



“25 Years of Post-socialism in Albania in a Geographic Perspective: Regional Polarization and Migration as Challenges on the Way to EU”

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25 years: theoretical framing

„There are many possible episodes that flow from the 1989 revolutions, but here I focus on three ways in which the spaces of post-socialism have been enacted since 1989.“

These are:

- (1) Common spaces of Europe;**
- (2) The narrowing of a post-socialist geographical vision to Europe and issues of harmonization and integration;**
- (3) Regionally uneven landscapes of development and the diverse economies of actually existing post-socialism that sustain them.**

[according to J. Pickles 2010, 129 („The spirit of post-socialism: Common spaces and the production of diversity“, in: European Urban and Regional Studies 17(2) 127-140)]

AMSWOT as a method

<u>A</u> chievements	<i>ex post</i>
<u>M</u> istakes	
<u>S</u> trengths	<i>present time</i>
<u>W</u> eaknesses	
<u>O</u> pportunities	<i>ex ante</i>
<u>T</u> hreats	

Instrument for strategic management and planning;
originating from business and management consultancy;
useful for determination of own position („where are we?“);
recently adopted by spatial sciences/economic geography;
referring to spatial entities (communal, regional, national).

AMSWOT

Achievements	Mistakes
stability in politics, economy, society	delayed and chaotic early transition
democracy, free elections	politics as an arena of personal vanities
dynamic economy in the 2000s	one-sided economy without industry
international acceptance	underused potentials

AMSWOT

Strength

political stability
International competitive education
hospitality and openness
flexibility and spontaneity
risk acceptance of entrepreneurs

Weaknesses

clientelism and corruption
brain drain and brain waste
coping with the past, lustration
reliability (e.g. of administration)
technological standards,
infrastructure

informality
low wage level

spatial and social polarisation
situation of pensioners/elderly

AMSWOT

Opportunities/Chancen	Threats/Risiken
industrial sector	dependencies (e.g. on contract manufacturing)
tourism (annual growth!)	"gold rush mentality" vs. sustainability
return migration	re-integration of returnees
position on EU-border	new dependencies (import of natural resources)
EU-membership (access to markets, subsidies)	expectations towards EU

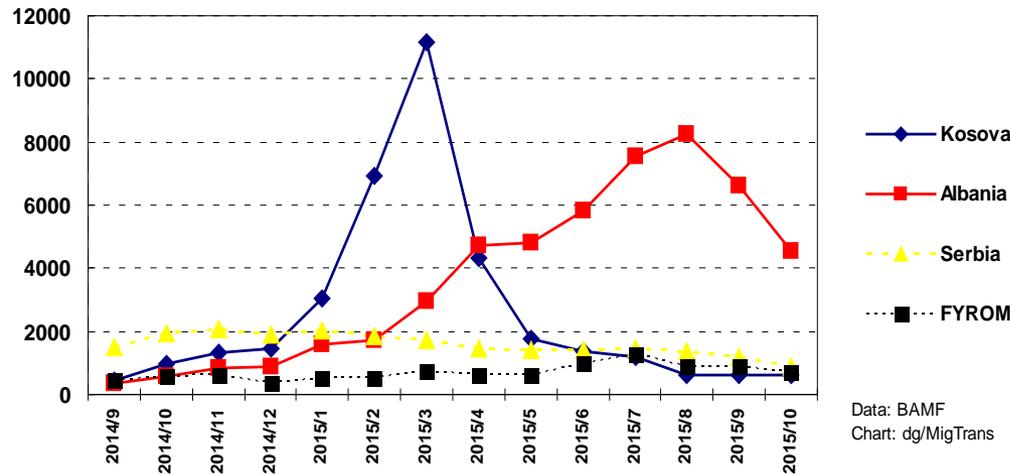
First results ...



After two and a half decades of post-socialist transition Albania's dynamic socio-economic developments in central parts of the country are contrasted by certain limitations and manifold threats in peripheries.

