

Urbanization and Territorial Organization in pre-1990 Albania. The Connection with Contemporary Migration: A Novel Approach and a Research Agenda

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Abstract

This paper aspires to outline a novel approach to the study of Albanian migrations that would move beyond the usual correlation to poverty; that is the connection of poverty differentials in the places of out-migration in Albania to the directionality of internal and international migrations. Rather, we focus on the differentials of urbanity, inherited from the peculiarities of the pre-1990 regime and its central socio-spatial planning. Our hypothesis asserts that the post-1990 territorial organization of the country, which concerns the diffusion of the 'urban' across an important part of the national territory through a dense network of 'urban' settlements (and/or of settlements with several 'urban' functions) has had an undoubtable impact on the urbanization of life in Albania, and, overall, the lifestyles of the population. In this assertion may lay one of the main drivers of the unprecedented contemporary migrations towards urban and peri-urban destinations within Albania or abroad. Considering that all the above deserve further attention when studying the more recent developments in migration and urbanization in Albania, the objective of the paper is to shape the novel approach, drafting a concise research agenda for this endeavour.

Key words: *Albania, migration, urbanization/territorial organization, rurality/urbanity differentials*

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1. The necessity for a novel approach in the study of migration in Albania

The study of Albanian migration after the fall of the previous regime has been a favourite topic to researchers. This is related inter alia to the fact that, in the last three decades, Albanian migration has been a mainstream phenomenon, earning the label "a laboratory for the study of migration" (King, 2005). As maintained elsewhere (Kokkali, 2024), the critical developments to human mobility that took place in Albania in the previous decades were mainly examined under the perspective of poverty differentials regarded as the main driver of international and internal migration. Overall, the directionality of Albanian migrations was largely associated to the degree of poverty of the places of out-migration. It has been widely admitted that, during the first decade of the transition (1990-2000), migration from poorer, mountainous areas in the northeast was directed towards urban hubs like Tirana, and this pattern was prevalent, while coastal and border areas neighbouring Greece and Italy attracted internal migrants, some of whom joined international migration flows. In the second decade (2001-2011), poverty ceased to be primarily an issue of rural areas; rather, it shifted to urban areas. International migration became widespread, including migrants from central and northeastern regions, with a decrease in emigration from cities. This decrease was offset by returnees due mainly to the economic crisis in Greece and Italy, starting in 2008. According therefore to this mainstream approach relating migration to poverty, the movements of internal migrants 'displaced' poverty from the rural mountainous areas in the northeast to the peri-urban areas of the coastline and the greater Tirana region (Kokkali, 2024: 292-293).

Such reasoning may provide some explanation, but it remains partial, far from forming an explanatory system, in particular as regards the persistence and intensity of the migratory movements in Albania. Even more importantly, it suffers from what A. Sayad has named 'subordination' in the discourse held on emigrants in the countries of emigration themselves. Namely, it is a discourse that lacks autonomy, since it borrows the themes, categories of thought and analysis of the discourse on immigration, essentially held by the host/ immigration countries, which in many cases have been besides former colonial powers (Sayad, 1981: 365-366; 1999: 12; cited in Kokkali, 2024: 294-295). In this line, it would be interesting — as suggested elsewhere (Kokkali, op. cit.) — to investigate why the Albanian Institute for Statistics (INSTAT) constantly monitors the relation of migration to poverty post-1990s; instead of studying—or, even better, studying as well—, for instance, the 'diverted' migration towards the rural settlements around Tirana, that was a trend reported as early as 1975, and a form of 'diverted' urbanization of the capital, despite the harsh restrictions of the regime to banish further expansion of the big Albanian cities (for more, see Borchert, 1975; Sivignon, 1975, Vullnetari, 2012).

In the present paper, we aspire to propose a novel approach to the study of Albanian migrations, moving beyond the (undeniable) correlation to poverty differentials of the areas of out-migration. Rather, we seek to frame Albanian migrations as a constituent part of broader processes of social change (de Haas, 2021; Kokkali, 2024: 268, 295), focusing instead on the differentials of urbanity, which – we argue – may be more relevant to the processes at work in Albania. Against this background, we shift focus from the differentials of poverty and its spatial distribution across the country to the differentials of urbanity, inherited from the period 1945-1990, and their correlation to the directionality of Albanian migrations post-1990 either international or internal. The objective of the paper is to outline the novel approach, shedding more light to the peculiar territorial organization of Albania before 1990, which was the result of specific policies of central planning of the economy, and, in turn, of society and space. Our hypothesis is rooted in the claim that post-1990 migrations did not take place in a vacuum: place and space have diachronically been important to the formulation of the population trends in Albania (or elsewhere) either internal or international. In this sense, the exemplary urban/territorial organization of Albania under the command of the Hodja regime, which succeeded in diffusing urban development into the countryside (via mainly industrialization), while keeping in situ the population of the least favoured regions of Albania, deserves further attention when studying the more recent developments in migration and urbanization in this country.

