

S.P.A.C.E

Sustainable Partnerships for Arts
and Culture in Europe

STUDY TRIP #02

The Albanian Journey

June 2022 - Fagaras, Tirana and Weimar

S.P.A.C.E is short-term action by partners of the MOCI network to connect cultural initiatives in rural contexts with support by the European Cultural Foundation (ECF) and the Federal Agency for Civic Education (bpj) in Germany. www.moci.space



SHORT DOCUMENTATION

Building on the learnings from a first research phase and initial mapping process about cultural spaces in the regions of the partnership, we explore strategies among peers and communities to test various types of exchange and solidarity-mechanisms. This process is guided by short study trips to Romania and Albania to provide comprehensive insights into each country's local realities.

This short report gives some insights from the study trip to Albania in May 2022.

We want to thank our partners and hosts in the region of Făgăras for the warm welcome and hospitality.

CONTENT

Summary	p. 02
Fight for your right - Sebastia OJF, Laç	p. 03
A house without guests - the cultural center in Laç	p. 04
A social centre by a church community - Fara miresie, Laç	p. 05
Post-industrial brownfield - Superfosfati, Laç	p. 06
The Miss Balkans of Architecture - Zugo bridge Laç	p. 07
Multifunctional space for local youth - H.A.N.A in Lezha	p. 08
Innovating young women's business - Artizane Leshi	p. 09
Preserving the art of crafts - Artistike Zadrime, Lezha	p. 10
A cultural center for youngsters - Gjergj Lacaj, Lezha	p. 11
The outsiders - city walk in Lezha	p. 12
Protecting a natural habitat - Lagoon of Kune-Vain	p. 13
Re-programming a cultural center - the Kamza case	p. 14
Advocacy and activism through the arts - ATA, Kamza	p. 15
The red star neighbourhood - Valias, Kamza	p. 16
A community cultivated forest - Plepat e Brukes, Kamza	p. 17
Recap and co-creation at TekBunker, Tirana	p. 18



SUMMARY

We have visited 16 peer organizations or places of interests for the communities during our study trip from **21 - 26 May 2023 in Albania**. The peer organizations are often the only or part of very few civic initiatives in their local ecosystems taking care about culture, creativity and social inclusion. With this background the provided programme differed from the study trip in Romania.

We have started to go to the **city of Laç**, where we have met the team of **Sebastia OJF**, being not an ordinary cultural space the activist group supports good governance by lobbying, counseling and diverse community oriented activities. We also have met with a representative of the local **Cultural Center of Bashkia Kurbin**, which exists, but doesn't run its own programme, in fact it is empty. The **"Fara miresie"** is a church-owned social space, which sometimes cooperates with Sebastja. To understand the difficulties of the city we have visited the post-industrial brownfield **Superfosfati**. Last but not least we got the opportunity to have a look at **Miss Balkans of Architecture**, the Zugo bridge, which is a national heritage of the first category, but in risk of collapse due to the illegal activities.

The second part of the journey brought us to the **city of Lezha**, where **H.A.N.A** is the first and only youth center in the region. There we were introduced to the start-up **Artizane Leshi**, a small creative business by two young women. Preserving the art of craft is supported by **Artistike Zadrime** too. The ancient art of loom work was resumed in the villages near Lezha with several women involved in the working process of this laboratory. **Gjergj Lacaj** is a space for children to develop their talents at an early age. Currently this building has many functions, hosting some of the activities from the **Palace of Culture**, which is under construction. On our way back to Tirana via Kamza we stopped at **Kune Vaini Lagoon**. The region's rich biodiversity and natural assets have resulted in it becoming a protected zone, categorized as a natural reserve.

In the **city of Kamza** we have started with a visit to the **Kamza Cultural Palace**, which seems to be very representative of the situation in Albania, where programme development is rare, due to the lack of own budgets. The opposite way of doing basic cultural work in communities was represented by our partner **Grupi ATA**. The group offers a (mind)-space for social theater, urban interventions, exhibitions, workshops, media productions, publishing and the service of legal consultancy called legal clinic. Two examples of direct interventions by ATA in the neighboring communities were visited and discussed. The case of **Valias**, a neighborhood which is since the earthquake in 2019 under pressure of gentrification and heavy changes. And the case of **Plepat e Brukes**, a community cultivated forest, which could be protected and used due to the support also by Grupi ATA.

