **safer, more sustainable, adaptive, inclusive, and resilient built environments**.

## Objectives

- Promote interdisciplinary collaboration among researchers, academics, practitioners, and professionals in architecture, engineering, urban planning, construction, design, heritage, and related fields of the built environment.
- Advance the use of digital technologies and innovative methodologies, including BIM, GIS, artificial intelligence, data analytics, digital fabrication, and parametric approaches, in research and professional practice.
- Encourage sustainable, resilient, and climate-responsive approaches to architecture, construction, and urban development through innovative materials, energy-efficient strategies, and environmentally responsible design.
- Address contemporary challenges affecting cities, buildings, and infrastructure through scientific research, applied case studies, evidence-based approaches, and innovative design solutions.
- Promote the conservation, transformation, and adaptive reuse of cultural heritage, balancing cultural identity, contemporary needs, structural safety, and responsible urban development.
- Support human-centered and socially responsive urban transformation, considering public space, mobility, ecological systems, community needs, and the wider social and economic impacts of the built environment.
- Provide a platform for knowledge exchange and emerging research, enabling scholars, young researchers, professionals, and students to present innovative ideas, strengthen international collaboration, and contribute to future directions in the built environment.

## Main Conference Themes

- Sustainable architecture and green building practices.
- Innovations in construction technologies and materials.
- Heritage preservation and adaptive reuse in the built environment.
- Digital tools and smart technologies in architecture and construction (e.g., BIM, GIS).
- Climate-responsive and energy-efficient design.
- Disaster risk reduction and resilience in the built environment.
- Circular economy approaches in construction and material usage.
- Integration of AI and data analytics in building design.
- Acoustic and thermal performance in building design.
- Renewable energy integration in building systems.
- Advanced manufacturing techniques in construction, such as 3D printing.
- Innovations in construction technologies and materials.
- Heritage preservation and adaptive reuse in the built environment.
- Disaster risk reduction and resilience in the built environment.
- Digital tools and smart technologies in architecture and construction.
- Advanced manufacturing techniques in construction.
- Geotechnical Engineering for Sustainable Development.
- Cartography and Geographic Information System.
- Computer Automated Solutions for Built Environment.
- Reliability in Civil Engineering.
- Urban planning strategies for resilient cities.
- Climate-responsive and energy-efficient design.
- Regulatory frameworks and policies impacting construction and urban development.
- Design in the Era of Anthropocene (Rethinking the Relation between Human and Non-Human Species)
- Speculative Design (with Attention to “Discursive” and “Critical” Design)
- Design and Cross-Disciplinarity (with Emphasis on Processes rather than Design Outputs)
- Inclusive Design
- Art and Urban Regeneration (Focus on Participatory, Collaborative, and Research-Based Practice)
- Relational Art and Architecture
- Monuments and ‘Anti-Monuments’ (Particular Attention to the Process of Designing and Building the City)

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The conference is structured around six thematic sessions, each addressing a specific area of research and practice within the built environment.
Each session is coordinated by experts in the relevant disciplinary field and is open to professors, researchers, PhD candidates, and other scholars and professionals contributing to the conference themes.

### SESSION I
### Urban Planning and Societal Impact

**Chair:** Dr. Gent Avdija

This session examines the relationship between urban transformation, spatial development, and their social implications within contemporary cities. Contributions address rapid urbanization, urban fragmentation, the transformation and loss of public space, informal and spontaneous development, and the challenges associated with balancing growth and modernization with human-scale urban environments. Particular attention is given to the evolving conditions of Albanian cities and to planning approaches capable of supporting more inclusive, sustainable, socially responsive, and livable urban environments.

### SESSION II
### Sustainable Materials, Resilient Construction & Smart Design

**Chair:** Dr. Endri Duro

This session explores innovative approaches to sustainable construction, resilient structural systems, and environmentally responsive design. Particular attention is given to sustainable materials, energy-efficient and climate-responsive strategies, prefabricated and lightweight construction technologies, and human-centered approaches to structural and architectural design. The session investigates how material innovation, technological development, and responsible design practices can contribute to safer, more efficient, adaptable, and environmentally sustainable built environments.

### SESSION III
### Technological Advancements and Seismic Design for Resilient Places

**Chairs:** Dr. Seyyed Behrad Emadi & Dr. Ornela Şen

This session examines the role of technological innovation and advanced engineering methodologies in developing safer, more resilient, and adaptable built environments. Contributions address seismic hazard and risk assessment, digital fabrication, parametric and computational approaches, transformations of building envelopes and prefabricated housing systems, and emerging concepts for future urban mobility. The session highlights how the integration of engineering knowledge, digital technologies, and resilience-oriented design can strengthen the capacity of buildings, infrastructure, and urban environments to respond to contemporary and future challenges.

