# The village of Springs

Enhancing landscape values of Tushemisht, Albania.
Towards a sustainable recreational and urban development

## 1. Reflection on the topic of the Flowscapes studio and if applicable to the lab

My encounter with the village of Tushemisht happened at an early age, while on vacations with my family. The characteristics of this village, such as its numerous water sources and fields planted with fruit trees, would be engraved in my memory. Several years later, I returned to this place as a member of a team of architects responsible for the design of a complex of two-store wooden villas near the Drilon National Park. At that time, my professional training was limited to the spatial and functional study of the design object itself. As such, my focus was predominantly on the relationship between buildings with limited attention to the relationship between the building and space and environment. Tushemisht is blessed by canals of spring water channelled throughout the village, passing around, under, and through the various houses, most of which have direct access to natural spring water. Its specific natural characteristic ensures that this village has a boundless potential for tourism. Hence, there is a need to carefully compile a set of guidelines which will ensure that the village can incorporate new buildings and objects while retaining its natural characteristics pertaining to the canals of spring water.

The current project tackles the transformation of the landscape territory and its space, taking care of the spatial quality of the landscape while at the same time preserving and strengthening the individual cultural character of the Tushemisht village. As such, this project is listed under the Flowscapes studio. The proposed urban structure of the village in the new design is not only limited to the five typologies of the landscape which are strongly linked to the character of the place, but it expands further to take into account the typologies of housing by looking at the relationship between housing units and water. This project is part of the *'Laboratory of Circular Water Stories',* as such the focus is on water and all the forms it takes in this village: from its source, numerous canals and streams, to the outflow into Lake Ohrid. The new routing system proposed by this project is based on the sensory experience created by moving in space through connecting sequences.

## 2. A description of the societal relevance

Once a communist nation, Albania underwent a traumatic transitional phase. In 1997, the country experienced a short state of mob-ruled semi-anarchy triggered by the swindling of the life savings of many of the citizens by elaborate Ponzi schemes and resulting in 5000 people being killed. The violent signs of transition left their mark in Albania's landscape, its urban structure and urban landscape. In recent years, the territory of the country has been transformed by a very rapid urbanisation during which many characteristic natural and urban areas have been damaged. The village of Tushemisht and the whole area of the city of Pogradec are a concrete example of these transformations where the main underlying factor of these changes in the environment was of economic nature as well as the need for generating rapid housing. In the midst of these rapid changes, the country clearly lacked an urban plan to guide the landscape transformation by creating space for development and at the same time preserving the characteristic elements of the place. As Professor F. Palmboom points out, space and place, although different, are closely linked in an ongoing relationship. This project aims to provide a set of guidelines to accommodate the economic and social needs which are an irrefutable consequence of any type of transition while offering a manner to safeguard the landscape of the region. Preservation of the landscape is essential, particularly as we enter an age of rising global consciousness on climate, environmental and ecological issues. Besides bringing new solutions for all kinds of existing challenges, it is crucial for landscape architects to protect and preserve the genius loci. The project aims to show how one can balance economic and social needs with a healthy and aesthetic landscape.

3. A reflection on the strong and weak sides of the chosen (design)methodology.

The design is based on the observations constructed through a case study, a research strategy and an empirical inquiry that investigated the landscape typologies within the real-life context of the village of Tushemisht. One of the strengths of design methodology is the careful investigation of the region by focusing on its landscape characteristics and transition through history. The main design methodology consisted of walking through the village as an aesthetic practice. Walking was an exceptional manner to gain insights on the site which eventually led to the development of guidelines that are specifically tailored for the village and are well equipped to tackle some of its unique challenges. On the other side, the choice for a case study design comes with a well-known set of weaknesses, the most of important of which are related to the lack of scientific rigour, presence of subjective bias in design (presence of the observer's own interpretation and vision), and difficulty to replicate observations. Moreover, some of the strengths of the study can be seen conditionally as weaknesses. For example, walking is presented as a strength of the design, however, it also means that this method is time-consuming. Further, while the project proposes a set of guidelines carefully crafted for the village of Tushemisht, this also means that the project provides little basis for the generalisation of results to the wider global landscape.