In this line, in the next section a critical review of the relevant literature is presented, revealing the existing gaps in research, while in the third section particular attention is paid to the peculiar urbanization of Albania since the end of the WWII and, in turn, the inherited territorial organization of the country in the 1990s. In the last two sections, there is an effort to outline the novel approach and to draft a research agenda.

2. State-of-the-art

The study of Albanian migration of the last thirty years has been of great interest to researchers. An important body of research examines the intensity and the directionality of international and internal migrations in the light of poverty and the socio-economic inequalities of the districts and the regions of emigration (Carletto et al., 2004; Castaldo et al., 2005; Zezza et al., 2005; Azzarri et al., 2009 & 2011; Betti et al., 2003; King, 2005; Mckenzie, 2019; Murrugarra et al., 2011; World Bank & INSTAT, 2003; Kokkali, 2010; Vullnetari, 2007 & 2012). Some researchers mapped the regional disparities, as well as income- and non-income poverty per Albanian district (Carletto et al., 2007; Betti et al., 2018; Kotzamanis et al., 2003), examining inter alia the correlation of non-income poverty to the degree of rurality at district level (Kotzamanis et al. op.cit., 50). An important finding of this seminal work concerns the identification of regional and district "specificities" as regards the type and the direction of migratory outflows (international or internal) in

relation to poverty and the degree of rurality (see, for example, Zezza et al., 2005: 191-192; Carletto et al., 2004: 8). In another line of research, internal migration is studied through its impact upon the urbanization of the country which is key (Vullnetari, 2012). Agorastakis & Sidiropoulos (2007) focus on the role of geographic mobility in the dynamics of the capital, while Pojani (2009 & 2010) focuses on the spatial issues that have arisen from Tirana's rapid urban growth. More recently, researchers have been attracted by the changing migration flows between the decades 1989-2001 and 2001-2011. Jarne & Schuler (2018) studied the emergence of metropolitanisation and suburbanisation dynamics in the capital region, while Lerch (2016) examines the relationship between urbanization and international migration, observing a partial redirection of the rural exodus abroad. This research activity, focusing on post-1990 rapid urbanization (mainly of the capital, the axis Tirana-Durrës, as well as of other coastal zones along the littoral), lies largely upon the implicit assumption of a rural exodus marked by the fall of the totalitarian regime. With few exceptions (such as Jarne & Schuler, 2018; Jarne, 2020), this assumption does not take appropriately into account the urban/ territorial development of the country before 1990, despite the existence of considerable relevant findings issued from previous research.

Vako & Dibra (1965), based on the 1955 and 1960 censuses, examined the spatial distribution (at regional level) of urban and rural populations. Sivignon (1970; 1975; 1977; 1983) examined the urban organization of Albania – a network of settlements of different sizes with different functions, through which the population of Albania was kept in the countryside yet employed in non-agricultural jobs. Carrière & Sivignon (1982: 149, 153) refer to the urbanization of the country as a real phenomenon which yet was not portrayed in the statistics of the 1980s. In a similar line, Sjöberg (1992) pointed out that Albania did not account for an example of "zero urban development", as it was supposed to, according to the main explanatory model proposed by Murray *et al.* (1988) for cities planned under central command. Contesting the "zero growth" hypothesis, Sjöberg (1992) offered an alternative explanation, highlighting the significance of the detailed aspects of the traditional central planning model. Strict migratory controls are identified as crucial for achieving zero urban growth as defined by Murray and Szelényi. A case study focusing on patterns of "diverted migration" and the growth of non-urban settlements in the outskirts of the Albanian capital, Tirana, demonstrates how the explanation proposed by Sjöberg was helpful in reinterpreting urbanization specifics under orthodox socialist governance (Sjöberg, 1992). Even more importantly, in introducing the concept of "diverted migration", Sjöberg interpreted the development of the capital's suburbs: in the absence of an opportunity to migrate to Tirana, movements between rural areas took place, fueling settlement in agricultural cooperatives in the capital region. The important findings of Sjöberg's research were not taken any further. Even more, they seem to be largely disregarded when studying recent urbanization phenomena in Albania. As regards internal movements, in the period 1965-1971, Borchert (1975) studied their directionality

and showed the existence of movements from peripheral areas to coastal plains, particularly at the expense of the south and eastern regions of the country.

