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From the village to the city

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5

COPING WITH URBANITY

A Study on Rural-to-Urban Migrants in Kamza, Tirana

*“While Albania is a laboratory to study international migration,
Kamza is the laboratory to study internal migration”*

(King, 2005 and Bërxfholi, 2008)

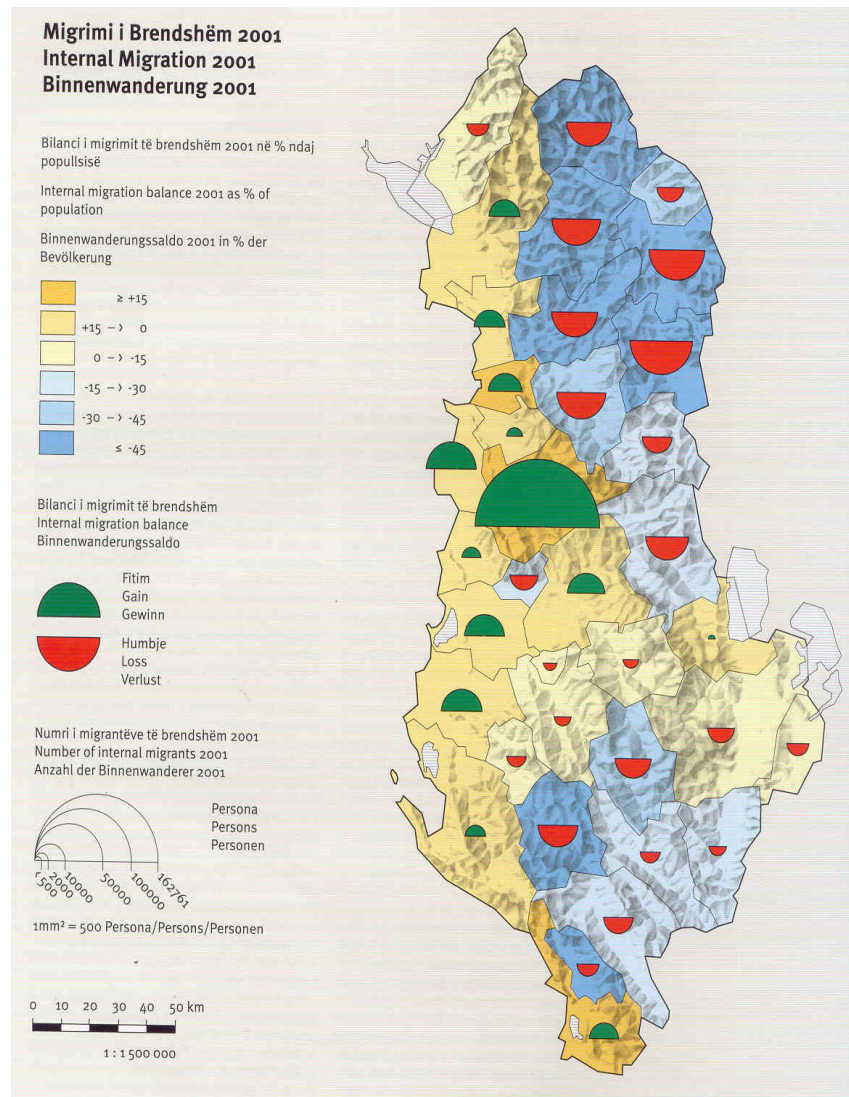
ABSTRACT

Where migration is a mass phenomenon, it seems sensible to turn to the statistics to give you the facts and the figures of the situation. This article argues that to understand, shape and direct the contribution of migrants to Albanian's urbanization, it is better to go beyond the facts and figures to get the feeling of migrants.

5.1 Introduction

Internal migration is one of the most dynamic phenomena of last decades in the post-communist Albania and has shaped the socio-economic and demographic situation of the country (UNDP, 2002). Since the early 1990s over 400,000 people, out of 3.1m, are estimated to have migrated within the country (INSTAT, 2004; World Bank, 2007). Between 1989 and 2001, the share of urban population increased from 35 percent to 42 percent (World Bank, 2007). The internal migration flows show a distinctive regional trajectory. People are moving from rural areas of the North-Eastern districts towards urban areas in the Central Region of the country (Fig. 5.1).