Our final event was realized in Tirana at **Tekbunker**, which is a grass-root organization working in the fields of rural community development through cultural, collaborative practices and knowledge exchange. During the study trip TekBunker hosted our project group for the evaluation of the study trip in Albania.



Fight for your right - Sebastia OJF, Laç

Study trip Albania - 22 May 2022

Sebastia NGO - Qendra Rinore Sebastia aims to create a conducive environment for the development of society in the Kurbin area and to influence good governance by lobbying and counseling. The vision of the organization is to create models of citizenship through activism of youngsters in the protection of their interests and rights. With their actions, the community members have tried to leave a mark on the city in an artistic way or other forms of expression. They strongly demand and contribute to have more beautiful public spaces, cleaner environments, and a better administered city. All of this is achieved only by having the desire and will to change things, and the desire to intervene whenever it is deemed reasonable to improve those things that do not go as they should.

Hosts: Emarilda Leti, Elton Laska, Elsa Sula

<https://www.facebook.com/sebastia.kurbin>



A house without guests - the Cultural Center in Laç

Study trip Albania - 22 May 2022

The cultural center is currently undergoing reconstruction and remains inactive most of the time, safe from activities that are brought in by independent cultural groups or projects. Its facilities are in a bad state due to low maintenance and a lack of funding. The building dates back to the communist era. Today, the building is in use by different institutions not only dealing with art and culture but also housing government offices. The Space is divided into several sectors that deal with sports, science and art, operated by a limited staff of three people.

Host: Kreshnik Shqalsi

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063689200878>



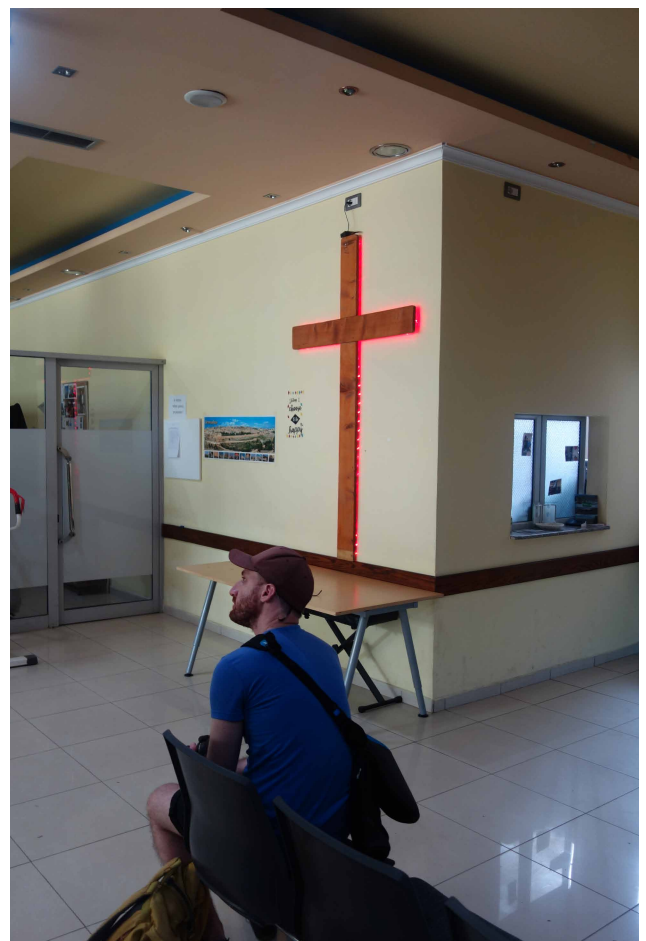
A social center by a church community - Fara miresie, Laç

Study trip Albania - 22 May 2022

Fara miresie is a multifunctional center that aims to support the community by providing various services. These services include physiotherapy for individuals with different abilities, visits from specialist doctors, feeding the poor, and organizing counseling seminars for families and professional courses for people in need. The center also provides assistance for children with different abilities and special classes for individuals who need extra support in various areas. By offering these services, the center aims to improve the quality of life of people in the community, bring hope to those who may be struggling, and make a positive impact on the community as a whole.

