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A Piece of Land to Start from Scratch

Co-creating Kamza from Below

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Symposium of Urban Design History and Theory

convened by
Janina Gosseye
Tom Avermaete
Matthew Heins

1-3 November 2023
Delft, The Netherlands & online

2 November 2023
08:30 - 10:30
Collegezaal

A Piece of Land to Start From Scratch: Co-creating Kamza From Below

Dorina Pllumbi

During five decades of totalitarian state-socialism in Albania, the movement of the population was extremely limited and centrally controlled. Anarchic times followed the fall of the regime in 1991, and the state weakened to the point of losing control over the territory. This triggered a migratory wave, not only out of the country but also within, towards the capital city of Tirana and its vicinity. Kamza, from an agrarian area close to the capital, turned into an arrival settlement for many families moving from the northeastern part of Albania where they had massively lost their jobs and social services previously provided by the state. First shelters resembled the primordial hut made out of local materials, like wood, plastic, or metal sheets. In the absence of the state, during the first years of settling in Kamza, the inhabitants had to rely fully on communal resources, in solidarity, kinship, and traditional oral regulations inherited from the place of origin. This gave Kamza the character of an autonomous, anarchic city, whose inhabitants were constantly stigmatized and othered as the newcomers, the squatters of land, and as those abiding by tribal customary self-organizational rules beyond the state and the market.

I employ the concept of commons and commoning to reveal stories of co-creation of the city but also to recognize and evaluate the capacity of this concept to be fully operational in political transition and exceptional times of the absence of the state. Practices of commoning in Kamza are not a sporadic manifestation, but the entire city is created out of them. Looking into Kamza through the lens of the theory of urban commons subverts the mainstream stigma towards this place as an anomalous reality fabricated both from the domestic politics and professionals of the discipline of architecture and urbanism. Methods of investigation include consultation of several family archives, oral and visual ethnographic exploration including video-recording, and common exploration together with a collective of activists that operate in Kamza named Grupi ATA.

Dorina Pllumbi is an architect and PhD researcher at the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, TUDelft. She explores the theme of commoning as material and spatial engagement in realities of political transition, departing from her lived experience as born and raised in a country going through drastic transformation like Albania. Her aim is to learn from and through non-canonical realities and discourses. Her writings have appeared in several Albanian press and cultural journals, at the Danish journal *Politiken*, and at the peer-reviewed journal *Architecture and Culture*. She has contributed to issues of *Architectural Review* and *Architectural Design*. Her latest chapter contribution was published in the book *Design Commons: Practices, Processes, and Crossovers* (2022).

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