

ARCHITECTURE OF
TERRITORY
European Countryside

FS 2020

PROJECT
ON
THE
COUNTRYSIDE
ALBANIA



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Tue, 10 am, ONA G35
aot@arch.ethz.ch
www.topalovic.arch.ethz.ch

PROFESSOR Milica Topalović
TEAM Gyler Mydyti, Nazlı Tümerdem, Jan Westerheide
INTEGRATED DISCIPLINE Planning
PLACES max 18 students

INTEGRATED SEMINAR WEEK TO ALBANIA
13–22 March 2020 (cost frame C)

When it was first exhibited in 1972, Edi Hila's *Planting of Trees* was praised by his colleagues in the Writers' and Artists' Union. However, the playful exuberance of the painting was too heterodox for the communist regime. A year later, *Planting of Trees*—initially conceived as a metaphor for planting a progressive future for Albania—was denounced for disregarding the principles of Socialist Realism and Albanian Socialism. Hila was sent to a labour camp for three years and *Planting of Trees* was condemned to be locked in a dark room for nearly half a century.

Edi Hila's painting represents both Albania's paranoid past and the exciting momentum of progressive socialism. Today we can appreciate it anew and use it as a lens through which to look at the Albanian countryside and its future. What is the meaning of Hila's perspective on planting trees in the context of a contemporary European territory and society? What will be the future of Albanian, and of European countryside? And could we, through a project on that countryside, also address urgent challenges for Europe—inequality, migration and ecological crisis?

Albania is still one of the least explored countries in Europe, yet its idiosyncratic wilderness and its cultural past have much to tell. Albania's recent history has been characterised by radical territorial and structural transformations. The country's past is marked by almost forty-five years (1946–1990) of extreme isolation under the socialist dictator Enver Hoxha. Self-sufficiency, the building of socialist villages and the education of the rural society were at the centre of Hoxha's programme.

Since the end of communism in the early '90s, Albania has embarked on a delirious rush towards the open-market economy which has reversed the urban-rural relationships. Surprisingly, agriculture still remains its main economy.

Southwestern Albania portrays multiple transformations occurring today across the Albanian countryside. It is a slow territory, now exposed to fast paced change. It is a palimpsest, where industrial and self-sufficient agriculture co-exist, and mass coastal tourism and mountainous eco-tourism are both booming. Despite these currents, the future of Albania's countryside and its villages remain open. Our investigation will set out from the following questions: What can we learn from Albania's mountainous countryside? How do we envision its future? Can our project be both social and ecological? Can we design new ways of living and working in the countryside?

During the semester we will take an investigative journey to Albania. We will be working on and travelling through the slow countryside of Përmet's mountains, the tidal villages of Zagoria, the agricultural heritage of Drino river valley, the UNESCO city of Gjirokastër, the olive and tangerine orchards of the Ionian coast. The aim of the journey is to explore this cultural landscape and to prepare the basis for our studio work in Zurich.

Throughout the course we will deploy a range of performative research and design methods, including investigative walks, cartography, photography, and model building. All of the study sites require individual handling, fresh insights and careful approaches, but each student's work will form a crucial contribution to a common vision. Together we will rethink the role of architects for the European territory.

PROJECT ON EUROPEAN COUNTRYSIDE

With the Arcadia studio in the spring of 2016, Architecture of Territory initiated the research project on European Countryside. Since then, several design studios were dedicated to paradigmatic cases studies. The aim is to research the character of urbanisation processes in the countryside, and to describe potentials for the new urban-countryside living and working in the form of a territorial project.

PROCESS AND RESULTS

The semester consists of an investigative journey and intensive studio sessions. Architecture of Territory values team spirit, intellectual curiosity and commitment. We are looking for avid travellers and team workers to develop their highly motivated and independent positions. Our approach

enables students to work with a wide range of methods and sources pertaining to territory, including ethnographic explorations, reading and writing exercises, study of precedent projects, large-scale drawing techniques, model building, book making, and exhibition making. We will start the semester by immersing ourselves head-on into the methods of ethnographic research followed by several workshops that will help students to learn the tools needed to represent the findings of the field work: drawing, GIS, model making and photography. We will welcome guest lecturers and shape common agendas through debates. Each student group will write their own project brief and will receive our unreserved support in honing their project. Each project will address a particular topic but together they will contribute to a common vision.

COLLABORATION

Albania—Project on the Countryside is part of a collaboration with the Albanian National Territorial Planning Agency and Polytechnic University of Tirana – Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism. Students from the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism in Tirana will work in parallel on selected sites, coming together for the seminar week in Albania and a common final review in Zurich. Experts, citizens, designers, journalists and other fellow travellers will work with us.

TRAVEL

An investigative journey constitutes the core of the project. Travelling along the territorial line that crosses the southwestern Albania (Përmet-Gjirokastër-Sarandë), we will experience the region's complexity and beauty. Our journey will entail a performative walk with Nazli

Tümerdem in the slow mountainous countryside of Përmet and other sites of study. Student teams will also have time for individual investigation of their project sites. The trip will be concluded with a workshop session with guest tutors and experts. The seminar week will take part from the 13th to 22nd of March and is integrated and mandatory. The cost frame is C.

CREDITS

The semester project offers the total of 19 credit points: The Design Studio with Integrated Discipline (Planning) 14+3 KP and the Seminar Week 2KP.

IMAGE

Edi Hila, "Planting of Trees", 1972, oil on canvas.