Host: Sander Molla

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064845064182>



Post-industrial brownfield - Superfosfati, Laç

Study trip Albania - 22 May 2022

The former fabric of hemicals called “Superfosfati” was shutted down in 1997, and until today it is just a dangerous and polluted space. Civil society recently has conduct a petition for its rehabilitation, but yet there is no response from the responsible authorities. The site is considered very dangerous because of deposits of arsenic that are still present there. Plans to demolish the entire structure and transform the area into a livable one are still ongoing, but there is no clear view of progress.

Hosts: Emarilda Leti, Elton Laska



The Miss Balkans of Architecture - Zogu bridge, Laç

Study trip Albania - 22 May 2022

The Zogu bridge is national heritage of the first category, built during the Zogu's regime in 1927, and awarded with "The Miss Balkans Award" in 2001. The bridge is in risk of collapse due to the illegal activities under its pillars from companies in search of building material. Also, for the bridge, there is an initiative led by the civil society, which made possible its inclusion in the 7 Most endangered Program from Europa Nostra.

Hosts: Emarilda Leti, Elton Laska

<https://7mostendangered.eu/sites/zogu-bridge-albania/>



Multifunctional space for local youth - H.A.N.A, Lezha

Study trip Albania - 23 May 2022

H.A.N.A is the first and only youth center of Lezhe. EED supported the center with a startup grant which proved to be the incentive necessary for it to become a factor in Lezhe and beyond in Albania. It has 250 square meter space and all needed equipment to function as a youth center fostering youth empowerment through volunteerism and activism. H.A.N.A is the abbreviated form of the phrase "Hand to Hand Against Nation Apathy". It will shortly be pronounced H.A.N.A (same as hëna in Gegë dialect, what means „moon“ in English). The founders deliberately intended and welcomed the coincidence; the moon symbolizes the feminine energy and Albanian society has many struggles to face regarding girls/women empowerment. The center serves young people aged 13-29 and until recently was the only youth center in the Municipality of Lezha. The center offers courses in theater and also serves as a creative laboratory for socio-cultural activities such as film / documentary screenings, indoor games, poetry afternoons, book clubs, etc..

Hosts: Fabjiola Ndoj, Albert Forfoj

<https://www.hanacentre.org>



Innovating young women's business - Artizane Leshi, Lezha

Study trip Albania - 23 May 2022

A small startup from Erlinda and Angelina, two creative girls with a passion and a love for crocheting and embroidery, this way keeps alive one of the most important traditions that has been passed on from generation to generation. Their unique products can be earrings that take the name of the first person who orders a particular design, or clothing with controversial and traditionally mixed sayings in a traditional dialect, thoughtful in every detail to the immaculate packaging.

Starting from 2021 they wish to continue this work they do on a larger scale, and why not in the future manage to have their own space and workshop.

Hosts: Angelina Gjoka, Erlinda Mesuli

<https://www.instagram.com/artizaneleshi/>



Preserving the art of crafts - Artistike Zadrime, Lezha

Study trip Albania - 23 May 2022

This space is a laboratory where the owner Tereze Gega, one of the greatest seamstresses and designers in Albania, creates handcrafted textiles, clothes and accessories with the help of other women. Today, Artistike Zadrime employs 17 women, with some working from home while others, including Tereze, work in the shop. Artistike Zadrime sells textiles for the home, traditional clothes, scarves, wallets, bags, and table covers, among others.

The history of Artistike Zadrime dates back to 1993 when, in the village of Blinisht, near Lezha, Tereze started to work at the loom creating gorgeous works. With the help of the Catholic Mission in Albania, other women were invited to join and work with Tereze and, in 2006, the laboratory was moved to Lezha. Thanks to Tereze, the ancient art of loom work was resumed in the villages near Lezha with several women involved in the working process of the laboratory, a process which helped create jobs.

Host: Tereze Gega

<https://www.artistikezadrime.al>



A cultural center for youngsters - Gjergj Lacaj, Lezha

Study trip Albania - 23 May 2022

A building designed to give a space to children to be able to develop their talents at an early age. Currently this building has many functions, hosting some of the activities from the Palace of Culture (That is under construction) and giving its main room to most of the cultural events taking place in the city. The top floor of the building is also being used by the Regional Educational Directory, temporarily, somehow limiting the space for expanding their reach and services. This center offers 5 courses, English, canto, ballet, piano and painting and engages in many activities in the city of Lezha.