4. A discussion of possible problems that occurred during data collection and how one tried to overcome or compensate these problems.

The data collection process has been one of the most challenging phases of the project. The available maps had many shortcomings which slowed down the research process. To overcome this challenge, I recreated maps based on the information obtained from google map as well as on personal experience visiting the village throughout the years. Moreover, creating historical maps was particularly challenging due to lack of visual information. The historical maps, which were a crucial aspect of this project, were created and drawn from scratch based on a series of interviews with old locals within the village, as well as through reading artistic literature and reviewing old photographs.

5. A discussion of possibilities to generalise the results of the research.

As mentioned earlier, one of the weaknesses pertaining to the case study nature of the design is the generalisability of results. The current project offers a tailored design for the village of Tushemisht which cannot be immediately applied to wider landscapes. However, this project consciously proposes a design strategy rather than a blueprint design and as such allows some room for generalisability. A blueprint design would not only be too subtle but would lose its effectiveness very quickly by failing to adapt to future changes. A design strategy is more flexible and provides space for customisation and interpretation from the developers (in this case the residents). In the project, I have defined a set of general rules which aim to offer guidance during building and ensure that some characteristic qualities of the village are preserved and improved through enhancing and emphasising them. Therefore, the design strategy offered here can be generalised to other rural areas that are also governed by a culture where informality plays an important role in landscape transformation. Although this village is specific and special in its kind, the design strategy used here can serve as an example for other rural areas with special landscape features such as those encountered in Albania.

6. A reflection on ethical issues and dilemmas. (lectures at the start to the master track!)

Albania suffers from pervasive problems generated by the low economic income of its residents on one side and high governmental corruption on the other. The stakeholders of this projects, namely the residents and developers, find themselves in constant moral dilemmas that are often dominated by economic rather than social or environmental interests. This is perhaps a familiar dilemma in all those regions that need to accommodate increasing population demands in a restricted area. The (landscape) architect is constantly confronted with challenging situations in which they need to balance the competing interests of different parties. For example, catering solely to the stakeholders (loyalty) would mean in this case maximising space use and profit. However, this goes against the code of ethics for a landscape architect who is responsible for

keeping a balance between building and preserving the characteristics of the site. In this project, I proposed design guidelines that allow space for new developments while setting harsh criteria on building density and size. The project offers some solutions to the moral dilemma in form of trade-offs. For example, instead of big scale multi family housing, the residents are offered a landscape that would promote tourism and hence contribute to the local economy. On other specific solution pertains to the inclusion of a fruit park in the design which would facilitate the commercialisation of local produce.

Moreover, this project takes into account the current situation of informal housing in Tushemisht. The design strategy uses a flexible design language that is able to accommodate possible customisation and interpretation from the developers (in this case the residents).

7. Difficulties to visit the site, digital mentoring and other issues related to the Corona-crisis.

The design of this project was carried out during the period of the global pandemic COVID-19 and as such was influenced not only by the situation in general but also in particular by the lack of attendance at the faculty and social isolation. Digital mentoring went smoothly, and site visits were conducted before the pandemic spread. The project may have benefited from discussions and information exchange with other students of this master track, which were rendered impossible during the 'intelligent' lockdown.

MSC THESIS LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Bledar zaho

Student number: 4925904

First mentor

Ir. Denise Piccinini

Lecturer at the Section of Landscape Architecture

Second mentor

Ir. L.P.J. van den Burg

Bachelor Coordinator Urbanism

Delegate of the board of Examiners

Peter Koorstra

Ass. Prof. Form and Modelling Studies

Delft University of Technology

Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment

Master Thesis - Landscape Architecture track

Flowscapes Graduation Studio

Graduation Studio: Circular Water Stories