## SESSION IV

### Cultural Heritage

**Chairs:** Dr. Nikolla Vesho & Dr. Marsela Demaj

This session addresses the preservation, interpretation, and transformation of cultural heritage within contemporary architectural and urban contexts. Contributions explore conservation strategies for historic buildings and sacred architecture, seismic assessment and strengthening of heritage structures, adaptive reuse, and the social implications of urban regeneration and heritage loss. Particular emphasis is placed on achieving a responsible balance between conservation ethics, cultural identity, structural safety, and the evolving functional requirements of historic buildings and urban environments.

## SESSION V

### Spaces of Connection: Art and Design for an Interspecies and Interdisciplinary Environment

**Chair:** Dr. Francesco Scasciamacchia

This session explores the intersections of art, architecture, design, technology, and the built environment through interdisciplinary and experimental perspectives. It investigates changing relationships between human and non-human systems, spatial perception, adaptive reuse, post-industrial landscapes, urban representation, digital heritage, and environmentally and socially engaged design practices. Through critical, speculative, participatory, and research-based approaches, the session examines how art and design can generate new forms of connection, reinterpret existing environments, and contribute to emerging cultural and spatial narratives within contemporary cities.

## SESSION VI

### Next-Generation Pioneers of the Built Environment

**Chair:** Dr. Flogerta Krosi

This session provides a dedicated platform for emerging researchers and students to present innovative, experimental, and forward-looking approaches to the built environment. Contributions span architecture, engineering, urban planning, environmental resilience, design, and related creative disciplines, reflecting the interdisciplinary character of a new generation of researchers and practitioners. Through projects addressing topics such as bioclimatic design, flood-risk management, structural technologies, architecture-inspired design, and critical interpretations of objects and social space, the session encourages critical inquiry, experimentation, and new perspectives on the future of the built environment.

**Layout & Design:**

Dr. Kristiana Meço

Msc. Erjon Çobani

## POLIS University Contact:

Rr. Bylis 12, Autostrada Tiranë-Durrës, Km 5, Kashar

Kodi Postar 1051, Kutia Postare 2995

Tiranë, Albania

Tel: +355.(0)4.2407420 / +355.(0)4.2407421

Fax: +355. (0)4.2407422

Mob: +355 (0) 69 40 88 111

Email: contact@universitetipolis.edu.al

Website: www.universitetipolis.edu.al

# Table of Contents


**SESSION I** ..... 14

**Urban Planning and Societal Impact** ..... 14

**The Fading Public Realm:** ..... 5

From Expansive Open Spaces to Morphological Compression in Durres' Rapid Urban Growth

**Arjola SAVA** ..... 5

**Spontaneous Architecture as Adaptive Metabolism in Post-Socialist Cities Renis Batalli** ..... 18

**The ground floor as an urban interface: the human-building relationship and the Loss of Urban Contact Avrili MESHI** ..... 35

**Urban Blueprint and Compatible Growth:** ..... 45

A Multi-Scalar Morphological Method for Sustainable Transformation in ..... 45

Erseke, Albania **Mario DINE** ..... 45

**Examining the Internal Anatomy of Socialist-Era Hotels in Albania:** ..... 58

Spatial organisation, Geometry, Structure, Circulation, and Function**Malvina Istrefaj(KOLIÇI)** 58

**Urban Construction Through Destruction Sotir DHAMO** ..... 73

**SESSION II** ..... 87

**Sustainable Materials, Resilient Construction & Smart Design** ..... 87

**Human Centered Design in Civil Engineering Ilda RUSI, Albi ALLIAJ** ..... 88

**The courtyard as a climate-responsive and resilient spatial strategy: the case of Novi Pazar Elma MAHMUTOVIĆ, Dragana KONSTANTINOVIĆ** ..... 103

**Numerical assessment of the thermal performance of a heated and cooled floor containing upgraded phase change materials Oumayma BABAHARRA, Khadija CHOUKAIRY** ..... 121

**Eco-Friendly Building Envelopes:** ..... 132

Thermal, Energy, Cost, and Time Performance of Prefabricated Lightweight MRC Panels in Residential Construction **Erjon ÇOBANI, Flogerta KROSI, Ornela ŞEN** ..... 132

**SESSION III** ..... 156

**Technological Advancements and Seismic Design for Resilient Places** ..... 156

**Identification and assessment of resident-driven façade interventions in prefabricated large panel buildings:** ..... 157

**the case of Tirana Flogerta KROSI, Alma GJONAJ, Merita GURI, Ornela ŞEN, Endri DURO** ..... 157

**Tirana_ toward a (non) resilient city of the future** ..... 173

Re-shaping mobility and bring back "La raison d'être of the city" **Ina MUSAI** ..... 173