Host: Mimoza Shtjefni

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100057121493310>



The outsiders - city walk in Leizha

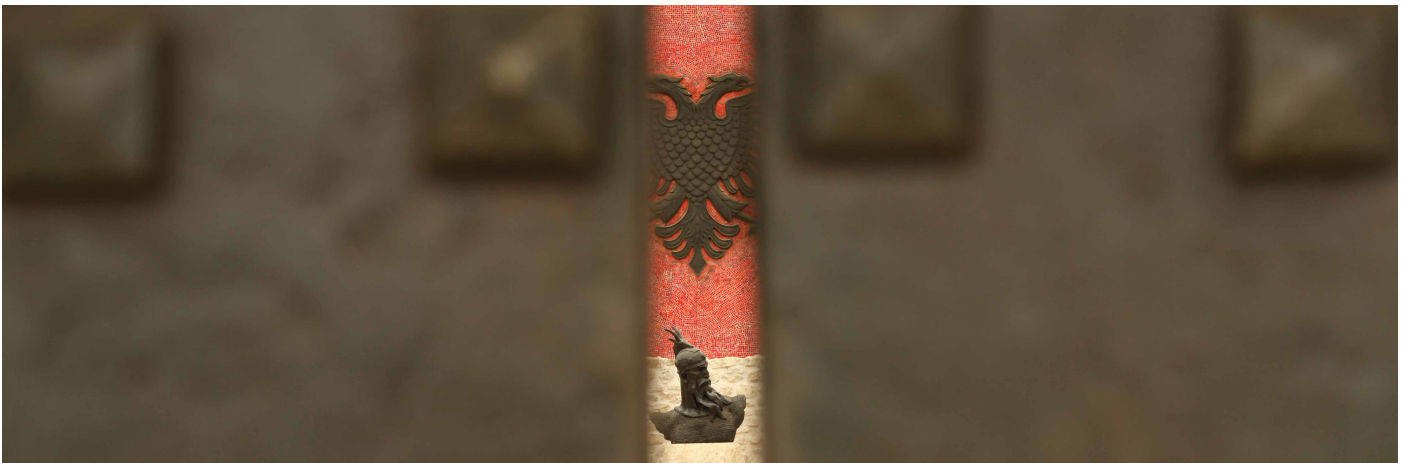
Study trip Albania - 23 May 2022

Lezha Public Library was built in 2001, with an interesting architecture. The building has 5 reading rooms and other facilities, which provided free access and information catering mostly to students with its premises.

Palace of Culture - The construction of the palace of culture in 1983 created greater space and opportunities for cultural activities in the city of Lezha. Until 1990 there were over 220 mass culture activities held in these spaces. These were the golden years. In recent times, the infrastructure was run down, so months prior, began the reconstruction of the building in a modernized design, which has put on hold cultural activities or let for them to take refuge in other smaller venues.

The Memorial of Skanderbeg – It is the most monumental tomb in Albania. Though it does not contain the remains of the greatest Albanian hero, Gjergj Kastriot Skanderbeg, this memorial remains a place of high significance for Lezha and the entire country. Many archaeologists speak of underground treasures, including pagan constructions, dating back to the 3rd century A.D.

Host: Fabjola Ndoj



Protecting a natural habitat - Lagoon of Kune-Vain

Study trip Albania - 23 May 2022

Kune Vaini Lagoon is located southwest of the city of Shengjin, west of the villages of Shengjin Island and Lezha Island. The Lezha wetlands, covering more than 30 square kilometers, constitute an important area for migratory birds, especially, in recent years, for the yellow osprey colony and the small white one (Ardeidae). The region's rich biodiversity and natural assets have resulted in it becoming a protected zone, categorized as a natural reserve. Indeed, Kune-Vain is one of the first protected areas in the history of nature conservation in Albania since it was declared a hunting reserve as early as the 1940s.