Relying upon this critical review of the existing literature, the following gaps and discrepancies have been detected:

1. Research activity that has been dealing with urbanization in Albania after 1990 has underestimated the study of the country's urban/territorial development before 1990. The implicit assumption has largely been a rural exodus marked by the fall of the regime in the 1990s.
2. Urban development in Albania, which has been considered as insignificant before 1990, has not been studied with the appropriate attention in relation to more recent urbanization trends, as well as to the Albanian migrations since 1990. The prevailing approach concerns the correlation of the degree of rurality-poverty of the place of emigration with the directionality of migration.
3. The findings of previous research on the directionality of internal migrations before the fall of the regime have not been further studied. Crucially, any similarity in the patterns of internal movements before and after the fall of the regime has not been studied systematically and in depth.

3. The peculiarity of the Albanian territorial organization

Considering the discrepancies revealed by the overview of the existing literature, it becomes clear that the implicit assumption of a rural exodus after the fall of the regime in the 1990s, which would explain massive migrations and extensive urbanization, is quite ambivalent. As aforesaid, research activity dealing with post-1990 urbanization in Albania does not take seriously into account the country's urban/territorial development before 1990. This, then, is also challenging for the study of migration itself, in particular as regards the directionality of internal migrations before and after the fall of the regime.

For these reasons, in the present section we tend to outline the history of urbanization in Albania to highlight the peculiarity of the country's territorial organization, as inherited in the post-1990 era by the previous regime.

3.1. Introduction

During the Roman era, Via Enatia has been a vital link between East and West, easing trade between Italy and Salonika, letting caravans travel across the Mediterranean basin. The economic growth of the regions along this road was enhanced, leading to the establishment of stopping points, markets, and even towns like Elbasan. In the Middle Ages, a network of Adriatic cities emerged, thriving due to their access to maritime ports, such as Durrës, Shkodra, and Vlora, as well as well-maintained connection points, such as Elbasan and Lezhë. In the fifteenth century, the influx of Ottoman forces prompted city residents to escape to the mountains for safety. Many of the cities that have flourished in previous times, reverted to village status. On the other hand, strategically situated cities, such as Shkodra and Elbasan, exemplify how geographic location together with Ottoman policies for territorial control (e.g. garrison towns) fostered urban growth, cultural exchange and economic development (Odile, 1978: 62-64).

In 1912, Albania becomes an independent state. This is not the consequence of a somewhat “national revival”, as it is often implied in the relevant literature (e.g. see Odile, 1978: 65); rather, the Albanian nationalism developed within the broader context of similar movements in the Balkan region, reflecting both shared and distinct political, social and regional patterns (Clayer, 2007). The significant diversity among the “Albanians” is laid upon the multiple geographical, socio-economic, linguistic, religious, and political conditions across the different vilayets and sandjaks. This heterogeneity gives rise to multiple interpretations of “Albanianness”, which has been shaped by different “national visions” (Clayer, 2007; Anagnostopoulou, 2008), and distinct spatio-cultural separations (e.g. North – South, see De Rapper, 2004).

3.2. Tirana: the development of a capital city

The foundation of the capital of Albania revolves around the figure of Sulejman Pasha *Bargjini* or Sulejman Pasha *Mulleti*; in 1614, he built a mosque, an inn, public baths, and a bakery, thus establishing the core of a future town (Kera, 2010; Odile, 1978: 67). In 1920, Tirana was designated as the provisional capital of Albania, a decision that sparked considerable debate. Shkodra, Durrës, Vlorë, and Korçë were argued to be better choices for capital, as all were previously significant cultural and economic urban centers and have historically served as regional capitals or administrative hubs in the region. Tirana had certain advantages, including its central position, considered besides not to belong either to the North or to the South of Albania. Located in the southeastern area of the central plain of Albania, Tirana was very close to the port of Durrës (just 40 kilometers), making it relatively accessible to the outside world (Kera, 2010). At the time, Tirana was a town

covering an area of 305 hectares, with the residential zone making up 98.2% of the town's space and a population of 15,000 residents, resulting in a density of about 50 inhabitants per hectare (Aliaj et al. 2003: 28, 30, 32-33).