**A Seismic Hazard Model of Albania** ..... 187

Case study: Kukes, Berat and Himarë **Anila XHAHYSA, Neki KUKA** ..... 187

**Phenomeno-Parametrism:** ..... 203

Translating Place Experience into Parametric **Markeljan LLESHI** ..... 203

**SESSION IV** ..... 217

**Cultural Heritage** ..... 217

**Preserving and Adapting Sacred Architecture:** ..... 218

A Case Study of the Jazak Monastery **Una RADIVOJEVIĆ**.....218

**Monumentality Reconsidered:** Heritage Preservation and Adaptive Reuse through the Theories of Robert Venturi and Aldo Rossi **Harika SHEHABI** .....233

**Seismic Performance Assessment of Historic Stone Masonry Buildings:** .....245

The Case of the Angonate Residence, Gjirokastër **Alma GJONAJ, Merita GURI, Endri DURO**... .....245

**Future Heritage by Design:** .....258

New Design Approaches to Heritage Reuse **Gregor ANDONI, Kristiana MEÇO** .....258

**SESSION V**.....267

**Spaces of Connection: Art and Design for an Interspecies and Interdisciplinary Environment** 267

**Heritage as Narrative:**.....268

Building City Image Through Adaptive Reuse in Durrës **Vjola ZIU, Remijon PRONJA** .....268

**The Extraordinary Everyday** Children's Spatial Agency as Anti Monumental Practice **Xhoi MUSLIAKA** .....281

**'Liminal Architectural Bodies' in Post-Industrial Kuçova:**.....298

From an Ecological Perspective to an Aesthetic realm **Dorina XHERIMEJA, Aishe BITRI**.....298

**IN Illyria, Episode I: Apollonia** .....311

A Pixel-Art Game Framework for Archaeological Interpretation and Cultural Heritage Learning **David KRYEMADHI, Nikolla VESHO, Skervi BAUSHI, Remijon PRONJA, Kujtim HALILI**.....311

**In the Age of Material Transformation:** Textile Design and Upcycling **Armela LAMAJ**.....326

**AI as a Designer:**.....336

The Future of Taste and Creativity in Automotive Design **Gregor ANDONI** .....336

**The Secondary Archive:** .....342

Collective Memory, Mental Images and AI-Assisted Representations in a Transforming Tirana **Dejvi DAUTI** .....342

**SESSION VI**.....352

**Next-Generation Pioneers of the Built Environment** .....352

**Performance-Based Bioclimatic Design of a Kindergarten in Tirana:** Integration of Passive Systems and Dynamic Simulation **Erald MEÇE, Afërdita MUHAMEDI, Verona HYSI, Klodjan XHEXHI**.....353

**Integrated Flood Risk Management in Albania:** .....363

Human drivers, Basin dynamics and Policy gaps **Zejd BUSHATI, Esad MALAJ, Erjon ÇOBANI, Merita GURI** .....363

**Steel frame technology for residential buildings:**.....383

A comparative thesis-antithesis study versus reinforced concrete systems **Elton AHMETAJ, Erjon ÇOBANI, Merita GURI** .....383

**DOUBLE SKIN:**.....394

How does the "Double Skin" concept interact with our body in the field of fashion design? **Desara LLESHI**.....394

**Chairs as instruments in the construction of social roles and human bodies Aurora BALLA** 401

**Autonomy as a Value:**.....409

Design and Branding in the Post-Fordist Era **Irena ALIAJ, Erson RAMAJ**.....409

# SESSION V

## Spaces of Connection: Art and Design for an Interspecies and Interdisciplinary Environment

Art, architecture and interdisciplinary design: Art–architecture relationships / Cross-disciplinary practice / Experimental design / Research-based creative processes.

Human and non-human environments: Interspecies design / Ecological relationships / Human–environment interaction / Alternative spatial narratives.

Critical and speculative approaches: Critical design / Speculative design / Spatial perception / Relational art and architecture.

H Adaptive and post-industrial environments: Adaptive reuse / post-industrial landscapes / Urban regeneration / Transformation of existing spaces.

Representation, heritage and material experimentation: Urban photography / Digital heritage interpretation / Textile upcycling / Material reuse / New cultural narratives.

# 'Liminal Architectural Bodies' in Post-Industrial Kuçova:
## From an Ecological Perspective to an Aesthetic realm

**DOI:** 10.37199/c4100052

**Dorina XHERIMEJA**

POLIS University, Albania
dorina_xherimeja@universitetipolis.edu.al

**Aishe BITRI**

POLIS University, Albania
aishe_bitri@universitetipolis.edu.al

**Abstract**

*This paper explores post-industrial urban landscapes as aesthetic tools for understanding the complexity of sites that are still in transition, meaning they have not yet been deindustrialized, restructured, or gentrified. Starting from the idea of the "Anthropocene" understood as the hierarchical intervention of humans in nature, the research aims to disclose the paradoxes and contradictions of these "in-between nature and human" urban scenarios.*

*Taking Kuçova, Albania's first oil city, as a case study, we explore the various locations on site where extractive infrastructures are present. Through photographic documentation and interviews with locals, the research speculates on a "hybrid aesthetic" that emerges between human and nonhuman activities, and between past and present. Some of these oil extraction infrastructures (functioning since 1928) are still active today while others are no longer operational.*