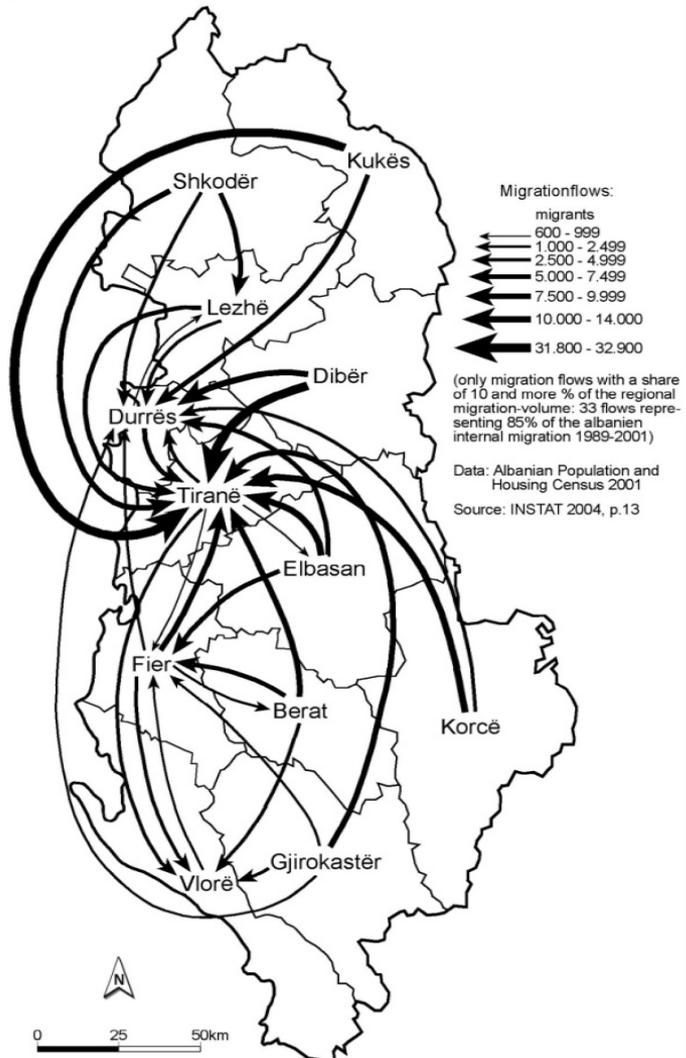
Migration

Asylum applicants from Western Balkan Countries



Internal and international migration is the main trigger for diverted spatial development. Poor living conditions, the lack of infrastructure and missing perspectives serve as push-factors and lead to massive out-migration from rural-peripheral areas. Socio-economic development in lower Albania is a pull-factor for migration to the centres, where spatial planning is unable to cope with. As a result, the situation on housing and labour markets is tense. Emigration and brain drain are still high.

Internal migration in Albania



Apart of the Tirana-Durres-region, almost the whole country is affected by massive out-migration.

Cities and villages on the peripherie shrink while Tirana is overcrowded by immigrants.