When the partisans gained control over Albania in 1944, Tirana was a small city of 50,000 inhabitants. Although more than 85% of the population lived from agriculture at the time, this latter was rudimentary. Besides, there was almost no manufacturing industry (Abitz, 2006: 33). Following the founding of industry in 1949, which aimed at fostering economic growth, the expansion of Tirana marked a significant transformation of the city (Odile, 1978: 69). The relatively rapid urbanization of Albania from 1945 to 1960¹ has led to the depopulation of several southern mountain districts². Tirana has absorbed most of this urban growth. Pandi Geço (1970³) has shown that Tirana has importantly grown due to in-migration from the southern part of Albania, which was also the most advanced part of Albania, in economic and societal terms (Sivignon, 1975: 333).

In 1960, there is a major shift in the urbanization of Albania. The so-called "cultural revolution" of the country triggered -among other things- a set of anti-urban policies that sought to abolish urban-upon-rural domination. This mainly meant to maintain a numerical balance between the "urban" and the "rural" (populations). In this context, although urban growth rates remained high⁴, they were only associated with a very high birth rate, while only small new towns continued to benefit from some migratory influx. In all the others, and particularly in-migration towards Tirana was prohibited (Kokkali and Rembeci, 2024: 51; Jarne, 2018).

Nonetheless, in 1975, Tirana stands out as the only major city in Albania, with a population of around 180,000 inhabitants, that is seven times larger than what it was in 1938. Tirana is also the fastest-growing city, and we could only find similar growth rates only when looking at newly established towns ("exemplary cities" emerged, for instance, due to the oil industry). In contrast, Shkodra, the next largest city, has 55,000 residents. Similarly, Durrës, Vlora, Korçë and Elbasan, count for 40,000 to 55,000 residents each. Behind them, in 1970, there are also seven cities with populations between 10,000 and 25,000, while nine others count from 6,000 to 10,000 inhabitants. It is also worth noting that, by 1974, a total of 63 localities were designated as cities, with some having fewer than 1,000 residents (Sivignon, 1975: 334).

The period from 1960 to 1991 is indeed marked by the creation of new cities ("exemplary cities"), but also by the severe restriction of the development of existing cities, particularly Tirana (see below). With the fall of the regime and the consequent liberalization of

¹ According to the statistics produced under the communist regime, the urbanization rate (%) in Albania, across the successive censuses ranged from 14.6% in 1918, 16.0% in 1926, 21.8% in 1945, 27.4% in 1955 to 32.0% in 1960 (Jarne, 2020: 205).

² It is to note that these districts were participating in emigration across the Atlantic even before the Second World War (Sivignon, 1975).

³ Geographer and professor at the University of Tirana, Pandi Geço (1970); cited in Sivignon (1975).

⁴ 32.5% in 1969, 34.1% in 1979 to 36.4% in 1989 (Jarne, 2020: 205).

migration, there is a recovery of urbanization processes with the contribution of rural populations. These latter, through self-housing practices, settle in new "arbitrary" settlements in the suburbs mainly of Tirana (Kokkali and Rembeci, 2024: 51; Jarne, 2018).

Since 1991, Tirana and its suburbs have been growing in a spectacular way. On the contrary, the network of the so-called "exemplary" cities gradually collapsed after 1991, as lifting the travel ban worked mainly for the benefit of the Tirana-Durrës metropolitan area. It is to note that some cities initially resisted the decline, since emigration to Tirana and abroad was offset by intra-regional influxes of rural population; still, since the 2000s, all these cities have lost population, with the exception of Sarandë, a coastal city, which was the only one to develop outside the Tirana-Durrës metropolitan axis (Jarne, 2018).

3.3. The peculiarity of the Albanian urban/territorial organization

According to Murray *et al.* (1988), Albania moved away from the Soviet model of primitive socialist accumulation and adopted a "zero growth" strategy by accumulating capital in rural communes and converting agricultural surplus into the development of a local industry⁵. Amid international isolation and authoritarian rule, Albania showcased its capability to implement the principles of the planned economy (Aliaj *et al.*, 2003; Jarne, 2018: 3). The country stands out in Eastern Europe for its effective control over urbanization, thanks to its state monopoly.