*What is peculiar, however, is that they remain as "liminal architectural bodies" or relics. Although pollution and abandonment continue to shape Kuçova's built environment, this research argues for a shift from purely ecological perspective toward an aesthetic approach. Such a shift opens possibilities not only for remembering Kuçova's industrial past, but also for imagining future scenarios that incorporate, rather than dismiss, these remnants even as an object of aesthetic contemplation.*

*The paper argues that it is precisely today, when conditions of "transition zones" are still visible in Albania's urban landscapes and when the complexity of history and its human and nonhuman aesthetic and architectural constructions remain materially present that we have the opportunity to think critically about a more sustainable, equal and inclusive future.*

*This research is part of a broader ongoing project aimed at developing a hybrid design and art*

*platform capable of generating debate and reflection among the inhabitants of Kuçova, positioning them as active agents in shaping the city's vision.*

***Keywords**: Liminality; Anthropocene; Hybrid aesthetic; Transitional zones; Sustainable future*

## 1. INTRODUCTION: THE OIL HISTORY AND ITS POST-INDUSTRIAL REALITY

The main objective of this article is the analysis of the city of Kuçova as a post-industrial city whose landscape characteristics are unique and can open possible scenarios regarding the historical relationship between man and environment concerning the extractive dimension. Historically developed as a strategic center for the oil industry in Albania starting from 1920, and in a period of greater productivity during the socialist regime of Enver Hoxha, today Kuçova, although most of its facilities are operational, is in a state of symbolic and functional suspension. Since 1928, with the intervention of Italians from the company AIPA (Italian Oil Company Albania), Kuçova has been the center for the development of the economy in the national oil production system.

Thanks to the purchase of concessions and the agreement signed with the Albanian government, which expressed the need to attract foreign investments and technologies, a strategic opportunity for oil extraction emerged in Albania. A very important figure who contributed to the discovery of oil, especially in the city of Kuçova, was Stanislav Zuber, a European-ranking scientist in geology and the oil industry. At the request of the Italian company AIPA, the scientist arrived in Albania in 1927 and worked for 20 years tasked with conduction geological studies and analyses to identify oil deposits in Kuçova. The region was characterized by geological peculiarities and had a scarcity of local competitors.

Zuber created detailed geological maps, essential for understanding where the oil deposits, where located. He contributed to the development of the oil industry, making Kuçova one of the most important and wealth cities in Albania. Thanks to his scientific approach and positive evaluations, the prospects for an era of tar and gas discovery in southen Albania opened up. The city grew rapidly, expanding over an area of 11,000 m², and oil wells spread throughout the territory of the city, reaching a total of about 1.700 wells, of which 970 are still operational today. The mechanism and plants employed were designed and brought from Italy, with the arrival of Oreste Jacobini and other Italian engineers, who took care of the oil extraction and management of the wells. In the 1930s and 1940s, benchmarks for development began in the Devolli Valley, where the first oil well was drilled. This area is still considered the historical



Figure 1. Oil field in Kuçova. Retrieved from AIPA Collection.

area for the oil field where the first oil structures were built. The wheel-shaped mechanism, *(fig.1, fig.2, fig.3, fig.4)* allowed for the continuous and efficient extraction of oil. The wheel powered a system of levers and rods that moved the piston inside the well, pumping oil to the surface without the need for electric motors or complex modern systems. The extracted quantities of oil were stored in large tanks and transported overland; railways specifically built for the oil or tanker trucks in areas where the railway did not reach. The main destination was