Host: Besjona Zour

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064312496885>



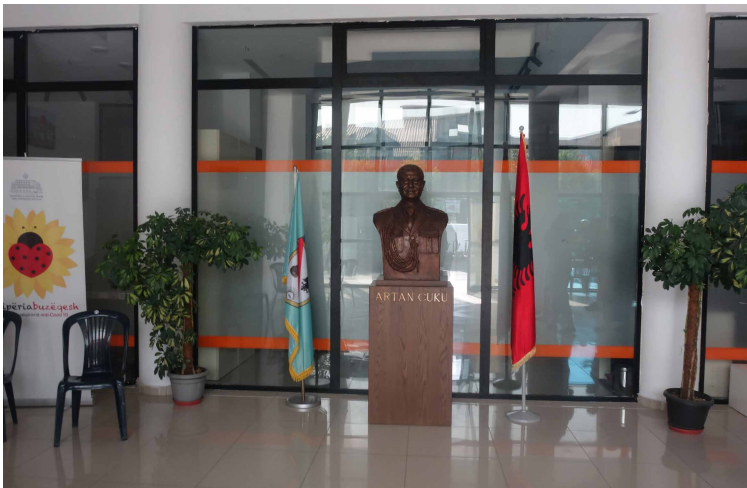
Re-programming a cultural center - the Kamza case

Study trip Albania - 23 May 2022

With a large theater and a library, the structure houses one of Albania's biggest cultural centers. Currently undergoing structural revision and developing an open door program, the space hosts cultural activities related to theater and musicals. More than 10 years after its building, the cultural center is still rarely used by non-formal organizations or cultural groups that are outside the municipality or government direction.

Host: Ridelca Gupe

https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100071015753802&sk=about_profile_transparency



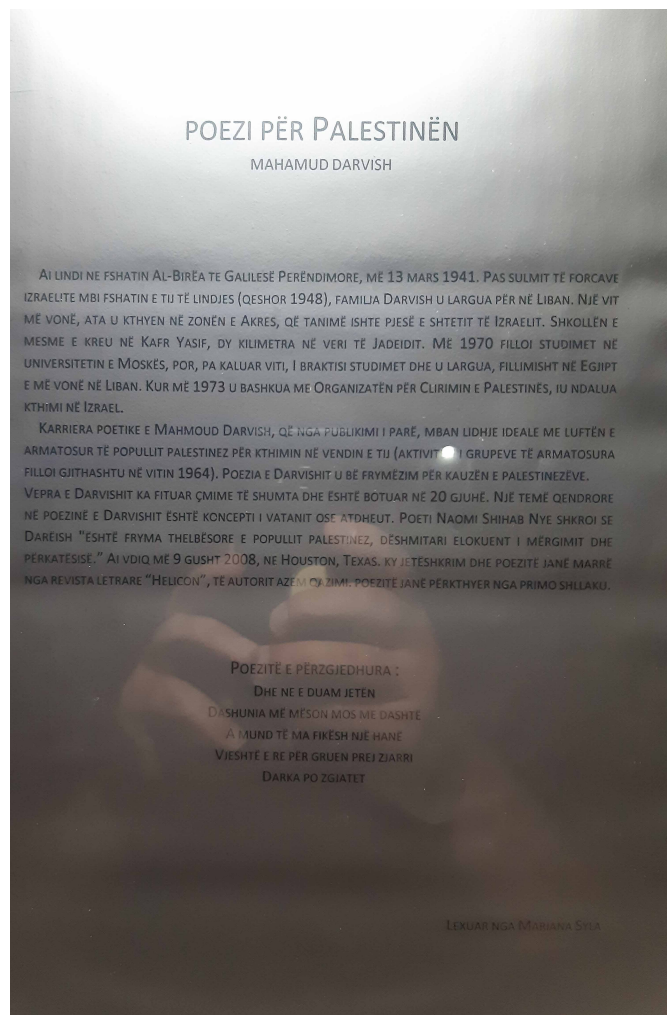
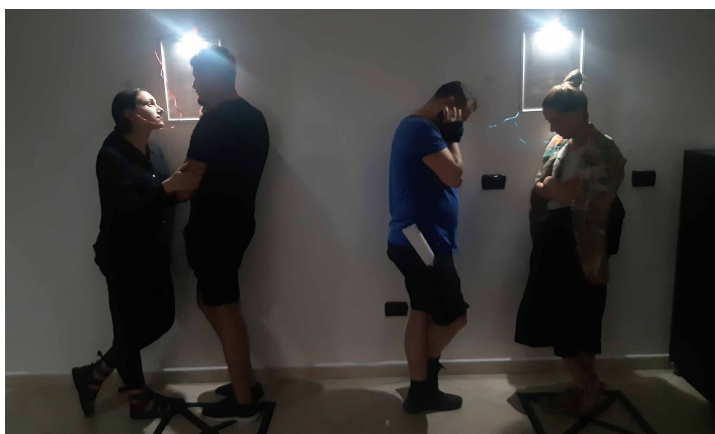
Advocacy and activism through the arts - ATA, Kamza

Study trip Albania - 23 May 2022

ATA, translated as “them” in English language, is a self-established activist group in 2014, that acts and works in the city of Kamza. The group aims forms of activism to make action, knowledge and collective creation more powerful via social theater, urban interventions, exhibitions, workshops, media productions, publishing and the service of legal consultancy called legal clinic.