In Tirana, as in other socialist cities, urban planning aimed to address the problems inherited from capitalism and create a new city pattern reflecting a classless society. The principles were egalitarianism and planned urbanization, striving to provide equal living conditions for all social classes, ultimately aiming for a single working class across urban and rural areas (Abitz, 2006: 32). The real Albanian singularity in the context of Eastern Europe became evident in 1960 when Albania shifted its foreign policy and aligned with Maoist China. This led to the launch of Albania's "cultural revolution," which was characterized by anti-urban policies aiming at abolishing urban-over-rural domination and maintaining a numerical balance between the rural and the urban population. The main characteristic of such a policy was the spatial distribution of the country's population by one-third in urban areas and two-thirds in rural ones (Aliaj, 2003; Jarne, 2018: 3).

Control over urban growth was kept on the basis of the 'yellow line', that was concerning town borders established around every big city, separating the 'rural' from the 'urban'. If population grew fast to reach the limit of the 'yellow line', people were redirected to existing or new cities. There were three main criteria in order to receive the status of 'town': (i) the nature of the economic activity, which had to be dominated by jobs in the industry, but also in the local administration; (ii) the number of inhabitants (with a minimum

⁵ As aforementioned, Sjöberg (1992) contested this thesis, particularly as regards the Albanian case.

ranging from 2,000 to 5,000, yet without any fixed limit set); (iii) a social dimension concerning urban-lifestyles. It is important to grasp that such policy aspired to harmonize the network of the country's settlements, considering that rural settlements were mainly characterized by the dominance of agricultural activity and the lack of any administrative function (Aliaj, 2003: 27-28).

The share of the urban population in the mid-1970s was counting for only one-third of the total, despite a broad definition of the "city", which included any locality in which more than half of the workforce was engaged in non-agricultural activities. The pace of urbanization, which was relatively fast until 1960, stabilized by 1975, with the urban population share remaining nearly the same as in 1965. This stagnation was rooted in the aforementioned policy, achieved mainly through the spread of industry across the country (Sivignon, 1975: 333).

If Albanian statistics accounted for 63 cities in 1975, this was indeed due to the transition of villages to urban status by modification of their activity. This is how the establishment of the so-called "exemplary cities" has been implemented. Mining towns emerged from coal deposits (such as Mborja near Korçë, Krraba southeast of Tirana, and Memaliaj near Tépelen), while there existed oil-based cities as well (Qytet Stalin, Cerrik, Patos, and Ballshi), but also cities that grew around industries and were not linked to natural resources (such as Laç with its fertilizer factory). Villages also developed around iron ore and non-ferrous deposits (like Prenjasi, Rubik, and Kukes). Even more importantly, some agricultural villages expanded due to state farms and the combination of different cooperatives: bringing together administrative services, schools, media, workshops for the repair of agricultural equipment, craftsmen and shops, cinemas, gyms and meeting places, has been sufficient to form small towns, like Maliq and Shjak. It is therefore rather eloquent that the coastal plain from Tirana to Shkodra, which was previously very sparsely populated, by 1975 hosted a series of small towns (such as Kamza, very close to Tirana, Mamuras and Miloti). In the same line, the Myzeqeja plain was also populated with small new towns (Sivignon, 1975: 334-336).

In contrast, historical urban centres such as Shkodra, Korçë, Gjirokastër and Berat experienced only a modest increase, whereas Elbasan grew at a higher rate. Cities such as Gjirokaster, Korçë and Shkodra, whose prosperity was intrinsic to multiple relations with Greece and Yugoslavia, when the frontiers were hermetically closed, they became peripheral as to the new gravity centre of the country, which had shifted Centre-West. The pre-war commercial activity with the neighbouring countries was now far from having a significant role in the economy of Albania. And this has been decisive for the decline of cities like Korçë and Shkodra. This latter has been the only major city in Northern Albania, and the most populated among the Albanian cities by 1938. Just like in the case of Korçë, its population had doubled since 1938, since different kinds of industries (mainly primary processing ones, such as canning, dairy, flour milling, tobacco, wood, etc.) came to take over the old crafts and commercial activity. Gjirokaster and Berat were also important

centres before the war. They were classified as museum cities, and for this purpose they have been restored and protected.

Elbasan is a different case, as it has benefited from its very central position in Albania and a good connection with Durrës and the South-East. It has gradually become a centre for woodworking, tobacco, canning, and, overall, the iron and steel industry of the country. By 1975, the steel plant of Elbasan was expected to employ 13,000 people. Considering, however, the set objective to limit city growth, Elbasan was not exempt; moving labour back and forth from nearby villages and towns has rather been preferred (Sivignon, 1975: 340-341).