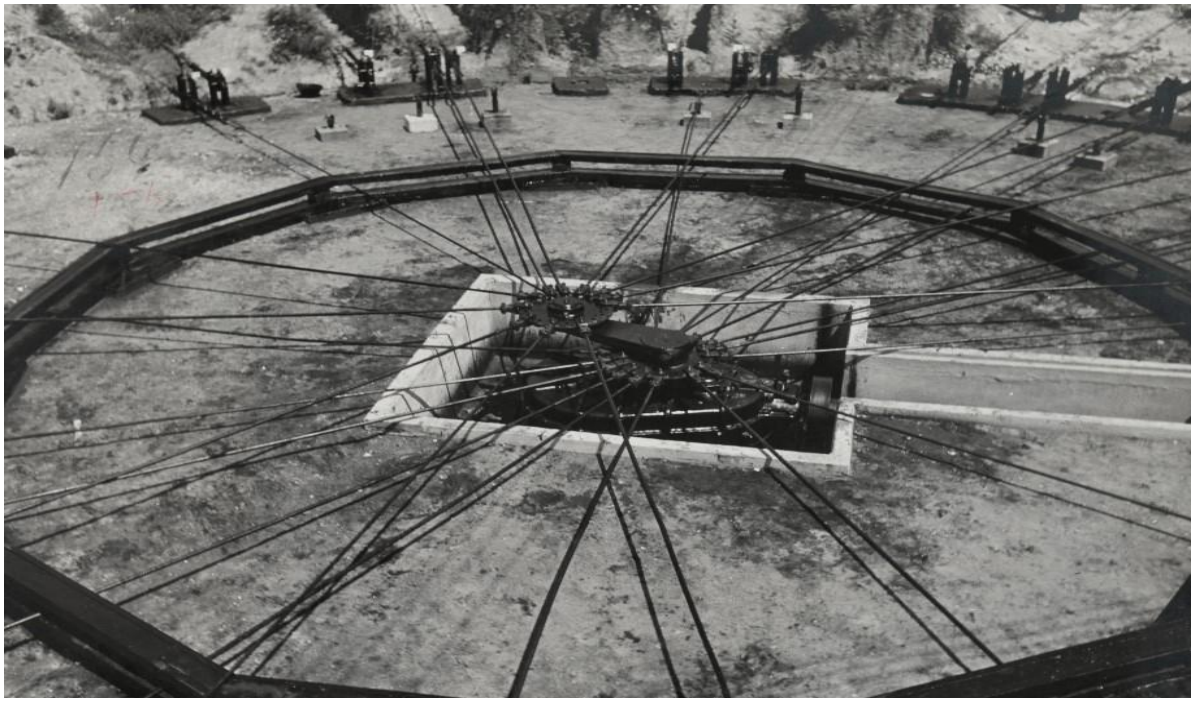


Figure 2. Wheel-shaped mechanism, “RROTA” from the Devoll Valley, Kuçova, Albania. Retrieved from Eni Archive

the port of Vlore, from where it crossed the Adriatic to reach Bari, where it was refined and sold. This system allowed for maximizing exploration of oil deposits and created economic and industrial links between Albania and Italy.

The Italian influence also contributed to the constructions of houses, roads, cinemas, ect. transforming Kuçova into a true industrial city. For this reason, the residents of Kuçova have always viewed and perceived oil only as a wealth for the city and never questioned the environmetal, ecological impact and health effects that this fuel would have caused them on the long term.

As we will see later, the fact that these extraction machines, such as the wheels and jack pumps are still present today, and some inactive, does not provoke any thoughts on the part of the citizens about a different future for Kuçova which continues to be nostalgic regarding its glorious and wealthy past. In 1943, with the conclusion of World War II and the defeat of the Italian forces, Albania began a significant transition to a communist regime under the leadership of Enver Hoxha, who nationalized the oil industry, without expansion for Kuçova, which with the end of regime from the 1990s began to experience a phase of erosion of its local wealth, thus these machines becoming merely ghostly presences or relics of industrial archaeology no longer carriers of wealth.

## 2. A NOT LINEAR LOGIC FOR READING KUÇOVA'S PAST FOR DEVELOPING ITS TRANSFORMATIVE FUTURE



Figure 4. Oil extraction mechanisms, period 1928 to 1944. oil field Kuçova. Retrieved from Eni Archive.



Figure 3. Oil extraction mechanisms lateral view, period 1928 to 1944. oil field Kuçova. Retrieved from Eni Archive.

Currently these oil infrastructures remain as "architectural" residues, almost industrial archaeological relics that create a landscape that tells at the same time a story of continuity with the Albanian industrialization process but also a historical narrative of unexpected interruptions. It is precisely these unexpected interruptions that, following the thought of the German philosopher Walter Benjamin in his Theses on the Concept of History (Über den Begriff der Geschichte) written in early 1940, posthumously published in 1942 in Walter Benjamin zum Gedächtnis, (Benjamin, 1942) in which he develops his idea of a discontinuous historical reconstruction compared to a linear narrative of the past, that allow us to glimpse revolutionary moments within the past itself. If for Benjamin this vision of history tied to class struggle, considering his idea of revising official history through concepts expressed by him such as "The Time of Now" (Jetztzeit) and "Critique of Progress", the first being an interrupt time, a present laden with revolutionary tension that detaches from the chronological flow to reactivate the past, and the second as a rejection of the linear and progressive vision of history, it is possible to think about the history of Kuçova, precisely due to the presence of historical documents, as we can consider the remains of industrial archaeology, as a present that the philosopher would say has a revolutionary potential that through reactivating the past interrupts the idea that we must look to the future, annihilating the transformative potential inherent in the past itself.

Thinking about Benjamin in the context of Kuçova means using the residues of the past, the oil machines once active, many of which are now unproductive, not to place them in a linear vision leading towards progress, in this case understood as the dominant anthropocentric model, but to use their interruption and inactivity as potential for social and cultural change. Kuçova and its oil past are themselves moments on interruptions in history, frozen residues of industrial archaeology, like the abandoned and informally built peripheries of the capital. To make these structures readable, visible and unproductive, as history has wanted for the city of Kuçova, means interrupting and rendering discontinuous the linear and progressive historical process that would have the city once again be a site of oil extraction as the only possible alternative.