Figure 5.1 Internal migration for the period 1990-2001



Source: Bërçholi et al. 2003

Since 1990s, the North-Eastern region has continuously been excluded from the development policies of the State. The region has suffered the most from poverty and has been an extreme case of unemployment, scarce physical and social infrastructure, and inferior levels of education which has lead to an overall deprived quality of life. Regional disparities have pushed people to move from the deprived areas of the North towards more prosperous areas in the center such as Tirana and its surroundings. Tirana accounts for around 75 percent of Albanian's total urban population (World Bank, 2007). The rapid population growth in Tirana has expanded its outskirts, creating a new rural-urban reality.

This new form of rural-urban admixture differs from the traditional concepts of urban and rural with areas mostly inhabited by rural migrants, characterized by informal and squatter settlements, including the case of Kamza Municipality, an emerging urban reality on the outskirts of Tirana, now the largest informal area nationally. Informal migration has raised tensions among the migrants, the state and the owners; initially the government of Albania did nothing to accommodate the influx of rural migrants towards the capital city, Tirana. However, the rapid spread of informal settlements brought burgeoning conflicts especially between the migrants, early and late and the few landowners. When the Albanian government decided to relocate the migrants to their original villages, a new form of conflict started among migrants and the police (Fig. 5.2).

Figure 5.2 Confrontations among migrants and the police



Bathore 1995. Të ardhurit protestojnë kundër shembjes së ndërtimeve pa leje
Armando BABANI

Tiranë, legalizohen 40 mijë shtëpi

TIRANË - Legalizim në masë për rreth 30-40 mijë ndërtime pa leje në Tiranë. Qeveria i ka hapur rrugë dhe zbatimit të një projekti gjigand të Bashkisë së Tiranës, që parashikon legalizimin e ndërtimeve pa leje brenda vijës së verdhë të qytetit të Tiranës. Ndërtime, këto, që duhet të jenë bërë përpara datës 25 tetor 1998. Qeveria ka dhënë dhe një financim shtesë prej 10 milionë lekë për Bashkinë e Tiranës. Ky financim do t'i shërbejë Bashkisë së kryeqytetit për ngritjen e Njësisë së Legalizimit, e cila pritet që pas 15-30 ditësh të shpallë fillimin e procesit të legalizimit të ndërtimeve, që nuk kishin marrë më parë lejet përkatëse. Por, që pavarësisht kësaj, kanë hedhur shtat pa përfillur studimet urbanistike apo planet rregulluese të organeve të qeverisjes vendore. I përfshirë në premtimet e Edi Ramës, gjatë fushatës elektorale për zgjedhjet lokale të 1 tetorit, tashmë legalizimi i ndërtimeve pa leje ka marrë jetë dhe lejet e para pritet të lëshohen pas dy muajsh. Ndërsa, i gjithë projekti mund të përfundojë për rreth 6 muaj apo një vit.

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Source: Armando Babani 1995

5.2 Context: Kamza an emerging city.

The municipality of Kamza, once a State-owned farm, is continuously transforming into non-farming employment and over populated land and is the biggest informal settlements (MoK, 2007; Aliaj et al. 2003). In early 1990s Kamza was an agricultural farm of only 6000 inhabitants (MoK, 2002). Following the freedom of movement and land reform in Albania in the early 1990s, Kamza's population grew tenfold by 2002 to 60.000, than to an estimated 100,000 inhabitants in 2009 (Aliaj, 2002; MoK, 2002; 2009). Kamza's dynamic urbanization is unlike normal urbanization trends seen in other countries (Hall, 1998, Çabiri et al. 2000). Kamza represents a dynamic case of chaotic urbanization, with mushrooming informal settlements, that is lacking infrastructure and access to services (Aliaj et al. 2003) (Fig. 5.3).

Figure 5.3 Informal extensions in years (1994 and 2008)



Source: John Driscoll et al. 2007; Erka Çaro, 2008

The emphasis of this article is on hearing the voice of rural migrants and their livelihoods in a suburban area. Migrants have often been blamed in the Albanian media as “suffocators” of the city life, or “ruralizing” the capital (INSTAT 2004; Çabiri 2002). Their voice is almost absent from the decades-old Albanian migration literature, even though migration has been the center of scientific arguments for decades (Cila, 2006; King, 2005). To understand the consequences of massive internal migration for the suburban community of Kamza, to explore the ways rural-to-urban migrants adjust in this sub-urban area and to emphasize the importance of social, economic and physical capitals I looked at the views of these rural-to-urban migrants. I focus on the migrant's perspective, their feelings and thoughts, and on their housing, as the most essential capital owned by the migrant households and a symbol of wellbeing and social status.