Still, as Michel Sivignon notes in 1975 with respect to the growth of Tirana, *“the very development of the Albanian economy makes it very difficult to limit the expansion of Tirana, the country's only major city. Nevertheless, immigration to the capital is severely limited and the rate of increase [by 1975] is much lower than before 1960: from 1960 to 1970, the annual increase of the population is 2.6% per year, half of which is due to the excess of births on deaths. The share of Tirana to the total population is still only 7.5%, which is little compared to the situation in other Balkan countries, apart from Yugoslavia”*. Sivignon highlights, besides, the fact that the *“effort to limit urban development has enabled Albania to push its industrial development at the lowest possible cost, while avoiding the flight of the population of the least favoured regions. The deliberately limited urbanization of Albania is even more striking considering that the total population of the country is growing by 2.5% per annum, compared to a birth rate of about 35%. Limiting urbanization is therefore allowing for an increase of the rural population at approximately 2% per annum”* (Sivignon, 1975: 342-343).

Against this background and while seeking to outline a novel approach to the study of Albanian migrations in connection with the peculiar urbanization and territorial organization of pre-1990 Albania, in the next section, we draft a research agenda for this endeavour. Our hypothesis asserts that post-1990 territorial organization, that is the diffusion of the ‘urban’ across an important part of the Albanian territory, and, in turn, the making of a network of urban settlements with different dimensions and/or functions, has had an undoubtable impact on the urbanization of life in Albania, the customs of the population, and, overall, the lifestyles, which probably become *irreversibly* urban and urbanized. In this sense, even when – later and essentially post-1990 – some of these settlements were downgraded in the urban hierarchy, urban mores and lifestyles should have resisted. Probably, they become, besides, one of the main drivers of the unprecedented migrations towards urban and peri-urban destinations either within Albania or abroad.

4. A Research agenda

The peculiarity of the territorial organization in Albania due to the state monopoly over planning, in particular the attempt to effectively control urban growth by diffusing non-agricultural activities in the countryside, resulted – among other things- in the extensive urbanization of the Albanian society. As previously maintained, this pattern (and its various impact) has not been taken effectively into account insofar when studying the recent trends in urbanization and migration in Albania. We aspire to delve deeper into this aspect, estimating that it is key to the proposed approach herein.

This endeavour would, first, involve the following objectives:

- (i) To create reliable data, metadata and indicators concerning migration and urbanization trends in Albania. This entails in-depth investigation of post-war demographic and territorial (including socio-economic) developments in Albania.
- (ii) To problematise the very concept of ‘rural’ (and ‘urban’) in a command economy such as postwar Albania; and to construct appropriate indicators as regards the evolution of the territorial organization of Albania in the postwar era.
- (iii) To seek for a new comprehensive method of analysis to reach the above objectives. This entails developing an innovative methodology and theoretical approach both for the study of urbanization and migration in Albania. It is necessary to move beyond existing approaches. Literature recalled above suggests that we should pay more attention to topics that are not covered by the scheme poverty-rurality-migration as do the usual approaches of Albanian migratory patterns.
- (iv) On the basis of the above, to correlate (if applicable) urbanization and migration trends in postwar Albania. And also, to correlate (if applicable) previous and current patterns of internal and international migration in Albania.

The methodology proposed for the implementation of these research objectives is described as follows. The central research questions are listed in section A below, which may be tackled based on specific steps to be taken, as they are listed in section B. Section C presents some more generic methodological choices relevant to our research endeavour.

A. Central research questions to investigate

1. Urban/rural/territorial and socio-economic organization of Albania post-1990. The urban development of Albania until 1990 has been portrayed in official statistics in a specific way, using a very large definition of the ‘town’ to achieve a numerical balance between the ‘urban’ and the ‘rural’.

1.1. Moving beyond the delimitation of the population as rural/urban, in what ways could we describe the urban/ spatial/ territorial and socio-economic organization of the Albanian territory before 1990?

1.2. Do we have any alternative approaches to study the territorial and socio-economic organization of Albania post-1990? Is it relevant to study the progressive urbanization of lifestyles (if any)? And in what ways/ methods could this be achieved?

2. Migration and migratory patterns pre- and post-1990

2.1. Can we trace any correlation between internal migration patterns before and after 1990? What was the impact of internal migration patterns on the spatial distribution of the population? What might be the reasons for the identification of similar patterns of internal migration (if any) along the different periods?

2.2. What was the evolution of external migration patterns (post-1990) and what was their impact on the spatial distribution of the population remaining in Albania?