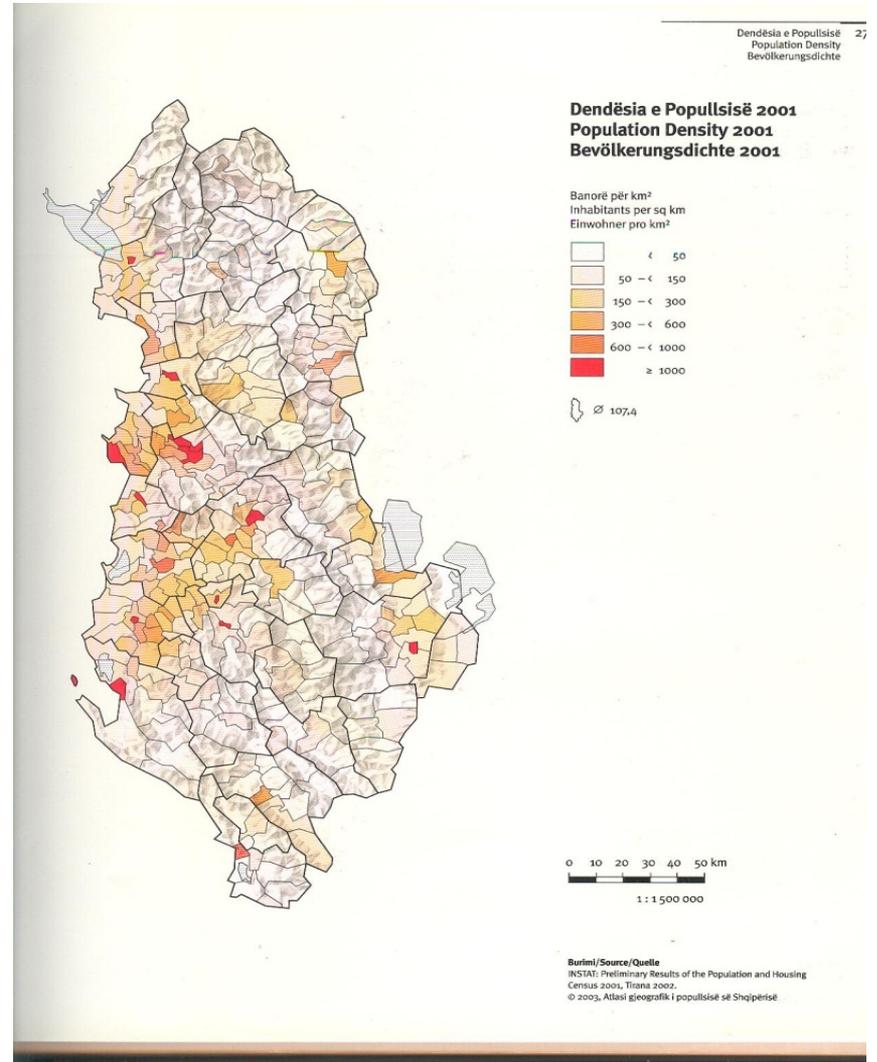
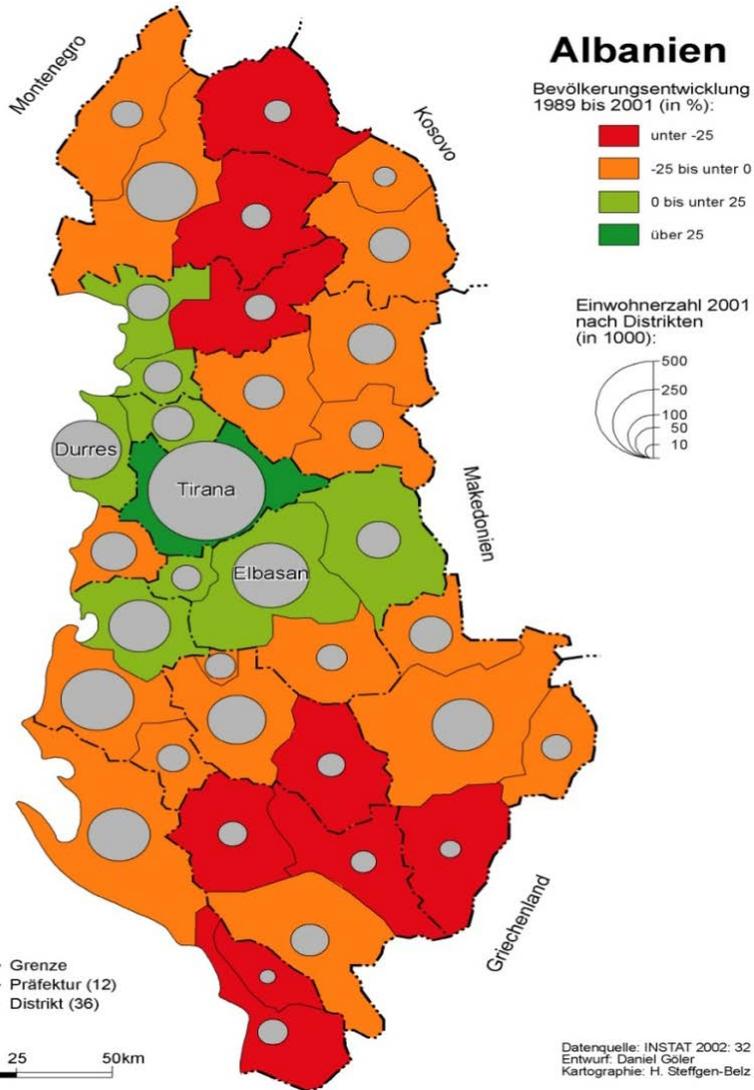
[Göler et al. 2005, Studime Gjeografike 16, p. 55]

Internal migration

- **Migration control until 1990**
- **Closing of industrial and mining activities after 1990**
- **Underdevelopment, especially in mountainous regions.**
- **Lack of infrastructure (roads, schools, hospitals etc.)**
- **Less employment possibilities and high unemployment**
- **Differences in natural conditions (altitudes above 500m)**

Consequences of migration

In population growth ... and ... population distribution



Regional development in Albania

Large disparities between center and periphery:

Revaluation of the centers:

- **Hyper-urbanisation**
- **Marginalisation of in-migrants**
- **Outsourcing industries, contract manufacturing**
- **FDI and capital accumulation**

Depreciation of the periphery:

- **Outmigration and loss of population**
- **Demographic drain, ageing**
- **Regional shrinkage**
- **Regional economic reorientation**