5.3 Settling Process

The start of migration towards Kamza started with the communist regime's 1990 fall. Proximity to the capital, Tirana, cheap land prices, and abundant free space to accommodate (Aliaj, 2002), were highly attractive in these early days. The typical settling process started with the household head coming from the village to occupy a place in Kamza. As a second step the *Barak* (makeshift made of wood, Fig. 5.4) was built while constructing the house. A household child (usually a daughter) would then arrive to act as a care giver. Once one housing floor was completed, the remainder of the family would join, and depending on economic stability, up to three further floors would be built, and familial contacts would arrive in a migration chain. Where early migrants purchase ground, they may subdivide it and sell/give it to the 'trusted' migrants, meaning relatives, neighbors and friends:

“Here everybody has taken the land and did not pay for it. I remember that everything happened at a blink. They [migrants] came with trucks full stuff ...bam bam plugged four lumbars in the ground and constructed a *barak* just in the middle of the space. They were as mushrooms everywhere.” (Sabri, 43)

Figure 5.4. *Baracks*



Source: Erka Çaro, 2008

5.4 Legalization Process

Upon arrival, the migrants need a number of coping strategies in order to reduce their vulnerability and deal with difficulties in the first years of their existence in Kamza, often years of fear and survival. Conflicts over land in these years were numerous, resulting in continues

confrontations and violence among migrants and the State (Cila, 2006). In 1995, the government of Albania was determined to relocate the migrants living in informal settlements to their villages and demolish their houses (Aliaj et al. 2003; Cila, 2006). This attempt resulted in confrontations between migrants and the police.

“We have nothing ... we are afraid that we will lose our house, our land ...the blood of our sons and husbands in emigration...only when there are elections they [politicians] comes here, promises us everything... rights on the land and house, that we will have water and electricity...lies...after they go everything is forgotten” (Naxhia, 52)

Following growing social chaos the government acknowledged migrants as legal, granting migrants public policy influence through their struggles. Legalization started in mid July 2006 with the self-declaration of land and buildings by the migrant households (Potsiou, 2010). Legalization is expected to facilitate the adjustment process of migrants, as some migrants are expected to enjoy a many benefits, including increases of house and land value, eligibility for loans and a functioning real estate market (Cila, 2006).

5.5 Investing in houses via remittances from abroad

Investing in the house is an important way of increasing one's wellbeing. Remittances are considered one of the most significant economic capitals which facilitate the adjustment process and construction of social capital by investing in the most essential asset, the house. Remittances are seen by most Albanians as way of coping with difficult economic conditions (De Soto et al. 2002). In Kamza we found that remittances were used mainly to invest in housing and for everyday expenses. After the migration decision is taken, remittances act as the main source to finance the settling process and the construction of the house:

“We made Kamza; here was empty and endless. Our sons, husbands aboard have scarified have sent money to build the houses, to build our life here. We found nothing and now we have everything” (Leta, 47)

5.6 Achievements and fears of the migrant community in Kamza

Kamza's migrant's lives in the city have changed significantly compared with their original village. Although urban living costs are higher compared to rural areas, household living conditions have improved. There is better access to infrastructure and facilities; there is physical capital in housing, and social, economic and psychological capital such as social networks, work and education. Work and remittances are seen as elements that bring not only economic benefits but also social status and psychological wellbeing. These capitals are perceived as important elements in the adjustment process. Yet the adjustment process is impeded by the never-ending legalization process which would enable migrants to gain the right on their house and the land. There was an overall perceived fear, among the migrants, of

losing the house and being sent back in the north. These feelings caused continuous community stress, lowering the feeling of belonging.

However, the mainstream's perception of migrants is that Kamza is becoming a stable community. The area is expected to progress and further urbanization is foreseen through integration to Tirana and investments in the area. The migrant community perceives the adjustment process as a complex phenomenon goes through various stages of development over time. Many factors act as facilitators or barriers to the adjustment process. The migrants were willing to develop, change and adapt to different cultural context, yet there is the risk and fear of the assimilation of their own values. Adjustment is not only a matter of duration of time, economic conditions and social networks, but is also a matter of willingness, feeling, individual characteristics, learned behavior and personal values.

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