3. Territorial organization of Albania & migratory patterns.

Can we trace any correlation between the territorial and socio-economic organization of Albania pre-1990 and the directionality of internal and external migration flows post-1990? Here, it is of relevance the urban lifestyles adopted in the countryside and in settlements that were very broadly construed as 'urban', in the period 1960-1990. Do we have any information/resources about these urban lifestyles? May a population lose its 'urbanity', including its urban lifestyles, with the degradation of a settlement in the urban hierarchy as time passes? (See, for instance Jarne, 2020: 322) regarding the urbanization in Albania between 1918-2011, and in particular the typology proposed regarding the evolution of the urban hierarchy.)

Does the redefinition of categories such as "urban"/ "rural" (population), etc. in pre-capitalist Albania impact on the patterns of internal and external migration post-1990? In other words, can we still identify a major movement from the afore-called "rural" areas (mainly of the mountainous regions) towards the afore-called "urban" (or more urbanized) areas (such as Tirana and the coastline) as regards the direction of post-1990 internal migratory movements? Can we still identify a major movement from more urbanized areas (Tirana, the coastline) abroad in the first two decades of the transition? (that is before the generalization of international migration of Albanians notwithstanding the region/district of emigration which occurred after 2012).

B. The consecutive steps to take to respond to the above research questions are as follows (numbers apply to central questions in section A above):

1.1. To describe in alternative ways the urban/ spatial/ territorial and socio-economic organization of the Albanian territory before 1990 it would be relevant:

(a) to study across 1989 & 2001 censuses (in priority) the economic activity of the "urban" & "rural" population, focusing on the performance of non-agricultural work by "rurals". Of particular relevance are indices calculated by INSTAT in the aforementioned censuses, such as: Ratio of employed persons whose place of work is a Farm/Not Fixed Premises outside home to the total number of employed persons (per Commune); Ratio of employed persons with Seasonal job/with second job to the total employed persons (per Commune); etc.

(b) to study the definitions and classifications of terms such as "urban"/ "rural" (population), "town", "village", "settlement", etc., across the population censuses before the transition period, starting from the 1989 census and going backwards (1979, 1969, etc. according to data availability⁶); and, also, to reflect on alternative classifications of Albania's residential network of settlements based on broader criteria deriving from (a) above;

(c) to problematize the very concept of 'rural'/'urban' and related terms (such as urbanity/ rurality/ territoriality, etc.); and to enrich/redefine them by broadening the evaluation criteria based on steps (1.1.a) to (1.1.b) above;

(d) to identify what other data deriving from the Albanian census of 1989 (and older) might contribute to the task of redefinition as described in step 1.1.c above (e.g. comparison between percentages of "rural" and "urban" households with assets such as TV, electric cooking stove, washing machine, microwave oven, air-conditioner, computer, car, etc.).

The review of these terms and classifications stems from the necessity to describe appropriately the socio-spatial and economic development of Albania in the decades 1970-1990, beyond definitions that may have served the ideology of the then central state, hypothesizing that such classifications (may) blur the image of the urban development and the degree of urbanization in postwar Albania. This review will be achieved by redefining the criteria according to which a territorial unit in pre-capitalist Albania was characterized as urban/rural. Besides, it is of relevance to take more seriously into account other models of territorial organization, beyond the dipole urban/rural.

1.2. Considering the different roles performed by the different "urban" and "rural" settlements in the postwar period, it is also of relevance:

(e) to reflect on alternative classifications of Albania's residential network of settlements, taking under consideration the productive structure of the local economies (as reflected in census data), as well as to the functional roles played by a wide range of Albanian settlements to the provision of different kinds of services to the 'urban'/'rural' population. This entails to propose a novel type of grading/ hierarchization of the residential network based on services and support provided to local populations ("living frame"/ "cadre de vie"; for instance, see Goussios & Rieutort, 2018).

⁶ Jarne (2020) provides a relevant classification which may constitute a starting point of considerable value.

(f) to assess the “living frame” of different settlements. Of relevance, here, are indices calculated by INSTAT such as rural pharmacies per 10.000 inhabitants (commune level), hospital beds per 10.000 inhabitants (nuts 2 level), post offices per 10.000 inhabitants (commune level), number of teachers per students (nuts 2 level), etc. It is also meaningful to study consumption patterns (if applicable).