Hyperurbanization of the capital region

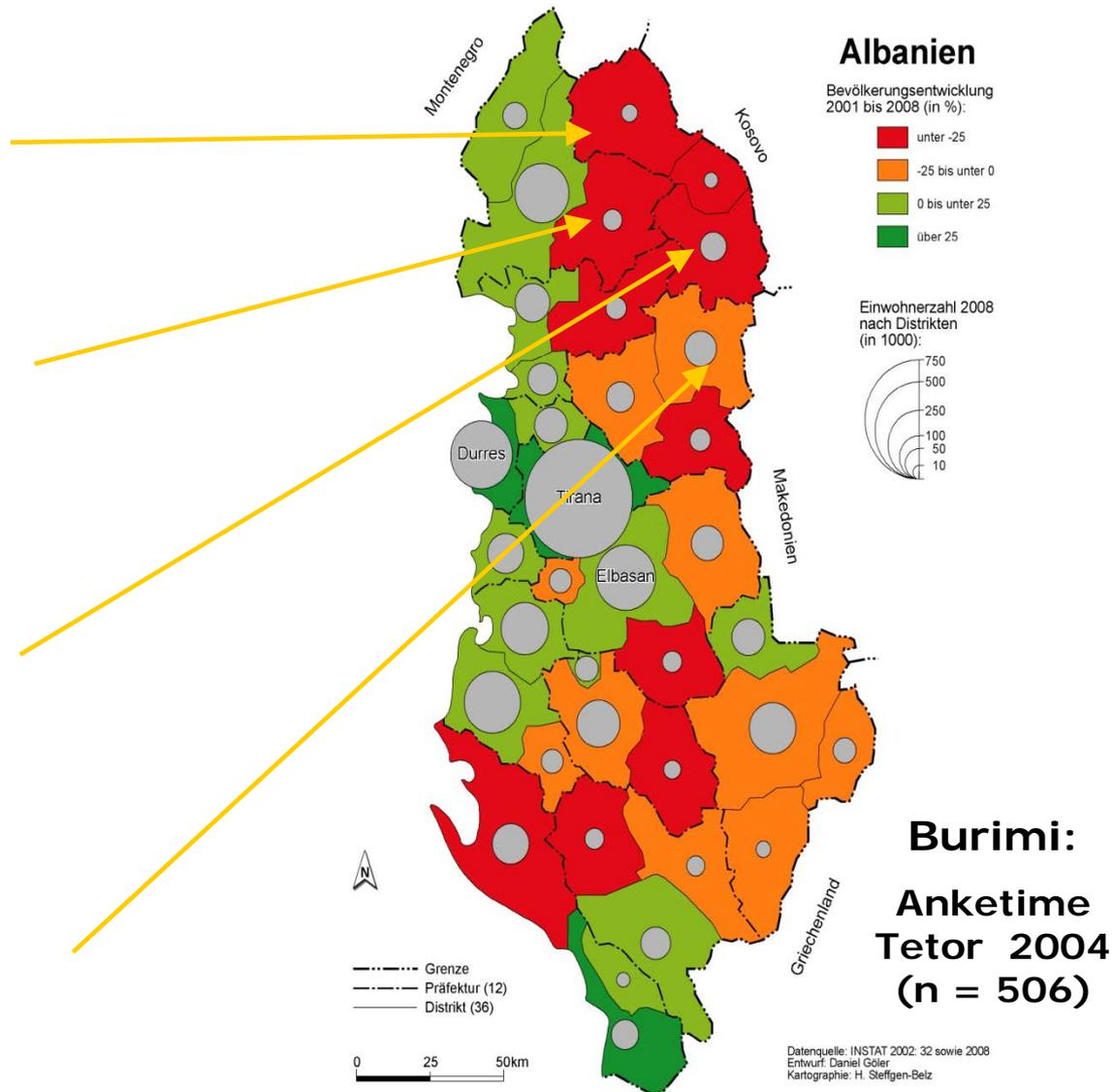
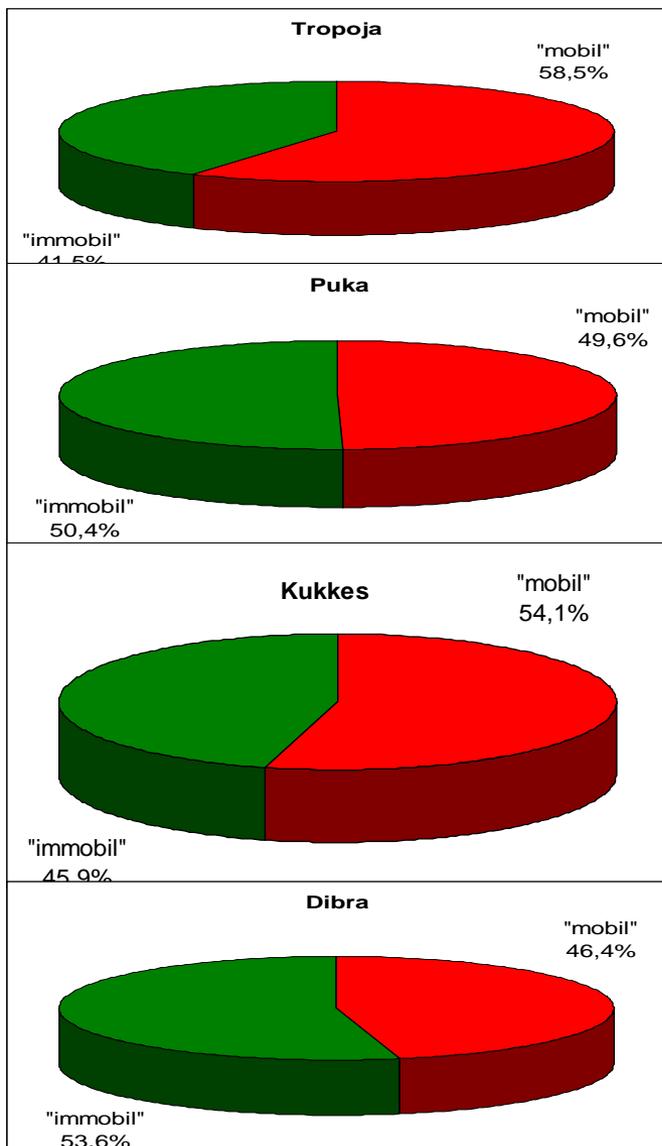
- Due to massive internal migration in the 1990 the city of Tirana experienced a rapid growth. With annual growth rates from 5 to 7% Tirana was one of the fastest growing cities in the world.
- Recent estimates for Tirana tend to apr. 800.000 inhabitants and to 1,5 Mio. in the whole agglomeration, i.e. nearly 50% of the population.
- „From socialist under-urbanization to post-socialist Hyper urbanization“ - characteristics are: newly build areas, high degree of informality (more than half of the buildings have been built after 1991, especially in suburban areas; nearly 90% of the new building are illegal or semi-legal; apr. 40% of the population in Tirana live in informal settlements; 2/3 of population in Tirana and surrounding areas are immigrants.
- Overall, the extremely dynamic city development shows three main levels: informal dwellings, a dynamic inner-city-development and internationalization of the economy.