The residents themselves, as stated before, still dream of reactivating that past of wealth and do not foresee that the reactivation of that past would lead to a model that cancels local, social and cultural practices outside of both colonial and contemporary neoliberal extractivism.

If indeed these "infrastructures" of extraction, once the economic and pulsating heart of Kuçova, operative from the 1920s until the 1990s, are no longer commercially productive today and have not been removed, they remain, however, indelible signs on the landscape of the anthropocentric and extractivist dynamic of the city's industrial past.

This contribution proposes interpreting these structures as "liminal architectural bodies", spatial elements positioned between operability and abandonment, between perfection and ruin, between a productive and aesthetic dimension. The conceptual liminality to which these "bodies" make us think should be understood not just as a transitory state but as a permanent status of uncertainty; a "frozen" moment of Kuçova's past not yet erased by the "evolutionary"

processes to come. This very uncertainty and indeterminacy, this unfished and unresolved transitoriness, initiates an open thought that freezes past and present without a univocal thrust towards a possible future. In her volume (Arendt, 1961) identifies a typical condition of advanced modernity as the crisis of tradition and authority. According to her, the waning of a shared horizon of values and references determines a rupture between past and future, placing the individual in an intermediate space, characterized by instability and loss of meaning. In this context, the past can no longer guide present actions, while the future becomes indeterminate. This suspension produces a profound transformation in the way spaces and object are perceived; they cease to be bearers of consolidated meanings and become traces of systems now devoid of symbolic authority.

On the light of the theoretical framework outlined, the case of Kuçova is configured as a particularly significant context for the analysis of the relationship between industrial space, memory and economic transformations. The city, historically linked to the oil industry, presents a landscape strongly characterized by the presence of extractive infrastructures which constitute not only functional elements but also symbolic devices. From an Arendt-ian perspective, these structures can be interpreted as material traces of a productive system that has lost its normative and identity capacity. They belong to a past that no longer exerts authority over the present, generating a condition of suspension in which the industrial space is positioned “between past and future” devoid of a univocal and stable meaning. This loss of continuity transforms the landscape into a place of crisis but also of potential socio-economic and political re-elaboration.

Due to Albania’s neoliberal capitalist development, visible, to borrow an architectural metaphor, from the constant vertical growth of the capital, resulting from the ever-increasing attraction of foreign capital, the presence of “liminal” zones in Tirana (areas not yet erased, destroyed and/or gentrified where past and future, social, economic, cultural, and architectural coexist) the country becomes almost an area of “other” thought compared vis-a-vis to the dominant and neutral narratives of global cities. Kuçova, like many peripheries of Tirana, offers this perspective not only from the viewpoint of a development process not yet undertaken, perhaps in an embryonic state, but also and especially in relation to the dynamics now taken for granted of human centrality over nature in a clear hierarchical relationship. The two dimensions of neoliberal urban realities and that of the anthropocentric worldview travel together and are part of the same logic that sees man and his built environment imposing themselves on the urban or a natural landscape. However, while these discourses are clearly visible and articulated in highly developed Western countries, where the duality of man versus nature, or urban landscape versus built surroundings, is no longer immediately recognizable in Albania the transitory, or what we have called liminal spaces, still exist. The visibility of this “liminality” opens the possibility, even now, for the imagination of something that although, has been part of a past, can be re-articulated. For example, the agricultural Albania, which still exist, can be used as a social and cultural practice that resists the unique and irrevocable model of cancellation and neutralization of identities and local socio-economic and cultural practices against primarily global ones. Indeed, it is the logic of informality that has guided

over the years the transformation of Albanian territories and consequently their urban and extra-urban landscapes. In Kuçova for example, the absence of an urban plan in the post-socialist period after the 1990s allowed many residents to build homes near the oil infrastructures to extract residual amounts of gas for domestic use.



Figure 6. Photography by Dorina Xherimeja & Aishe Bitri: Oil extraction sites embedded within residential areas in the city of Kuçova.



Figure 5. Photography by Dorina Xherimeja & Aishe Bitri: Oil extraction sites embedded within residential areas in the city of Kuçova.