Hosts: Ronald Qema, Diana Malaj, Aurora Leka, Fidane Leka, Payjo Gjini, Anisa Pepkola

<https://grupiata.com>



The red star neighbourhood - Valias, Kamza

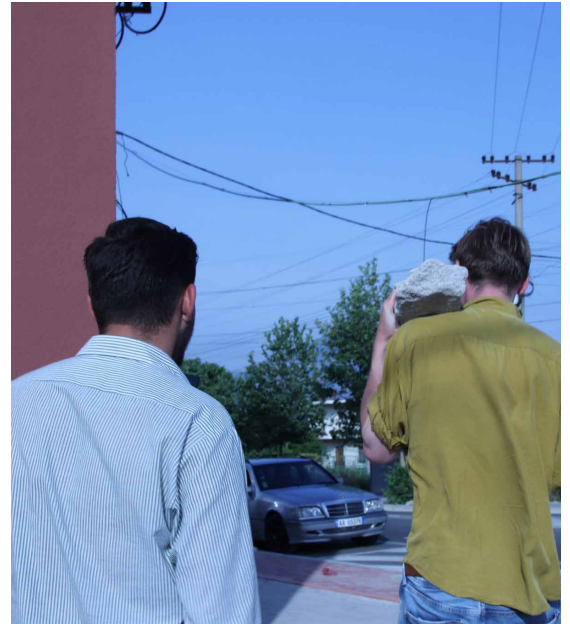
Study trip Albania - 23 May 2022

Valias is one of the neighborhoods of Kamza and is in fact the origin of this young city since the first housing buildings were built for workers of the airport and of the farm "Red Star" here. For Grupi Ata this neighborhood is really important, as it was the first host of their „Theatre of the Oppressed“ in 2020.

After the earthquake, Nov 2019, Valias was declared a reconstruction area, but the buildings were heavily damaged more by the lack of taking care of the roofs than the earthquake itself, but it was part of a bigger reconstruction plan. All this process was somber for the people since through all of it they didn't get any information by the municipalities of what was happening. The whole area has since then been under pressure of gentrification and heavy changes.