Situation in peripheral areas

For example: Northern Albania

- **Unemployment rate in northern districts: 25%**
(District Kukes: 40%)
- **Labour force in agriculture (District Puka: 70%)**
- **Dependency ratio (District Has: 80%)**
- **HDI (Qark Kukes: 0,726)**
- **Welfare recipient (Bajram Curri/Tropoja: 50%)**
- **Subsistence and local markets**
- **Remittances from external migration**

Migration potentials in northern Albania



Summary and conclusion

- At present, spatial **polarization tends to increase**. Convergence is far beyond geographic reality. The necessity for detailed geographic analysis of mechanisms and consequences of these problematic trends is obvious.
- **Albania is facing EU-accession** and needs appropriate development concepts on the national, regional and local level to meet basic requirements for this courageous step, as convergence and equivalence are amongst the basic principles of spatial planning inside the EU and a precondition for membership.
- **Albania has potentials for that**, but politics as well as planning authorities are still lagging behind basic needs and international standards. The country needs new concepts and policies regarding spatial development. They should include a special focus on the regional level and strengthen their endogenous potentials. Nevertheless, in the case of remote, widely deserted areas alternatives to costly but uneconomic infrastructural investments must be considered.
- At the same time **the potential of migration has to be activated**. So far, migration is a safety valve for marginalized families and a main cause for increasing regional disparities. But migration also bears potentials for compensating these gaps in future times and could serve as a tool for overcoming the dichotomy of chaotic development in urban agglomerations and in underdeveloped peripheries.
- These concepts have to be independent from national government and politics/political dissent, should aim on the reduction of spatial (and social!) polarization, and **must serve as a clear and long-term strategy that will be implemented step-by-step and consequently** according to the bottom-up principle where the municipal and regional level plays a decisive role. Decentralisation and strengthening the regional level are the main challenges for a better future.