This approach between the community and the oil wells has produced an unprecedented hybridization between residential space and industrial space, where the technical elements are not separated from the daily dimension but becomes an integral part of it. This physical and functional overlap around the oil wells prevents large scale reactivation or maintenance interventions on these structures, not allowing the creation of safety distances or the development of technical corridors and operational reactivation. As a consequence of these interventions, the industrial infrastructure is trapped in a state of forced suspension that confirms its transformation from a productive machine to a “relic” incorporated into urban space. From an ecological perspective, this situation raises fundamental questions regarding soil pollution, the management of energy waste and the environmental vulnerability of local communities. Beyond a critical dimension also emerges a perceptual and symbolic reconstructions of the landscape. Rusty structures and non-operational mechanical equipment integrated into the backyards of homes contribute to the constructions of a post-industrial aesthetic that does not correspond to a view in ruins but rather to a form of coexistence between nature, technology, and daily life. In this context, Kuçova presents itself as a theoretical laboratory that highlights the transition from a growing economy based on oil extraction to a post-productive state where these “architectural bodies” do not cease to exist but change their ontological and perceptual *status.*

## 3. PROJECT PROPOSAL FOR KUÇOVA: FROM AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE TO AN AESTHETIC REALM

Despite my direct knowledge of the territory and its history, having been boorn and raised until the age 17 in Kuçova, I began to investigate, with the help of local inhabitants, their view regarding the contemporary state of the city (fig.7.8). As previously stated intuitively, the idea that the inhabitants have of Kuçova is still linked to its oil history and the industrial archaeological artifacts -which I have extensively discussed- is for them merely nostalgic: these extractive machines are reminders of a once opulent city that no longer exists. Rather than using these structures as a stratagem to rethink the future of the city, there is almost an uncritical resignation to a marginal and peripheral destiny for Kuçova. Instead, through the ongoing analysis, I intend to start from the idea that the historical process can only be transformative when elements of the past have not yet been completely eradicated. Only by preserving or freezing such elements (in this case, the absolute wheels and jack-pumps) it is possible to transform the irrevocable process of constructing a global dominant model that erases cultures and social practices of resistance related to a territory.

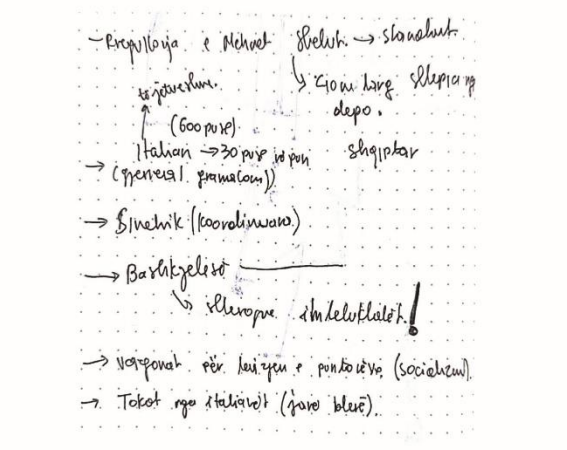


Figure 8. Fields notes based on accounts from residents of Kuçova.

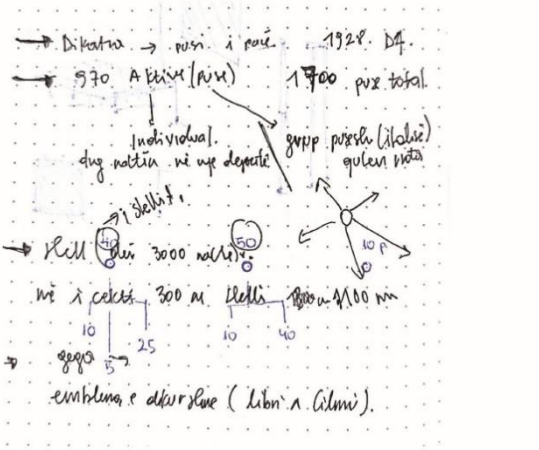


Figure 9. Fields notes based on accounts from residents of Kuçova.

Starting from Kuçova's suspended and transitional present, an unfinished process in which residual elements of the past are still alive, I intend to build and design a multidisciplinary artistic platform that includes visual arts, textile design and possibly fashion, which rather than thinking, as most of the city's inhabitants would like, of reactivating the oil extractive dynamics, would or of advocating through strictly ecological or urbanistic principles the removal of such structures, rather insists on their preservation, presenting an evident, almost "hypertrophic" aesthetic that makes these extraction structures even more recognizable and visible. In this way, the transition will be from a purely moral and/or economic dimension to an aesthetic dimension that produces and invites reflection. Indeed, the oil wheels and balance pumps will become, no longer part of the everyday life of Kuçova's inhabitants, but

rather “monsters” of aesthetic contemplation that preserve the past but in a critical key.

The aestheticization of these mechanisms will make them more inoperative, asserting their necessary suspension for the constructions of an alternative local imagination to the dominant productive model.

The idea of using the concept of “aesthetic hypertrophy” for the extractive oil structures of Kuçova draws inspiration from practices and theories developed in the 1960s and 1970s by the Italian Radical Design movement, which, in response to the transformations and social and cultural protests of that period in the country, removed design from its functionality and from every principle of industrial reproducibility. In this way, at least in the most radical examples, the expression of Italian design embodies highly aesthetic values, mostly inspired by American Pop Art. The idea of using a design vision, similar to that of the Italian Radical movement, for the oil machines of Kuçova lies in the fact that these “objects”, once endowed with functionality but lacking an intentional aesthetic dimension, will strip more evidently the function for which they were born. Balancers and wheels are therefore objects that we can assimilate to the Italian radicalism of those years. Be employing, in a manner we might call “anachronistic”, tactics of “aesthetic exaggeration” that accentuate these structures in the landscape of Kuçova, it signifies highlighting clearly and simultaneously the necessity of not eradicating the past while also underscoring the indecipherability and transitoriness of the city’s present.