To engage with alternative approaches for the study of the territorial (including the socio-economic) organization of post-1990 Albania, in particular as regards the study of the urbanization of lifestyles (if any), it would have a sense:

(g) to involve with the theories and methods of Sociology of Lifestyles (see for instance, Giddens, A. (1991), *Modernity and self-identity: self and society in the late modern age*, Cambridge: Polity Press; Bourdin, A. & A. Masbouni (Eds.) (2004), *Un urbanisme des modes de vie*, Paris: Le Moniteur Editions).

2.1. Internal mobility per period.

Studying inter-regional and inter-communal changes of residence, Borchert (1975) found that, in the period 1965-1971, there was a strong tendency for moving from the peripheral areas to the industrial triangle of Durrës-Tirana-Elbasan. Similar patterns of internal mobility have also been registered post-1990. These have yet been positively correlated to the degree of poverty/rurality of the districts and the regions of emigration. To review this restricted vision, it is proposed to analyze at NUTS III level the following aspects of internal mobility:

(h) the changes of permanent residence across the Albanian censuses of 1989 and 2001; at a second stage, and according to the availability of and accessibility to data, previous censuses will also be examined, i.e. 1979, 1969, etc. Special attention will be paid to the relation between the place of birth and the place of last residence, as well as between the permanent population and the place of residence one and five years before each census date. The objective of this study is to identify the directionality of internal flows along different periods of time. It is also to assess the impact of these flows on the territorial organization of Albania.

(i) to study (if possible) the intensity of commuting flows (‘diverted migration’), to identify the differentiated dynamics of the main employment basins in Albania circa 1990, and backwards.

(j) to detect and analyze any common patterns of internal mobility before and after 1990, based on the 2001 Albanian census, which provides information on previous residence (see also Jarne, 2020).

2.2. External mobility per period.

(k) to map the places that “absorb” and “expel” Albanian migrants respectively in Greece, Italy, and Albania (see Carletto et al., 2004; Zezza et al., 2005). This will be achieved mainly through the study of census data in the three countries. Let us note that Italy and

Greece remain the two main destinations of the Albanian out-migrations, in the last three decades.

(l) to propose a relevant taxonomy of these places, based on their profile and characteristics (socio-economic parameters, district/region of last residence in Albania before the migratory episode, etc.), according to data provided from the Greek, Italian and Albanian censuses of 1991, 2001, 2011 and 2021.

3. To trace correlations (if applicable) between the patterns of territorial organization and the migration trends in postwar Albania, it is proposed:

(m) in continuation of (l) above, consider the reviewed notions/ terms /categories of population/places/territories as defined in steps 1 and 2. This task entails reconsidering the directionality of Albanian migrations either internal or international.

(n) to examine whether the revised notions/terms/categories and the novel indicators applied result in novel conclusions about the relation of the territorial organization of Albania pre-1990 and the migratory movements pre- and post-1990. Of relevance, here, is to re-examine the (insofar) mainstream hypothesis of the prevalence of international migration in those Albanian districts that circa 1990 were characterized as highly urbanized.

C. Overall, the proposed approach relies heavily on the following:

(i) The systematic analysis of the scientific literature and its critical review (with some emphasis put on research carried out during the decades 1960-1990) in relation to: (a) key concepts: city/town/countryside; classification criteria (urban/rural population; structure of the local economy/consumption/ employment; urban/rural lifestyle/living frame, etc.); urbanization/ (degree of) urbanity/ rurality, etc.; (b) in relation to internal migratory movements in Albania and the spatial distribution of the population during the period 1945-1990; (c) in relation to internal migratory movements in Albania and the spatial distribution of the population in the period after 1990, c) in relation to international migratory movements in Albania and the spatial distribution of the population after 1990.

(ii) The mobilization of a wide range of indicators to qualify the migratory movements and to identify the geographically differentiated patterns over time. The construction of novel indicators to describe appropriately the evolution of the urban development/organization of the Albanian territory in the postwar era will allow for a revised view of the notions of 'urbanity' and 'rurality' in a command economy such as postwar Albania. This entails to assess the different functions/roles played by the different villages, towns and cities through the Albanian territory in the pre-transition era. It is proposed to calculate indicators on a 10-year basis at village level in Albania (NUTS III).

(iii) The mobilization of Cartography/thematic maps: 1. Cartographic depiction of internal migration flows at the lowest possible spatial level before the fall of the socialist regime. 2. Cartographic depiction of internal and international migration flows at the lowest

possible spatial level after the fall of the socialist regime. 3 Comparison of the directionality of migrations before and after the fall of the regime and identification of similar migration patterns (if any) as regards the communes/districts/regions of migrant outflow and influx.

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