Hosts: Ronald Qema

<https://grupiata.com>



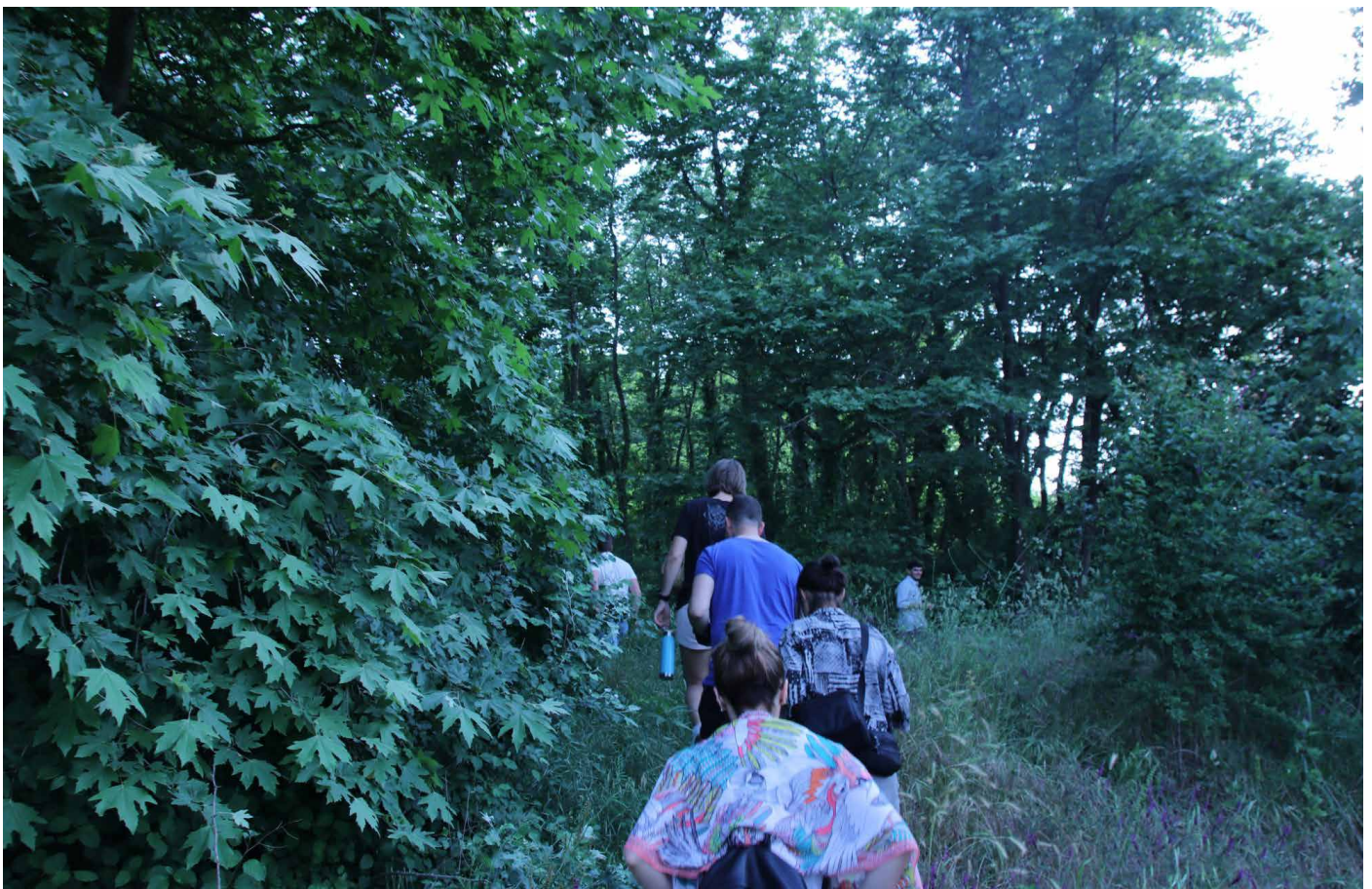
A community cultivated forest - Plepat e Brukes, Kamza

Study trip Albania - 23 May 2022

„Plepat e Brukes” is a community cultivated forest that was created as a health protector for the houses that were next to Tirana River. Laknas was suffering the smelly river going through it and the inhabitants planted trees periodically and took care of the forest since the 1960s. In 2019 the Mayor approved the building of a slaughterhouse and cutting of trees. The people of Laknas started resisting until they won their right of having green and public spaces that also protected them. Grupi ATA stepped in with the law clinic, which offers free law assistance, and followed the whole process over three years, which ended up with the rightful decision in favor of the community.

Hosts: Ronald Qema

<https://grupiata.com>



Recap and co-creation at TekBunker, Tirana

Study trip Albania - 24-25/ 26 May 2022

TekBunker is a grass-root organization working in the fields of rural community development through cultural, collaborative practices and knowledge exchange. Together with the other partners it is a founding member of MOCI - an informal transregional network for civic and cultural collaboration and peer-learning. During the study trip TekBunker hosted our project group for the evaluation of the study trip in Albania, to give the German partners the opportunity to present their backgrounds and programmes, to iterate first ideas about the upcoming micro-fest in Romania, to visit bunkers from the past and to celebrate European solidarity in Tirana with the public.

Hosts: Kevin Dishani, Redina Qose, Ivo Krug

<https://tekbunker.eu>



Collaboration matters!

Study trip Albania - 21 -26 May 2022



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The Mihai and Maria Fratila Foundation
The Fagaras Research Institute
TekBunker
icebauhaus

www.incredereinfagaras.ro
www.icf-fri.org
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Grupi ATA

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Under the label of MOCI (Mobile Open Knowledge and Innovation) we seek to connect and transcend cultural constraints, eliminating digital divides, creating common vocabularies and access to open knowledge. We introduce and co-create tools esp. for empowering young citizens in rural areas or vulnerable contexts, where exchange and co-operation are of fundamental importance in creating free and open societies.

www.moci.space