The fact that these oil infrastructures can be transformed into object of aesthetic contemplation or perhaps possess the potential to become “relational structures” -potential that will be explored though the involvement of the residents of Kuçova through preliminary workshops, field visits and multidisciplinary lectures- responds in a practical way to the theorical vision on history by Benjamin and Arendt’s thought on modernity, concepts I have described earlier. If we indeed see history not as progressive and linear and modernity as possessing a transformative potential, we can assert and highlight Kuçova’s present as indecipherable. That is to say as something that does not yet have a direction, or rather something that, although directed towards a unique narrative that seems already written and dominant, still holds within it a potential for interruption which here signifies “transformation”.

Thus, suspending their functionality, remembering that some mechanisms are still operational, means negating their productive past. As relics or noncelebratory “monuments” of a past that no longer exists, these infrastructures are already symbol’s devoid of authority in themselves, to put it in Arendt’s terms. However, their presence, although significant for the inhabitants as nostalgic memory promoting a return to an opulent past, is not at all transformative, and does not open avenues for triggering reflection. Reinterpreting, re-contextualizing and aestheticizing these machines can instead serve to illuminate the contradictions of Kuçova’s past and its transitional and liminal present.



Figure 10. Ugo Rondinone, Seven Magic Mountains, Las Vegas, Nevada, 2016. Retrieved sevenmagicmontains.com



Figure 11. Ugo Rondinone, Seven Magic Mountains, Las Vegas, Nevada, 2016. Retrieved sevenmagicmontains.com

Starting from the consideration that wheels and balancers can become what I like to call "liminal architectural bodies" I do not intend to follow contemporary artistic practices that, to

perform critical and/or ecological discourses in relation to extractivist dynamics linked to oil, include this fuel as matter and color but rather to radically deny its inclusion. For instance, Mexican artist Minerva Cuevas, known for her works critiquing neo-colonialism and capitalist production, in her series of paintings, such as *Flores Sea* (2021), uses oil as sculptural critical matter to depict in her canvas's natural landscapes, in this case, marine ones. By juxtaposing bucolic and natural landscapes with dirty and anti-ecological fuel, the artist presents us with an evident face of the extractivist/anthropocentric vision where oil becomes a visible artistic element rather than a hidden deposit behind the beauty of the natural landscape we are destroying. The aesthetic strategy I intend to employ for Kuçova contrary to Cuevas, at least as an initial and not definitive proposal, completely cancels the presence of "oil" matter in every aesthetic dimension. Specifically, the intervention I propose to the inhabitants is to paint these structures with vibrant and metallic colors which in this way become simultaneously environmental sculptures from which it is impossible to "escape" at least visually and also objects for aesthetic contemplation whose operability is denied and not nostalgically remembered.

A similar operation was, for example, conducted by Swiss artist Ugo Rondinone with Seven Magic Mountains (2016) in the Nevada desert. (RONDINONE, 2026) (Fig.9-10).



Figure 12. Minerva Cuevas, Flores Sea Oil on canvas dipped in chirotope, 69.1 × 51.6 × 4.1 cm, 2021. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA). Retrieved Artsy.net

Installed in the desert in 2016, the work consists of totems made of large stacked stones rising the desert. Evoking astonishment as foreign bodies in the natural landscape with surrounding neutral colours, although probably not intentionally, the fluorescent and metallic colors invite reflection on the "natural/artificial" and on "anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric". Following the model of this aesthetic strategy, different from that employed by Cuevas, the intervention for Kuçova and its extractive infrastructures aims to abruptly interrupt the harmonity of the city's landscape through exaggerating their presence.

However, unlike Rondinone, whose expedient seems to be playful aesthetic and attractiveness for tourism -a risk that the Albanian city

also faces- the environmental sculptures for Kuçova aims to be a first action, perhaps a temporary one, to interrupt a linear past, unveils its contradictions and insist that it is possible, in geopolitical contexts, like Albania, which are in transition to practice a present, outside the unidirectionality of an already established future

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

Places and landscapes like that of Kuçova in Albania are spaces where informality and formality, past and "avant-gardist" futures coexist in a visible and uncontested ways. These liminal spaces should be articulated and render more visible rather than eradicated in order to practice their transformative potential. Kuçova and the process I intend to undertake regarding its history, its landscape and its possible future can be a laboratory in which to experiment with aesthetic and social practices that become models for constructing a present and a future outside of the ever-increasing dynamics of real estate speculation, gentrification, art as a propaganda, extractives and anthropocentricism.

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